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NURTURING THE WHOLE BEING: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

‘Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul, to draw out that in itself is the best and make it perfect for a noble use.’

– Sri Aurobindo

Everybody is attracted towards an impressive "personality". Being a positive and effective person is considered to be the best asset an individual can have. Hence personality and its development constitute a major concern for psychology. While "personality" is universally accepted in popular circles, the concept of personality has been approached by psychologists in different ways. Also, personality does not refer to the whole of our existence the physical, social and spiritual. This issue has received attention from the Indian sages from ancient times. Bhagvad Gita provides comprehensive models of highly developed human potential. It emphasizes *Tri Guna* view whereas Upanishads laid down *panch kosha* theory. Similar to *panch kosha* theory of the Upanishads Sri Aurobindo has given a comprehensive system of one's being based on his studies on consciousness. In this lesson we will introduce you to some aspects of personality development from these wholistic Indian perspectives.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- define personality in view of the wholistic Indian perspective;
- to familiarize with the concepts of trigunas and panch koshas; and
- to understand the ways in which the different aspects of existential life can be enhanced.



26.1 WHOLISTIC PERSONALITY: AN INDIAN VIEW

The term personality generally refers to the kind of person an individual is. It comes from the Latin word 'persona' a mask worn in Greek and Roman theaters by actors to enable each actor to play several roles. It also means that the external appearance of a person comprising the characteristics that are accessible to other persons.

The Indian thinkers visualized human existence in terms of an integrated structure having spiritual as well as material aspects. In Upanishads the self, the *atman* or the consciousness is considered as the real core of personality. Consciousness is the eternal and immutable aspect of existence. Thus personality can not be taken as physical appearance (body) only. It extends to the different levels of existence incorporating the physical, social and spiritual levels. Let us try to learn about this model of personality in some detail.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.1

1. Describe the Indian concept of personality.

26.2 THEORY OF TRIGUNAS

This theory proposes that entire existence in nature is made up of combination of three Gunas namely *Sattwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Sattwa* represents light, *Rajas* represents dynamism and *Tamas* represents lethargy or inertia. Human beings too are mixtures or combinations of these three qualities. Geeta describes how different people under the influence of different Gunas behave in diverse ways. Human development is examined with reference to movement from *Tamas* to *Rajas* and then to *Sattwa*. The highest stage is a state of being above these three gunas. Let us study about three Gunas and personalities related to them .

Sattwik: This kind of person functions moderately in eating, sleeping and performing various activities. He or she meditates regularly, and does all his or her work as worship of the Lord. People love this person and this person also loves and helps people. He or she radiates the light of knowledge. Guru Nanak Dev, Hazrat Nizamuddin, Kabir, Meera, Purandar Das, and Thyagaraj are some of the examples of such evolved persons.

Rajasik: This type of person is very active, dynamic and addicted to work. If he or she does not have work to do, he or she will feel restless. This kind of a person likes to eat spicy food. He or she is fond of entertainment, sitting at one place and observing silence is difficult for him or her. Such persons are often found in the business world.



Tamasik: This type of person does not like to work. He or she gets up late in the morning. They are failures in their lives. Nobody likes them because they are dirty, idle and lethargic. People usually keep themselves away from such persons.

The three qualities mentioned above are not exclusive. Each and every person is a combination of these three gunas in different degrees. In some, Sattwik is predominant, in some Rajasik is and in some Tamasik. However all the three are present in each of us to some extent. Personality development involves achieving and maintaining the right proportion of these three qualities. It should be noted that Rajasik is necessary to some extent but Tamasik should be tried to be kept at the minimum.

Now we come to another way of looking at our existence which sees human beings consisting of five levels. Let us examine them in detail and also the ways in which life develops along with them.

26.3 THEORY OF PANCH KOSHAS (FIVE SHEATHS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE)

Taittiriya Upanishad gives the concept of Panch Koshas and their development. It says that starting from Annamaya Kosha and reaching the Anandamaya Kosh, our existence has 5 layers or sheaths called Koshas. The gross body that we see is **Annamaya Kosha**. The subtler body made of pranic energy is called as **Pranamaya Kosha** or vital sheath. The third kosha is **Manomaya Kosha** or mental sheath comprised of one's feelings and emotions. The fourth one is **Vijnanamaya Kosha**. It is comprised of imagination, memory, knowledge, insight and understanding. The fifth is **Anandmaya Kosha** or sheath of bliss. Its characteristics are creativity, joy and bliss. Let us examine these sheaths in detail.

