
Bhagavad Gita's *Triguna Prakriti* on Teachers' and Students' Behavior: A Reflective Study

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Abstract

The study explores the impact of *Triguna Prakriti*, as elucidated in Chapter 14 of the Bhagavad Gita, on the behavior of teachers and students. Drawing on interpretative research methodology, the research delves into the three qualities of nature - *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas* - and their manifestation in human psychology. The reflective study aims to interpret the *Triguna Prakriti* in relation to human behavior, specifically focusing on teachers and students. Through a hermeneutic approach, the study examines the nuances of each *Gunas* and their influence on individuals' actions and attitudes. The Bhagavad Gita serves as a foundational text, providing insights into the nature of human behavior and the role of teachers in guiding students towards self-realization. By analyzing the text and its interpretations, the study sheds light on the intricate relationship between *Triguna Prakriti* and the behavior of teachers and students.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Triguna Prakriti, Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, human behavior, teachers, students, hermeneutic approach

Introduction

Essentially, the Bhagavad Gita is a conversation between Krishna and Arjun, who was disoriented, disheartened, and confused during his conflicts with his own

family. He was receiving help from Lord Krishna in adjusting to this condition and stress (Karla et al., 2018). Arjuna received instructions from Krishna to enable him to prevail in the fight. Throughout the teaching process, Krishna covered a lot of theoretical and applied knowledge. As revealed by the Lord, it evolved into a popular classic, intellectual poem, and hymn of the lord (Ghimire, 2017). Among the *Prasthanas-trayi* the Bhagavad Gita is one of the foundational texts. It is a part of the well-known and widely read epic Mahabharata (Smami Gambhirananda, 2018).

The *Bhishma Parva* (chapters 25–42) of the Mahabharata contains the Bhagavad Gita. There are 700 verses in 18 chapters (Sharma, 2014 p. 28). In the Kurukshetra battlefield, Arjun expresses his moral dilemma regarding the murder of his own *gurus* and cousins. He explains why he finds it difficult to fight against *Adharma*, or injustice, in the course of his warrior duties. But after taking Lord Krishna's advice, he declares that his delusion has vanished and that he is now prepared to fight for his *Dharma*, or duty. (Bhagavad Gita 18.73).

The Bhagavad Gita is regarded as the highest level of *Vedic* wisdom and the supreme *Upanishad* (Prabhupada, 1998). The goal of the Bhagavad Gita is to liberate humanity from the ignorance of material existence. Every human encounters difficulty in different ways, much as Arjun encountered difficulties during the *Kurukshetra* war. This text covers all facets of human existence, including behavior and philosophy. It offers us a variety of paths to self-realization, assesses the difficulties we face on a daily basis in a systematic way, and teaches us various coping mechanisms (Viswanathan, 2020).

It is clear from various scholars' interpretations of the book that the Bhagavad Gita is an expression of heavenly inspiration that describes how it operates of the human mind. It describes how to identify the causes of a disturbance and treat it to

restore mental health. It also has an answer for every issue that a person might face against in their lifetime. It never advises us on what to do. Rather, it gives us the information we need to weigh the pros and cons of every facet of life before letting us make the ultimate choice. It teaches us about the human condition, the soul, the mind, salvation, action, and wisdom. These subjects have an impact on psychology in humans.

Psychology is, basically, the scientific study of behavior and the mind (Nairne, 2011). The study of mental life in all of its forms and contexts is known as psychology (James, 1890). It encompasses both people's thoughts and feelings in addition to the life that occurs within each individual's brain (Bowden, 2007).

“Psychology” comes from two words: psyche and logos. The word psyche (pronounced “sigh-key”) is from the Greek word (Ψυχη)– meaning “breath of life”, i.e. “soul or spirit”, loosely translated as MIND. Psychology is often understood to be the scientific study of human and animal minds and behavior (Benson, 1998). It is, more specifically, the study of thought and behavior (Kleinman, 2012).

