

# Major Constituents of Human Personality and their Role on Its Sustained Development – *Vedāntic & Western Views*

**Dilip Dutta**

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

University of Sydney

NSW: 2006, Australia

dilip.dutta@sydney.edu.au

**ABSTRACT:** After highlighting the major psycho-physical constituents of human personality *a la Vedānta*, the paper has focused on (i) the role of mind/brain, individual soul/Universal Soul and individual Self/Cosmic Self on its sustained development & also on (ii) the distinguishing features of the *Vedāntic* views from those of the Western views.

**KEYWORDS:** *Vedānta*, human personality, soul, self, will-power, stable mind, sustained human development.

## 1. Introduction

An *individual* becomes a *person* with capacity to relate his or her higher qualities (such as love, affection, care, trust, etc.) to other individuals. In fact, persons with different degrees of higher assimilative qualities create different personalities. As the *Vedānta* asserts, by developing one's apparent present *individuality*, one rises to a point where one becomes a better, perfect and real *personality*. A summary of origin and the major schools of the *Vedānta* philosophy can be found in Dutta (2014 a, 189-91). One's conscious existence, where every action is accompanied with a feeling of *egoism*,

does not, however, cover the whole spectrum of one's existence. During sleep or in performing automatic actions, there is no feeling of *egoism* present and yet one does exist, though one enters a stage that is below the conscious existence and/or even inferior to it. In the highest stage of human development also there is no feeling of *egoism*, but it is infinitely superior to the conscious and moves towards *super-conscious* existence. After highlighting the major *psycho-physical* constituents (body, mind & Self) of a human personality in section-2, nature of individual *soul* – a non-Self entity – and its role on the development of a human personality is analysed in section-3. The process of sustained development of a human personality is then elaborated in section-4, which is followed by a conclusion in section-5.

## 2. Major *psycho-physical* constituents of a human being a la Vedānta

The classic *Vedāntic* model of an individual human being generally comprises of the three-fold body involving its five *psycho-physical* layers or sheaths constituting its *personality*, which normally experiences three states of consciousness – waking, dream, and dreamless sleep. The three bodies are the *gross*, the *subtle*, and the *causal*, which are respective mediums of human experience for waking, dream, and dreamless-sleep states. These three bodies together play the role on an individual's fulfilment of desires – gross and subtle. It is also noteworthy that all the above-mentioned *psycho-physical* constituents of a human personality are, according to *Vedānta*, nothing but the modifications of matters, *gross* or *subtle*, and thus have no permanent reality.

### 2.1. Self – the permanent reality behind a psycho-physical human being

It is Self that is the single constant factor in human personality. 'Self' is the changeless immortal in a changeful *psycho-physical* garb of a human being. It is, in fact, the all-pervading Supreme Consciousness or Intelligence underlying every form of existence, animate and inanimate, that is manifest within every living being. This 'Self', being the immutable and eternal Consciousness, is the witness of the changing phenomena of the universe and/or the changing states of a human personality. This knowing 'Self', called *Ātman* in *Vedānta*, is behind the human body-mind complex and integrates all physical and psychical factors into a coherent whole, and coordinates the diverse functions of the mind, the organs, and the body. In fact, the organs, the mind, and the vital force are like so many attendants of the 'Self' ready for carrying out specific functions of an individual human being. But the 'Self' – the fundamental reality of a

human being – maintains the person's true identity in spite of its all changes within and without. The 'Self' is not limited because of the material things like mind, just as the sun is one, although its image may be seen in several pots of water.

## 2.2. Role of 'Self vis-a-vis mind' on human personality: Vedāntic & Western views

The *Vedāntic* ideas of the Self are that (i) It is Consciousness, (ii) There is continuity in Consciousness, and (iii) It is associated with all activities as the knower and experiencer. The existence of the [individual] Self (Ātman) in a human being is Self-evident. Though the Self permeates every pore of our being, the real nature of the Self is not self-evident to us. One can recall the famous statement of René Descartes, the father of Western philosophy: "I think; therefore, I exist," *i.e.*, nothing is unquestionable in this universe, except the fact of self-existence *i.e.*, the existence of a psycho-physical human being. *Vedānta* reverses this statement: "I exist; therefore, I think." That is, existence of one's Self as Consciousness precedes an individual body-mind complex's thinking or doubting. *Vedānta* holds that Self is beyond an individual's intellect, mind, and ego. Descartes also says, "Mind is a self-knowing principle," which is also not accepted by *Vedānta*. As Radhakrishnan (1937 [1929], 274) observes:

There is a tendency especially in the West, to overestimate the place of the human self. Descartes attempts to derive everything from the certainty of his own isolated selfhood. It is not realized that the thought of the self which wants to explain everything, the will of the self which wants to subjugate everything, are themselves the expression of a deeper whole, which includes the self and its object. If the self is not widened into the universal spirit, the values themselves become merely subjective and the self itself will collapse into nothing.

