

**Mahabharata Series**

**ALL ABOUT TRIGUNAS**

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July 2016

**For Private Circulation**

**Preface**

This work is a compilation of essential material on *Trigunas*. *Trigunas* constitute a central or key concept in *adhyatma shastra* and its clear understanding is essential to a scholar as well as to a *sadhak*.

The contents are taken from,

- Bhagavad Gita (The main source)
- Mahabharata, mostly from Mokshadharma parva which appears in Shanti parva
- Sri Aurobindo's work 'Essays on Gita'

Special thing to notice in Sri Aurobindo's work is that for several aspects he describes what happens at the culmination of *Sattwa*, the point of transformation for going beyond *trigunas*.

**Note:** *Texts of shlokas from Gita which have appeared once are not repeated elsewhere though referred.*

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## Understanding Trigunas

**Sattwa** / Sattwic: The seed of intelligence, conserves the workings of energy

**Rajas** / Rajasic: The seed of force and action, creates the workings of energy

**Tamas** / Tamasic: The seed of inertia and non-intelligence

## Native/comprehensive attributes

### **Sattwa**

तत्र सत्त्वं निर्मलत्वात्प्रकाशकमनामयम् ।

सुखसंगेन बध्नाति ज्ञानसंगेन चानघ ॥ (Gita 14:6)

*tatra sattwaṃ nirmalatvātpṛakāśakamanāmayam,  
sukhasaṅgena badhnāti jñānasaṅgena cānagha.*

सत्त्वं सुखे सञ्जयति रजः कर्मणि भारत ।

ज्ञानमावृत्य तु तमः प्रमादे सञ्जयत्युत ॥ (Gita 14:9)

*sattwaṃ sukhe sañjayati rajaḥ karmaṇi bhārata,  
jñānamāvṛtya tu tamaḥ pramāde sañjayatyuta.*

सत्त्वात्संजायते ज्ञानं रजसो लोभ एव च ।

प्रमादमोहौ तमसो भवतोऽज्ञानमेव च ॥ (Gita 14:17)

*sattvātsamjāyate jñānaṃ rajaso lobha eva ca,  
pramādamohau tamaso bhavato'jñānameva ca.*

*Sattwa* is by its stainless purity a cause of illumination & well being; it binds by attachment to knowledge and happiness. (14:6) (14:9)

From *sattwa* knowledge is born. (14:17)

Self-control, sacrifice, the religious habit, cleanness and purity, candour and straightforwardness, truth, calm and self-denial, compassion to all beings, modesty, gentleness, forgivingness, patience, steadfastness, a deep sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity (=the treatment of a serious matter with humour) and constancy/not wavering. (*Achapala*) (Sri Aurobindo: Deva nature: Essays on Gita)

(No effort has been made to remove duplication of attributes in the paras below)

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 36**

(Shl 10) The 'light' (*prakash*) in all beings is the form of **sattwa**. **Laghava** (lack of bombastic quality, simplicity, no ego) and **shraddha** (faith) are forms/indicators of **sattwa guna**. Sadhus praise *laghava*.

### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 313**

(Shl 17-20) The following are the characteristics of *sattwa guna*: Goodness, faith, improvement, knowledge, virtuous conduct, happiness, joy, delight, love, not having anger, non-violence, forgiveness, equality, truthfulness, courage, steadiness, health, cleanliness, purity, not being in any one's debt, not greedy, lack of miserliness, giving up everything by *daan* and focussing on *atma*, having no desire for others belongings, not feeling elated or depressed when good or bad things happen, simplicity, modesty, not boasting about *satkarmas* done, softness, helping others & kindness towards all living beings. (Re-arranged for better comprehension)

### Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 38

Brahma said: (Shl 1) Oh *maharshis*! Next I will tell about *sattwa guna* which is for the benefit of all beings, is irreproachable, is fit for *satpurushas* to acquire and is the greatest of *gunas*. (Shl 2, 3) The following are the functions of *sattwa guna*: Joy/beatitude, abundance of gladness, light (*prakashya*), happiness, liberality, fearlessness, delight, faith, forgiveness, courage, non-violence, equality, truthfulness, simplicity/honesty, not having anger, not finding fault in any, purity, skill and prowess.

(Shl 6, 7, 8) The following are the functions of *sattwa guna*: Trust, modesty, tolerance, purity, not having torpor, kindness, not having *moha*, kindness towards living beings, not carrying tales, joy, contentment, no ego, humbleness, virtuous conduct, acting with pure mind in peaceful karmas, very good attitude, desire to get liberated from the world, disinterest in worldly affairs, *brahmacharya*, complete unselfishness, no desires and carrying out works of dharma without discontinuation.

### Rajas

रजो रागात्मकं विद्धि तृष्णासंगसमुद्भवम् ।

तन्निबध्नाति कौन्तेय कर्मसंगेन देहिन्म् ॥ (Gita 14:7)

*rajo rāgātmakam viddhi tṛṣṇāsaṅgasamudbhavam,*

*tannibadhnāti kaunteya karmasaṅgena dehinam.*

Rajas, is of the nature of attraction; springing from craving and attachment it binds the embodied soul by attachment to action/works. (14:7) (14:9)

Greed is born from rajas. (14:17)

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

Rajas is a child of the attachment of the soul to the desire of objects; it is born from the nature's thirst for an unpossessed satisfaction. It is therefore full of unrest and fever and lust and greed and excitement, a thing of seeking impulsions, and all this mounts in us when the middle guna increases.