What I generalized that psychology is the scientific study of the brain and human behavior. Psychology has always been linked to human expression, thought, and emotion. Psychology is tied to human behavior, despite its initial association with the science of the mind.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, there are three kinds of material nature: kindness, passion, and ignorance. When the eternal living creature engages with nature, these phases condition him (14:5). Each person possesses one of these three traits more than the others. These three characteristics also indicate that they have diverse natures. *Triguna* affects a person's thoughts and actions.

Meaning of *Guna*

Guna is a Sanskrit term that means "quality," "distinction," "attribute," or "tendency." According to *Yoga* and *Ayurveda*, a *Guna* is a component of reality that influences our mental, emotional, and physical states (Burgin, 2019). It focuses on the characteristics of substances and their unbreakable bonds with one another. The identity, character, or idea that is necessary to describe an object or substance—without which it would not exist—is known as *Guna* (Neupane & Ghimire, 2020). Depending on the context, *Guna* can refer to virtue, excellence, or a string, thread, or strand (Dutta & Das, 2021). *Guna*, or quality, is therefore a necessary component for people and things to exist. This characteristic causes several behaviors to manifest simultaneously in various individuals. For example, the light of intelligence and righteousness shines when *Sattva* is dominating. The power of the *Rajas* encourages desire, passion, activity, and restlessness. Ignorance clouds the intellect and senses when *Tamas* is excessive, leading to carelessness, passiveness, and delusions.

Triguna and Psychology

Gopalacharya asserts that the term "Triguna" is a technical term rather than a noun as it is commonly understood. *Tri* is the Sanskrit word for "three." Conversely, *Guna*, depending on how it is employed, can indicate either "to invite" or "to grow/evolve/multiply." (as cited in Swaroop, Salagame & Kallahalla, 2018). In the context of *Triguna*, *Guna* is defined as "a component that an individual thinks to be a tool of growth". Three distinct categories of growth instruments are encompassed by the term "Tri".

Every person on this world has three *Gun*as, each of which defines or clarifies their way of living. All human beings possess all three of these *Gun*as, but their degrees of existence may differ (Banerjee, Pathak & Mathur, 2020). *Triguna* reflects the

qualities that shape an individual's psychological system, while *Gunas* refers to their state of mind, behaviors, and qualities (Malkar & Bandyopadhyay, 2020).

The Bhagavad Gita states that *Triguna* binds the "owner of the body" or "one who resides in the body" (*dehi*) (BG, 14.5). Chapter 14, verses 6–8, of the Bhagavad Gita provide more details on how this happens. The term "quality" of a substance is also used by the *Guna*. Sankaracharya, however, points out that *Guna* is *Prakriti* itself, not a quality of another, in his commentary on Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14 Verse 5 (Suresh, 2019). Three (Tri) qualities, or *Gunas*, are representative of the tangible, social, and psychological aspects of human functioning and are similarly important to understanding material objects (Agrawal, 2020).

According to the Bhagavad Gita and its commentary, human nature is associated with three aspects. It is innately related to human thought, behavior and action. From academic perspective, the question can be raised as to how the threefold nature influences human actions. Are these traits related to human psychology? Regarding these questions, the purpose of this research is to explain the threefold nature of the Bhagavad Gita in the light of the behavior of both the teacher and the learner.

Main aim of this study is to interpret nature of *Triguna Prakriti* in relation to human psychology. Specifically, objectives of the study are:

- a. To interpret the notion of *Triguna Prakriti* stated in the Bhagavad Gita,
- b. To explore own self-understanding of effect of *Triguna Prakriti* on human behavior according to the Bhagavad Gita,
- c. To reflect notion of *Triguna Prakriti* on nature of the teacher and learner.

Delimitations

Limitations are the limitations of the study. This is established by the researcher's selection of what should be included and excluded. To make the research more feasible and relevant to the researchers' objectives, they narrow its scope (DiscoverPhDs, 2020).

The whole of the Bhagavad Gita's subject matter is not covered in this study. Only the *Triguna Prakriti*, which is contained in the Bhagavad Gita, is the subject of this investigation. The main focus of this study is the researchers' self-reflection and comprehension following their study of the Bhagavad Gita and the *Triguna Prakriti's* interpretations of it.