## 2.3. Role of 'mind vis-a-vis brain' on human personality

According to the Western physiologists, brain is the centre from which all senses arise. According to the Indian philosophers, if there is no involvement of mind's attention, there cannot have the *perception* of the sense. According to the Western physiologists, from that automatic (*i.e.*, without conscious thought) *reflexive power* of the brain, one knows that it is light. So, in the sight of light, no explicit role of mind is recognised by the Western physiologists either. According to the Indian philosophers, *the brain*

*by itself cannot act.* After the sensation from light is impressed on brain and properly grouped for comparison purpose by the *discriminative faculty* of intellect and then there must be a mind behind the brain for the *perception* of that particular sensation. It is the *perceptive faculty of mind* that eventually will let the individual person know that it is light. In other words, there must have a role of a *stable* mind. For example, if mind is restless, then a proper grouping of sense perceptions is not possible.

Let's assume that an individual person has a stable mind. As it has already been noted above, mind is, however, a material element, although it is a subtle matter and finer than even ether. We have also noted that matter and force are inseparable; where there is matter, there is force as well. So, there must be some force behind the material mind as well. If we understand the real nature of our mind, we shall be able to understand what is behind the mind. This human mind, the individualised principle that is behind the cosmic mind, when transparent (*i.e.*, calm and pure), has a clear grasp of the Divine principle behind. If iron is put in a furnace, it becomes red-hot. It will burn anything it comes in contact with, for it has absorbed the heat from the furnace. So is with the human mind. All its intelligence and power as *determinative faculty* really belongs to the real soul or *Self* [individual *Self* (*Ātman*) or cosmic *Self* (*Brahman*)] that is behind it.

### 3. Individual soul – a non-Self entity & its role on the development of a human personality

A human personality is, according to the *Vedānta* philosophy, essentially a 'soul' *i.e.*, its *causal* body, which uses its other two bodies (*gross* and *subtle*) as instruments to gain five-sensory experiences. The soul lives in human being, and as a matter of fact in any other living organism, whether animal, celestial or infernal. The individual soul is in its true nature is Spirit (or Consciousness), and therefore is *potentially* pure and perfect, in the sense that it need not be explained in relation either to time or space or to circumstance.

#### 3.1. Evolution of an individual soul using a human personality as an external energy tool:

Personality as such is that part of a human being that was born into, lives within, and will die within time. To be a human (with ego) and to have a personality are the same thing. One's personality, like one's body (and mind), is the vehicle of one's evolution

towards wholeness. The decision that one makes and the actions that one takes in the material world are the means by which one evolves. At each moment one chooses the intentions (with motives) that will shape one's experiences and those things upon which one will focus one's attention. These choices affect one's evolutionary process of gradually awakening one's soul. This is so for each person. If one chooses unconsciously, one evolves unconsciously; if one chooses consciously, one evolves consciously. The fearful and violent emotions that have come to characterize human existence can be experienced only by the personality. Only the personality can feel anger, fear, hatred, vengeance, sorrow, shame, regret, indifference, frustration, cynicism and loneliness. Only the personality can judge, manipulate and exploit; only the personality can pursue external power. The personality can also be loving, compassionate, and wise in its relations with others; but love, compassion, and wisdom (personality's non-cognitive traits) do not come from the personality. They are experiences of the soul, which is a part of the immortal *Self*. Every person has a soul, but a personality that is limited in its perception to the five senses is not aware of its soul, and, therefore, cannot recognize the influence of its soul (Zukav 1989, 29-30).

Personality emerges as a natural force from the soul; it is an energy tool that the soul adapts to function within the physical world. This energy is the energy of soul consciousness, which is a part of divine consciousness. Each personality is unique because the configuration of this energy within is unique. It is the persona of the soul, so to speak, that interacts with physical matter in order to be brought into wholeness. The personality does not operate independently from the soul. To the extent that a personality is in touch with soul consciousness, the personality is soothed because the energy of soul consciousness is focused on its energy core of the *Self*, and not on its artificial facade, which is the personality. Note that Zukav (1989) has used individual *soul* and individual *Self* interchangeably.