1) Annamaya Kosha : The Food Sheath

The physical body, the outer most part of our existence is termed as the Annamaya Kosha or Food Sheath. It has emerged from the essence of food assimilated by the father and nourished in the womb by the food taken by the mother. It continues to exist because of food consumed and ultimately, after death, goes back to fertilize the earth and becomes food. The substance of the physical structure, rising from food, existing in food and going



Fig. 26.1: Panch Koshas: Framework of personality



back to become food, is naturally and most appropriately termed the food sheath.

The food we eat gets transformed into muscles, veins, nerves, blood and bones. If proper exercise and proper diet is given the Annamaya Kosha develops well. The signs of healthy development are fitness, agility, stamina and endurance. A person having these qualities can easily master motor skills and has good eye hand co-ordination. Food taken is transformed into various nutritious elements and makes us grow physically.

2) Pranamaya Kosha: The Vital Sheath

The Pancha-Pranas, which are corresponding to the five physiological systems described in Ayurveda, represent the Vital Sheath. These activities which support the body take place as a result of the air that we breath in. Hence it is termed the Vital Sheath. The five Pranas comprising this sheath include the following:

- i) **Prana (The Faculty of Perception):** It controls the perceptions of the five fold stimuli received from the external environment through the five sense organs.
- ii) **Apana (The Faculty of Excretion):** All things thrown out of body or rejected by the body such as septum, perspiration, urine, faeces, etc. are expressions of Apana.
- iii) **Samana (The Faculty of Digestion):** Digests the food collected in the stomach.
- iv) **Vyana (The Faculty of Circulation):** The power by which the nutrients resulting from the digested food are properly conveyed to the various limbs of the body through the blood stream.
- v) **Udana (The Faculty of Thinking):** The capacity in an individual to raise his thoughts from their present level so as to conceive a possibility of or appreciate a new principle or idea-the capacity of self-education.

These five faculties gradually weaken as people advance in age.

The Vital Sheath controls and regulates the Food Sheath. When the *pranas* do not function properly, the physical body is affected. The signs of healthy development of Pranamaya Kosha are enthusiasm, ability to use voice effectively, suppleness of body, perserverance, leadership, discipline, honesty and nobility.

3) Manomaya Kosha: The Mental Sheath

The mind regulates the Pranamaya Kosha or Vital Sheath. For example, when the mind is upset due to some shock, the functions of pranas and the body are affected. Mind interprets the impressions of sense organs. It stores good and bad memories of the past. It is possible to increase the strength of mind by regular prayer, making resolutions and keeping them up. There is a deep relationship between mind, intellect and body.



Notes

4) Vijnanmaya Kosha: The Intellectual Sheath

The mind (Manas) is that which receives the external stimuli through sense organs and communicates the responses to the organs of action. Though the stimuli received through the five sense organs are distinct and different from one another, an integrated experience of them is brought about by the mind. The intellect (Buddhi) is the discriminating and discerning process which examines and judges the stimuli received. It also communicates to the mind its decision about the type of responses to be executed. The mind associates the impressions with pleasantness or unpleasantness based on memory. The intellect however, with its capacity to think, takes a rational decision which may not be liked by the mind but is ultimately beneficial to the person.

The mind is the storehouse of all memories and knowledge. This storehouse of experience is the guiding factor in man's actions. The mind can also be described as the seat of emotions and the intellect is to examine the areas in which they operate. The mind has the capacity to travel only to the 'realms known' but the intellect, besides remaining in the realms known, can further penetrate into the 'realms unknown' to investigate, contemplate and comprehend new discoveries.

5) Anandamaya Kosha: The Blissful sheath

This is the innermost of the five sheaths and consists of Vasanas or desires. They exist in the subconscious, the way we exist during the state of deep-sleep. It is considered blissful, because, whatever be the condition in which we are in our waking and dream states, once we reach, all of us experience relatively the same undisturbed peace and bliss due to the cessation of agitation experienced by us when we are awake or dreaming. The Bliss Sheath controls the intellectual Sheath, since the intellect functions under the control and guidance of one's *vasanas*.