Methodology

This article is prepared based on the hermeneutic method of studying the scriptures. Crotty (1998) defines hermeneutics as "the science of interpretation". Similarly, Frazier (2008) recommends the study of Eastern philosophy texts, particularly those associated with Hinduism, by a method of hermeneutics. Therefore, based on these theoretical foundations, I have chosen the hermeneutic method.

Research Paradigm

I select interpretative research paradigm for this study. Denzin and Lincoln refer to practice interpretive research paradigm and claim that "all research is interpretive" (p. 22). In support of Denzin and Lincoln, Creswell (2012 as cited in Ghimire, 2017) says that "qualitative research is interpretive" (p. 238). Understanding a specific scenario or context is the main objective of the interpretative research paradigm, not the finding of general laws or regulations (Willis, 2007).

Everybody understands things differently. The same is true of my condition, as a result of my sociocultural surroundings; I built my worldview on my comprehension of many objects, circumstances, and phenomena. This study completed by myself using my own viewpoints and observations. I have decided to use the interpretative research paradigm to finish this investigation. The interpretive research paradigm was used for this study for three reasons: first, it is traditional in our academic discipline to write *Vedic* literature in a variety of interpretations. I additionally analyzed the facts in this article using my own interpretations of them. Second, this viewpoint suggests that various people may interpret the same scenario or occurrence in different ways. This indicates that the reality is different. Based on *Triguna*, I expressed my personal reality in this study regarding the nature of a teacher and student. Third, the researchers attempted to gain a more subjective and inter-subjective understanding of the nature of reality under this paradigm. I have selected this paradigm to provide a subjective explanation of the data in this text.

Research Design

I've chosen a qualitative research design for this study. According to Stake (2010), qualitative research is interpretive in nature. Inside the interpretive research framework, researchers can act as tools. Similarly, Interpretive research, according to Willis (2007), defines all research as subjective. According to Leavy (2017), studies like content analysis and document analysis fall under the category of non-intrusive methods.

Qualitative research generally examines personal experiences, opinions, and understandings. It doesn't include numerical statistics. Even now I have presented my views in this study. For this reason, I selected for a qualitative research design for my investigation. According to the *Triguna Prakriti*, this design facilitates in explaining the

behavior of the teacher and students. On the other hand, this study design is used because the data in this article are interpreted subjectively.

Data Generation and Interpretation Procedure

I studied a variety of printed and digital texts while doing this study. I read the Bhagavad Gita-related works written by different authors under the physical text. In the same way, I read volumes on the Bhagavad Gita and numerous papers on *Triguna Prakriti* under electronic text. I presented my personal opinions in this essay based on my comprehension and the reading of the relevant sources. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest using visual texts, cultural texts, and personal knowledge as text materials (as cited in Ghimire, 2017).

Hermeneutics is the name of the science of interpretation, which includes theory and practice (Crotty, 1998 as cited in Ghimire, 2017). So, I decided to generate and interpret data using the hermeneutics method. Hermeneutics, as I understand it, is the study of interpretation science and is a subfield of the interpretative paradigm. Thus, in my research, I applied the hermeneutics method.

Literature Collection

This research is entirely dependent on Bhagavad Gita-related literature. I gathered information from the primary Sanskrit and Nepali translations of the Bhagavad Gita. I searched for several translations of the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata, particularly those by *Shankaracharya Bhasya* and *Prabhupad*. These translations were available online and in publications published in Sanskrit, Hindi, English, and Nepali.

Literature Study and Meaning Creation

This article's primary focus is the Bhagavad Gita. The sub-theme is how the *Triguna Prakriti* affects how teachers and pupils behave. I started by gathering a variety of books and articles about the main subjects and their sub-themes. I subsequently read through those articles and books. Because the Bhagavad Gita is a properly huge book in terms of verses, I was unable to read them all. I read only verses from the Bhagavad Gita that were relevant to the *Triguna Prakriti*. Since Chapter 14 of the Bhagavad Gita discusses into much detail about the *Triguna Prakriti* and how it influences behavior, that is the chapter I focused on reading. This chapter, titled *The Three Modes of Material Nature*, is made up of 27 verses. I read also chapters 17 and 18, as they also provide an explanation of the *Triguna Prakriti*. In the same way, I exclusively studied *Triguna Prakriti*-related papers. I completed the literature study in three steps: first, at this stage I studied the literature related to the *Triguna Prakriti* under the Bhagavad Gita. The main task of this stage is to overview the literature. In the second stage, I studied how people behave according to the threefold nature. It was at this stage that I developed my understanding based on the literature overview. In the third stage, I studied the behaviors of teachers and students according to the *Triguna Prakriti*.