Rajas, then, is evidently the kinetic force in the modes of Nature. Its fruit is the lust of action, but also grief, pain, all kinds of suffering; for it has no right possession of its object—**desire in fact implies non-possession**—and even its pleasure of acquired possession is troubled and unstable because it has not clear knowledge and does not know how to possess nor can it find the secret of accord and right enjoyment. All the ignorant and passionate seeking of life belongs to the rajasic mode of Nature.

### Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 36

(Shl 9) **Rajo-guna** is said to be the form of *prakriti*. It is the cause for creation. All beings have tendency of *rajo-guna*. This *jagat* is also form of *rajo-guna*. Its characteristic is *utpatti* (production, birth in general).

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 313

The following are the characteristics of *rajas*: (Shl 21-24) Beauty, wealth, quarrelling, lack of sacrificial spirit, lack of kindness, experiencing of happiness & grief, interest in blaming/criticising others, interest in arguments & counter-arguments, ego/arrogance, not honouring the respectable, worry, enmity, grief, snatching others wealth, shamelessness, crookedness, divisive thinking, cruelty, *kaam*, anger, haughtiness, intoxication of power, hatred, and excessive talking.

### Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 37

(Shl 2-7) **The following are the works of rajo-guna**: grief, appearance, tiredness, happiness & unhappiness, winter/cold, summer/heat, wealth, quarrel, compromise, arguments/logic, lack of cheerfulness, tolerance, might/strength, valour, intoxication/insolence, rage, exercising, envy, wish, calumny, war, affection/'mine' ness, nurture/care of family, killing, imprisoning, sorrow, buying & selling, piercing/hurting other's sensitive parts by cutting, breaking, splitting etc acts, fury, severity, screaming, telling defects in others, thinking of the world, repentance, jealousy, afflicted by many



kinds of worldly feelings, untruthful speech, false charity, thinking with suspicion, speaking derogatively, blaming, praising, forcing, hospitality, serving/nursing, thirst, giving shelter/refuge to others, skill in dealings, ethics, being careless, censuring and accepting things from others.

(Shl 9, 10) **All the following are prompted by rajo-guna:** Sorrow, lack of confidence, *vrats* & rules, *kaamyas-karmas* (karmas done to pray for obtaining desired things), *ishtapurta karmas* (like constructing wells, lakes etc, planting several trees, constructing temples etc *punya karyas*), *svahakara* (for *devatas*), *namskara* (for guests), *svadhakara* (for *pitrus*), *vashatkara*, directing performance of *yajnas* as well as doing them, studying and teaching, giving to charity and receiving, repentance or atonements and auspicious acts.

(Shl 11) **The interest/attachment for things which makes one say, 'Let this thing be for me; let this be for me' occurs due to rajo-guna.**

(Shl 12, 13, 14) Great *vipras*! Treachery, cheating, disdain, pride, stealing, violence, disgust, anguish, being awake at night, hypocrisy, arrogance, affection/love, devotion driven by desires, love of objects of senses, joy, gambling, scandal/rumour, too much association with women and interest in dance, instruments, music etc are all said to be *rajasa karmas*.

### **Tamas**

तमस्त्वज्ञानजं विद्धि मोहनं सर्वदेहिनाम् ।

प्रमादालस्यनिद्राभिस्तन्निबध्नाति भारत ॥ (Gita 14:8)

*tamastvajñānajaṃ viddhi mohanam sarvadehinām,*

*pramādālasyanidrābhīstannibadhnāti bhārata.*

Tamas, born of ignorance, is the deluder of all embodied beings; it binds by negligence, indolence and sleep. (14:8) (14:9)

Negligence and delusion and also ignorance are born of tamas. (14:17)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

Dominated by the guna of tamas, the mode of darkness and inertia, the power of being works in a weak confusion, a prevailing incapacity, an un aspiring subjection to the blind mechanism of the forces of the Ignorance.

**Tamas, the principle of inertia, is a passive and inert nescience (=Ignorance) which suffers all shocks and contacts without any effort of mastering response and by itself would lead to a disintegration of the whole action of the energy and a radical dispersion of substance.** But it is driven by the kinetic power of rajas and even in the nescience of Matter is met and embraced by an innate though unpossessed preserving principle of harmony and balance and knowledge. Material energy appears to be tamasic in its basic action, *jada*, nescient mechanic and in movement disintegrative. But it is dominated by a huge force and impulsion of mute rajasic kinesis which drives it, even in and even by its dispersion and disintegration, to build and create and again by a sattwic ideative element in its apparently unconscious (=unconscious, without conscious thought) force which is always imposing a harmony and preservative order on the two opposite tendencies.