When all the other Koshas are well developed we experience harmony between the inner self and the outer world. This harmony gives us a sense of joy and bliss. The five sheaths are like the layers of clothes worn by a person which are totally different from the wearer. So too, the Atman or the real self is distinct and separate from the five outer layers.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.2**

1. What is the concept of panch koshas?

2. What are the three gunas?



26.4 DEVELOPMENT OF KOSHAS

Personality development moves from annamaya kosha to the pure consciousness gradually removing all the five covers that mask it. Regular eating habits, right kind of food, all types of exercises and games, jogging, running, walking and Asanas facilitate the development of Annamaya Kosha. Pranayam and breathing exercises improve the quality of Pranamaya Kosha. For the development of Manomaya Kosha study of good literature including poems, novels, essays and articles is useful. All the activities that challenge one's intellect develop Vijnanamaya Kosha. These activities include debates, problem-solving, study-techniques, small research projects, evaluation and appreciation of books and interviewing eminent persons. All these activities make you go beyond your tiny self and give you an opportunity to identify with your fellow beings-your community members, your country and the whole world. This facilitates the development of Anandamaya Kosha. Even in your contemplation you can extend your consciousness to reach the earth, the sun, the stars, the galaxies and the universe. This way we gradually build the relationship between individual self or individual consciousness and universal self or universal consciousness.

26.5 SRI AUROBINDO ON LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Sri Aurobindo says that two systems are simultaneously active in the organization of the being and its parts: a concentric system and a vertical system. The concentric system is like a series of rings or sheaths. The outer most circle is comprised of awareness of physical body, awareness of vital (pranic) body or sheath and awareness of mental sheath. They are interconnected. The inner circle is composed of inner mind which is in touch with the universal mind or Supreme Energy. The innermost core is called Psychic being which is a spark of the Divine (Supreme Energy) present in all of us and in every thing. It is also called Atman.

The vertical system is like a staircase consisting of various levels, planes of consciousness ranging from the lowest – the unconscious to the highest – Sat Chit Anand. In simple words, from unicellular being, humans have climbed innumerable rungs of the ladder of evolution. We have an evolved body and mind. But our evolution is not complete. Our consciousness has to climb several rungs to reach still higher levels and the highest level of consciousness which is endowed with amazing experience of goodness, freedom and knowledge.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.3

1. How can we facilitate the development of Anandamaya Kosha?



2. According to Sri Aurobindo, what is the innermost circle of consciousness called?
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**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Human existence and its development is a major concern of psychology.
- Bhagwad Gita and Upanishads give us profiles of highly developed life ways. Upanishads also give us the constituents of human potential. They are called Koshas.
- Atman, the divine spark of life, lives in the human body with five coverings on it. The coverings or sheaths are called Koshas. Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijananmaya and Anandmaya are the five Koshas.
- The food we eat gets transformed into muscles, veins, nerves, blood and bones. If proper exercise and proper diet is given the Annamaya Kosha develops well. The signs of healthy development are fitness, agility, stamina and endurance. A person having these qualities can easily master motor skills and has good eye hand coordination. Wiring, fitting, welding, knitting are motor skills that involve eye-hand co-ordination. Indian psychology says that the body is an effective instrument in the worship of God. Our duty and work itself is the worship and one is supposed to do it with total devotion.
- Sri Aurobindo's perspective gives us a concentric and a vertical model of our being. The development according to this is more or less similar to the development of Panch Koshas.

**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Explain any one Kosha in detail.
2. Describe the ways for development of the five Koshas.

**ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****26.1**

1. Personality is not mere external appearance. It includes the whole existence that includes physical, social and spiritual parts of life. An individual's true self or nature is considered as pure consciousness or Atman.



26.2

1. Panch Koshas include the following: Annamayakosha, Pranamaya Kosha, Manomaya Kosha, Vigarammaya Kosha, Anandmaya Kosha.
2. Sativik, Passik, Tamsik

26.3

1. Regular eating habits, exercise, night food and Yoga
2. Psychic being or Atman.

Hints for Terminal Questions

1. Refer to section 26.3
2. Refer to section 26.4