The Bhagavad Gita is written in *Sanskrit* language. I am unable to understand *Sanskrit* language. So, I studied the Bhagavad Gita books translated from the original *Sanskrit* language into Nepali and English. During the study, I tried to understand the meaning and purport of the verses related to the *Triguna Prakriti*. I have tried to making meaning based on the scholarly interpretation on Bhagavad Gita, supervisor's guidance and my personal ability. I have created meaning on the basis of literature study.

Results and Discussion

Triguna Prakriti in Bhagavad Gita

It has been said above that there are 18 chapters in the Bhagavad Gita. There are 27 verses in Chapter 14 entitled *The Three Modes of Material Nature*, all of which are related to *Triguna Prakriti*. All living beings are subject to the three qualities of nature, what are those qualities and this chapter discusses how those qualities affect people's behavior.

Human beings, according to the Bhagavad-Gita, are made up of three personality modes called *Tri Gunas* or *Guna Traya* (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 5). i.e. *Sattva* (Holiness), *Rajas* (Desire) and *Tamas* (Darkness). Every human being is made up of these three personality types. The personality of a person is determined by how these modes are reflected in their behavior. If a person's *Sattva* is dominant, he/she will be attached to bliss (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 11). A person with a *Rajas* dominance is known for their voracity, discontent, appetite, and urge to act (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 12), Un-illumination, lethargy, forgetfulness, and mere misunderstanding are associated with people who have *Tamas* supremacy (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 13). *Sattva* produces brightness and well-being, according to the Bhagavad-Gita, by clinging to cheerfulness and alertness (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 6), *Rajas* arouses desire by associating it with achievement (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 7), and *Tamas* causes obliviousness as well as witlessness, sluggishness, and sleepiness (Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14, Verse 8). Thus, according to the Bhagavad Gita, *Sattvic*'is the highest level of human being, followed by *Rajasic* and *Tamasic*, which are the lowest levels of human being. Humans, food, live, and inanimate items all contain *Gunas*.

Lord Krishna provides a full discussion and definition of the three *Gunas* in the fourteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, which are as follows: first, *Sattva* is impurity-free, enlightening, and disease-free. It connects the soul to enjoyment and knowledge through attachment. Second, *Rajas* are passionate people who are born from *Trishna* (thirst or extreme desire) and *Sanga* (love, attachment). It links the spirit to action through attachment. Third, *Tamas* represents man's darkness and crudeness. It is the result of inexperience and the source of delusion. Through irresponsibility, indolence, and sleep, it confines the soul.

The three *Gunas* in beings struggle for supremacy and try to inhibit each other. *Sattva* has the upper hand because *Rajas* and *Tamas* are suppressed. *Rajas* has the upper hand by repressing both *Sattva* and *Tamas*, while *Tamas* suppresses both *Sattva* and *Rajas*. In this way, there is always competition for qualities to become the leader (BG, 14:10).

Sattva Guna is holier than other virtues, so it is luminous. Those who are in such mode are influenced by feelings of happiness and wisdom (BG, 14: 6). *Rajo Guna* is the product of unlimited desires and cravings. Due to this, living beings are bound by worldly deeds (BG, 14: 7). From ignorance then *Tamo Guna* arises. Insanity, laziness and sleep are the result of this quality (BG, 14: 8). *Sattva Guna* makes a person happy; *Rajo Guna* engages in fruitful work and *Tamo Guna* covers knowledge and binds it to madness (BG, 14: 9).