### 3.2. The Western concept of soul is not distinguished from the mind:

In the West, under the influence of Christian theology, a person is a complex psycho-physical being and is considered to be created by God, and therefore dependent, that is, not self-existent. According to the Western view, a person 'has' a soul not being distinguished from the mind. Every human being is basically sinful and corrupt; the soul itself is therefore tainted. Each individual is, however, loved by God, the creator. This view is largely at the root of Western self-confidence and passion for intellectual understanding. Both Judaism and Christianity spent their greatest energies

developing the idea of God, whereas *Vedānta*-based Hinduism spent its greatest energies developing the idea of the soul. The Hindu view of an individual *self* thus stands as quite a contrast from that of the Western view. First of all, the Hindu view is that a person is fundamentally a soul and *has* a body. As Vivekananda would point out, an English-saying is that so-and-so ‘gave up the ghost,’ whereas a Hindu says, so-and-so ‘gave up the body.’ Secondly, though Hindus experience guilt as well, but the deep-seated guilt associated with one’s self-image is by and large not characteristic of Hindus, and is certainly not fostered by the *Vedāntic* tradition. In fact, in all traditions of Hinduism, the soul is seen as spirit, intrinsically pure by nature, and separate from the body and mind. Of course, the average Hindu does not *experience* the soul as such but this idea has nonetheless affected the ordinary Hindu’s sense of *Self*.

#### 4. Sustained development of a human personality

If the personality is to be refined and developed to its fullest potential, and along the [ideal] path, it would be imperative to mould its three-dimensional nature afresh, *i.e.*, thought, character and conduct must be moulded in a harmonious fashion. According to Vivekananda [CW, vol. 3, 530]:

That man alone is good who does good for good’s sake, and that is the character of the man. ... Not the body not the soul, but character. And that is left for all ages. Think about the great characters. All that have passed and died, they have left for us their characters, eternal possessions for the rest of humanity; all these characters are working— working all through. ... What of Buddha? What of Jesus of Nazareth? The world is full of their characters. This is a ‘Tremendous doctrine!’

What is required for building a strong character in the first place is ‘discipline of life.’ ‘Discipline of life’ is more precious than life itself, because it is out of that discipline, life derives *values*. It is these *derived values* that formulate the foundation of one’s character. In fact, when one fails to regulate one’s life in accordance with the high principles involving the ethically approved right conducts as above, one not only fails in social co-operation, but also personally disintegrates from within. Therefore, all great teachers laid more emphasis on practice rather than on mere theoretical knowledge. Right conduct cannot, however, be designed for all occasions and times beforehand. Truly, right conduct has the delicate fragrance of the just blossomed flower. It is what spontaneously emanates from within the person who has done initial home work for bringing himself or herself up, under no outer compulsion, but by the

propulsion of one's own self-chosen ideals of life. In fact, *character* is nothing but an 'acquired dynamics of the self-chastening process' that is developed for a person's going within himself or herself through self-effort. The secret of success in all worthwhile undertakings including building a strong *character* is the development of a strong *will-power*. By loving to do what one ought to do, one can develop strong *will-power* (Budhananda 1983, 53-54).

#### 4.1. The basis of will-power:

Although there are various factors in a person's success in life, but one common factor involved is *will-power*. According to Vivekananda (CW, Vol. 6, p. 44), 'human will' is a compound of the *Self* and mind. But, as has already been noted above, mind is nothing but a subtle matter. Thus, in the 'human will', there are two strands: one of the *Spirit* (a strand of light) and the other of *matter* (a strand of darkness). Thus, when one identifies oneself as only mind, the compound of one's 'human will' is bound to be unreal, for it is based on the unreality of illusion. The unreality of illusion is called *maya* in certain Hindu teachings (i.e., *Advaita Vedānta*), or *dukkha* or sufferings in Buddhism, or 'original sin' in Christian teachings. But as long as one is in the realm of illusion of material world, 'human will' is apparently very real for all practical purposes. However, the resulting actions and achievements of such human will we see in the phenomenal world are certainly transitory without lasting effects.

#### 4.2. Need for control on mind for sustained development of a human personality

In order to control one's mind (or thought), one needs, in the first place, to learn how to dis-identify oneself from one's mind i.e., to reverse mind's ego mode so that it can focus on the present moment. In other words, 'one needs to end the delusion of time' (Tolle 2004 [1997], 48). Because time and mind are inseparable, time needs to be removed from mind so that mind can stop its control. Note that, truly speaking, time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion too. What is precious is *one point* out of time and that is *this moment* or *now*. The more we focus on time— past and future—the more we miss the *present moment*, which is indeed the most precious.