When all of the body's gates are lit by knowledge, the manifestations of *Sato Guna* can be felt (BG, 14: 11). When *Rajo Guna* levels rise, signs such as strong connection, fruitful activity, intense exertion, and overwhelming desire and longing emerge (BG, 14: 12). Inertia, madness, darkness and illusion arise when the *Tamo Guna* increases (BG, 14: 13). Real knowledge develops from *Sattva Guna*, *Rajo Guna* leads

to the development of greed, and from *Tamo Guna* develops stupidity, madness and delusion (BG, 14: 17).

Thus, the Bhagavad Gita has extensively explained and analyzed what the *Triguna Prakriti* is, what are their characteristics, and the effect of each quality is what kind of symptoms appear in a person. This confirms that human behavior is determined by the *Triguna Prakriti*.

Human behavior and *Triguna Prakriti*

According to the Bhagavad Gita, when *Sattva* is prevalent, wisdom is radiated from all the gates of the human body. When *Rajas* rules, avarice, worldliness, pursuing worldly goals and a proclivity for selfish behaviors emerge. Darkness, laziness, irresponsibility, and illusion thrive as the number of *Tamas* increases. *Tamsic* people's behavior is primarily driven by traditions, but *Rajasic* people are assertive, adventurous, and risk takers, as a result of which they take initiative and interact with a wide range of individuals for a variety of reasons. *Sattvic*, on the other hand, are conscious of the impact of interactions with other people in various contexts, and their social control is influenced by tradition and present group norms. Highly *Tamsic* people are extremely reliant on their peers. They want for other people's attention and acceptance. *Sattvics* are democratic, stable, and cooperative, and they act in a natural way.

Sattva has the traits of harmony, tranquility, balance, and satisfaction. When people are in *Sattva*, they can be happy all of the time, think positively, and avoid viewing life's troubles as punishments. They try to figure out what's causing problems so they can fix it. *Rajas* are extremely busy and frequently do actions that could be avoided. Happiness, in the eyes of a *Rajasic* individual, is found elsewhere. A person seeks satisfaction in the outward world, whereas a *Sattvic* person seeks contentment

within. There is no energy in *Tamas*. It is only passive and lethargic if something occurs. Although the *Tamas* mind is capable of thinking, thoughts move at a glacial pace.

Sattva is the highest of the three virtues. It is unadulterated. Happiness, wisdom, and insight are all brought about through it. *Rajas* is second quality is passion, which manifests itself as extreme attachment and avarice. It is a source of sadness and pain. The third, *Tamas*, is the most dangerous of them all. It manifests as gloom, lethargy, and delusion as a result of ignorance.

According to the above explanation, the influence of *Triguna* is seen in different behaviors in each person. People with *Sattva Gunas* are good, people with *Rajo Gunas* are greedy and zealous and a person with *Tamo Guna* is foolish and ignorant.

Reflections of *Triguna Prakriti* on Teachers' and Students' Behavior

It has already been mentioned above that *Triguna* affects every human being. Therefore, teacher and students are also directly affected by *Triguna*. Therefore, under this sub-heading, there is a discussion about the nature of teachers and students due to three qualities.

Sattvic teacher. A *Sattvic* teacher has reached the pinnacle of spiritual attainment. He/she considers all living things to be one and does not believe in or teach hypocrisy. The praise and criticism have no effect on a *Sattvic* teacher. He/she has a deep sense of inner tranquility and unconditional love. A teacher like this learns and progresses alongside his/her students. They treat all of their students fairly and similarly.

Rajasic teacher. A *Rajasic* teacher aspires to be worshipped by his/ her students. *Rajasic* teachers use their appearance and desire to impress and hypnotize

their students. A *Rajasic* teacher preaches but does not practice what he/she preaches. They can be a little zealous at times. Frequently, such a teacher adopts a dramatic demeanor. He/she tries to take control of people's minds by seizing their emotions.

Tamasic teacher. *Tamasic* teachers are really perverted. To achieve power and sensuous pleasures, he/she engages in unethical actions. A *Tamasic* teacher tailors the teachings and ideas to his/her own agenda and ambitions. All truth is completely distorted by this teacher. He/she has the ability to change everything in order to further his/her own selfish goals. His/her main goal is to gratify the senses.

Similarly, according to the *Triguna*, the behavior of the students was found to be as follow:

Sattvic student. A *Sattvic* student does not mindlessly follow anyone. He/she is inquisitive and strives on improving themselves. Such a pupil does not require a long personal relationship with his/her instructor to undergo a profound transformation of awareness; in fact, it may be sufficient for him to association his/her teacher for only a few hours during his or her lifetime. He/she is aware of the distinction between real and unreal (discrimination).

Rajasic student. The true significance of spiritual teachings is invisible to a *Rajasic* pupil. Even if he/she lacks in-depth information, he/she studies a lot and strives to convince people to his faith. Such students frequently believe that a teacher possesses some sort of mystical formula. My instructor, my religion, and my god are all categories in their minds. He has an emotional tie to his teacher. Palmistry, astrology, and other occult sciences are common interests among *Rajasic* students. Fanatics, as well as people who believe they are special and know more than others,

fall into this category. These individuals should devote more time to personal development, selfless service, meditation, and speech control.

Tamasic student. A *Tamasic* pupil is egotistical and unwilling to learn. A *Tamasic* learner is incapable of discrimination and disobeys norms and punishment. This type of pupil is prone to misinterpreting all spiritual instructions. He/she enjoys arguing over nothing. He/she is unaffected by the majority of instructions. He/she does not think about spiritual matters with his/ her intellect. He/she is fascinated by occultism and frequently contacts numerous fortune-tellers. Such a pupil eats whatever he/she wants and surrounds himself/herself with all kinds of dirt (physical, emotional, etc.). Such a person should perform something active, such as cleaning schools, physically assisting teachers, and speaking less. He is not suited to solitary meditation or other *Sattvic* practices.

Conclusions

Main aim of this study is to interpret nature of *Triguna Prakriti* in relation to human psychology and impact on teachers and students' behavior. Chapter 14 of the Bhagavad Gita is the main basis for this study. The *Triguna Prakriti* is broadly explained on the basis of 27 verses under this chapter. Interpretative research paradigm has been used for this study. The study was conducted using a qualitative method known as hermeneutic approach.

What are the qualities of a human being? What is the effect of these qualities on human beings? What are the effects of *Triguna Prakriti* in teacher and student behavior? Why is it important to recognize the behavior of teachers and students? This study is needed to answer these and similar questions.

Our entire way of life has been influenced by Eastern philosophy. The *Bhagavad Gita* is considered to be one of the most important spiritual texts in Eastern philosophy. An in-depth study of the *Bhagavad Gita* helps to find out what the behavior of teachers and students is according to the *Triguna Prakriti*. From this, the teaching and learning process can be made effective by understanding the psychology of teachers and students.

This study found out the *Bhagavad Gita* explains how the *Triguna Prakriti* affect human behavior and how to overcome their effect. The mode of virtue is where true knowledge originates (*Sattva Guna*), greed is a byproduct of the passion mode (*Rajo Guna*), and ignorance gives rise to folly, madness, and illusion (*Tamo Guna*). Similarly, *Triguna Prakriti* also has an impact on the behavior of teachers and students.

Teachers and students with *Sattvic Gunas* are most important for effective teaching and learning process. Only such teachers can guide their students in the right guidelines. Students can also understand and follow the guidelines. So, teachers and students with *Sattvic Gunas* are the ideals of our educational system.

There is no coherence between teachers' statements and actions when it comes to *Rajas Guna*. Such students believe in miracles. As such teachers and students are ambitious and active; they are useful for hard work. These have the potential to give good results. But for that they need effective training and the right guidance.

The behavior of teachers and students with *Tamas Guna* is distorted because they have more unconsciousness and ignorance. They do not contribute positively to

the teaching-learning process. The state needs to do a lot of remedial work to get them on the right track.

Finally, teachers and students should overcome laziness and negligence and conquer *Tamo Guna*, *Rajo Guna* should be controlled by doing good deeds and *Sattva Guna* should be established by giving up ego and pride. So, all the teacher should know his nature and students' temperament needs to be identified. This will give the teacher a sense of how to deal with students with a disposition, from which learning can be achieved.

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