To succeed in controlling mind (or thought), one must have, in addition to strong will power, faith in oneself. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gitā* that one must oneself subdue one's weakness and raise oneself by oneself. In other words, the mind will have to be controlled by the mind itself. In fact, the mind is a superb instrument

if used rightly. By compulsive actions, dispositions, and habits of thought, our task of controlling the mind becomes almost impossible. As a result, our mind, instead, starts using us. It is perhaps helpful for one to be aware of the inherent weaknesses in one's own *personality* (i.e., a *personality* with weak human *character*) that allow mind to use own self. Specifically, one shall not be able, as Budhananda, (1971, 40) notes, to control one's mind (or thought) if one:

- + has strong likes and dislikes, attachments and aversions;
- + has the habit of deliberately harming others;
- + tortures one's body unnecessarily by indulging in intoxicants and living unbalanced and chaotic lives;
- + habitually indulges in vain controversy;
- + is inordinately inquisitive about others' affairs;
- + becomes very anxious to find others' faults;
- + spends one's energies in futile pursuits;
- + becomes too egocentric and self-righteous;
- + is over-ambitious irrespective of one's capacities;
- + is jealous of others' prosperity;
- + has a guilty feeling.

Once one is aware of the presence of some of the above weaknesses in one's personality as barriers to control one's mind, this awareness is certainly a major step in one's personality development. The important steps including this one, as suggested by Vivekananda (CW, Vol. 8, pp. 47-48), are summarised in the following paragraph:

Before we can control the mind, we must study it. We have to seize the unstable mind and drag it from its wanderings and fix it on one idea. Over and over again, this must be done. By power of strong will [i.e., a compound of the Self as well as a strong, stable and conscious mind], we must get hold of the mind and make it stop ... The easiest way to get hold of the mind is to sit quite and let it drift where it will for a while. Hold fast to the idea, 'I am not the mind, I see that I am thinking, I am watching my mind act', and each day the identification of yourself with thought and feeling will grow less, until at last you can entirely separate yourself from the mind ... [and then concentrate fully on your job at hand without allowing your mind to think of its result].

There is no question about the use of our thinking mind in a more focused and effective way. Focussed thought is certainly a force required for one's sustained development or evolution towards consciousness. It is often argued that when a creative solution to any particular problem in the material world is needed, one tends to oscillate every now and then between thought and stillness *i.e.*, between mind and no-mind. No-mind is, in fact, 'consciousness without thought'. One's thought alone, without being connected with the 'much vaster realm of consciousness' quickly becomes a barrier to creation. The more human mind becomes disciplined and refined, more does one become aware of 'Consciousness' or 'Self' within as the real source of 'surplus' in human being. As Vivekananda's (CW, Vol. 2, pp. 301-02) asserts in a lecture on *Practical Vedānta* in London, 10 November 1896:

Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested ... You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness.

The wonderful long-lasting achievements beneficial to the world at large are indeed the results of personalities with better character *i.e.*, personalities with controlled and focussed mind and being in touch with their inner *Self*— the source of love, compassion, and wisdom, which are nothing but a personality's non-cognitive traits.

## 5. Conclusion

The process of human development is 'from lawlessness through law beyond law, from the unconscious through the conscious beyond the conscious.' According to the *Vedānta* philosophy of human life, a human being is potentially *divine*. Everything that is good and powerful in human nature, such as love, sympathy, kindness towards other living beings, is the expression of that *divinity* within. All these superior human qualities are nothing but true expressions of the ultimate *oneness* of human beings with the universal Soul or Self.

Equipped with a stable mind, a human *personality*, which is essentially the *causal body* (or, ego-self) of an individual person, has the inherent capacity to become conscious of its *embodied soul* in the initial stage of its conscious journey towards the higher stage

of sustained human development. Because the *embodied soul* is the reflection of the *real Soul* or *Self*, a continuous attempt by the conscious personality with strong will power helps build a perfect character, which, according to the *Vedānta* philosophy, is the precondition for its attainment into a stage of sustained human development – a harmonious relationship of the stable and conscious mind with its *Self*, and then going beyond by eventually merging into the realm of stillness.

## References

- Budhananda, Swami. 1971. *The mind and its control*. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
- Budhananda, Swami. 1983. *How to build character*. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
- Dutta, Dilip. 2014a. "Sustained human development as a psycho-social evolution from individuality to personality," *International Journal of Development Issues*, Special Issue, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 188-202.
- Dutta, Dilip. 2014b. "Surplus in Man' & the Capability-Based Sustained/Total Human Development," *International Journal of Development Issues*, Special Issue, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 260-75.
- Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli. 1937. *An Idealist View of Life*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Second edition, p. 274 [First edition, 1929].
- Tolle, Eckhart. 2004. *The Power of Now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment*. Hachette Australia. (Originally published in 1997 by Namaste Publishing Inc., Vancouver, Canada).
- Vivekananda, Swami. 1989. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, various volumes. Mayavati Memorial Edition. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama.
- Zukav, Gary. 1989. *The Seat of the Soul*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.