**Tamas is born of inertia and ignorance and its fruit too is inertia and ignorance. It is the darkness of tamas which obscures knowledge and causes all confusion and delusion.** Therefore it is the opposite of *sattwa*, for the essence of *sattwa* is enlightenment, *prakasa*, and the essence of tamas is absence of light, nescience, *aprakasa*. But tamas brings incapacity and negligence of action as well as the incapacity and negligence of error, inattention and misunderstanding or non-understanding; indolence (=avoidance of activity or exertion; laziness), languor (=tiredness or inactivity) and sleep belong to this guna. Therefore it is the opposite too of *rajas*; for the essence of rajas is movement and impulsion and kinesis, *pravrtti*, but the essence of

tamas is inertia, *apavrtti*. **Tamas is inertia of nescience and inertia of inaction, a double negative.**

And again what is behind the inertia of Nature, behind this Tamas which, when complete, makes her action like the blind driving of a machine, a mechanical impetus unobservant of anything except the groove in which it is set to spin and not conscious even of the law of that motion,—this Tamas that turns cessation of the accustomed action into death and disintegration and becomes in the mind a power for inaction and ignorance? This *tamas* is an obscurity which **mistranslates**, we may say, into inaction of power and inaction of knowledge, the Spirit's eternal principle of calm and repose—the repose which the Divine never loses even while he acts, the eternal repose which supports his integral action of knowledge and the force of his creative will both there in its own infinities and here in an apparent limitation of its working and self-awareness.

**The peace of the Godhead is not a disintegration of energy or a vacant inertia; it would keep all that Infinity has known and done gathered up and concentratedly conscious in an omnipotent silence, even if the Power everywhere ceased for a time actively to know and create. The Eternal does not need to sleep or rest; he does not get tired and flag; he has no need of a pause to refresh and recreate his exhausted energies; for his energy is inexhaustibly the same, indefatigable and infinite.**

The Godhead is calm and at rest in the midst of his action; and on the other hand his very cessation of action would retain in it the full power and all the potentialities of his kinesis. **The liberated soul enters into this calm and participates in the eternal repose of the spirit. This is known to everyone who has had any taste at all of the joy of liberation, that it contains an eternal power of calm. And that profound tranquillity can remain in the very heart of action, can persevere in the most violent motion of forces...** The calm of the liberated man is not an indolence (= *Inactivity resulting from a dislike of work*), incapacity, insensibility, inertia; it is full of immortal power, capable of all action, attuned to deepest delight, open to profoundest love and compassion and to every manner of intensest Ananda.

#### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 36**

(Shl 8) ***Tamo-guna*** is the form of darkness and also consists of *trigunas* (in smaller proportion it has *sattwa* & *rajas*). ***Moha* is another name for *tamas*. It is a characteristic of *adharma*. This quality surely exists in sinners.** This nature of *tamo-guna* is also seen to be mixed with other two *gunas*.

(Shl 12-16) All the following have been said to be **wicked actions of *tamo-guna***: *moha*, ignorance, not giving up (*atyaga*), being always undecided about karmas, interest only in sleeping, torpor, fear, greed, blaming good deeds, loss of memory/poor memory, not thinking about consequences of actions, atheism, bad character, lack of discrimination about good & bad, weakness of *indriyas*, tendency to engage in lowly/mean acts, having false pride about acts not done by oneself, thinking that I am knowledgeable even though is ignorant, having enmity with all, not having interest in work to be done, doing things without faith/commitment, idiocy, crookedness, doing only sinful deeds, feeling heavy due to ignorance and laziness, not having good feelings and not having *indriyas* under control. Apart from these whatever states of mind have been said to indicate *moha* are all *tamas guna*.

(Shl 32) Interest/attachment to enjoyments of senses is called *maha-moha* (*ajnana* (ignorance) and *aviveka* (lack of discriminative thinking) is *moha*. Desiring sexual pleasures always is *maha-moha*. Even *rishis*, *munis* & *devatas* get caught in this *moha* and become fools.

(Shl 35) How can anyone who considers *atattva* (untruth) as *tattva* (true principle) know these matters and find *tattva*? **Having contrary view about everything is the main characteristic of *tamas tattva*.**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 313**

The following are the characteristics of *tamas*: (Shl 25-28) Confusion/delusion, ignorance, darkness and intense darkness. Darkness has been said to be anger. Intense darkness has been said to be

death. Desire to eat all the time; not feeling content in spite of eating much; not feeling content in spite of drinking much; wearing dirty & smelly clothes; greater interest in inappropriate roaming, sleeping or sitting idle; daytime sleeping; love in unnecessary arguments and carelessness; excessive faith born out of ignorance in dance, music and variety of musical instruments; hatred towards variety of *dharma-karyas*.

### **Related matters**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 241**

(Shl 19) It should be understood that *tamas*, *rajas* & *sattwa* are the *gunas* (quality, attribute) of *jeeva*. The *jeeva* is the *guna* of *atma*. Understand that *atma* to be the *guna* of *Paramatma*.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 203**

(Shl 3) *Atma* according to the nature of birth will have *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamo-gunas* which are distinct from each other. But he is distinct/different from these.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 339**

(Shl 27) *Sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* are called *gunas*. Because, these three will be in the body of living beings and will be active. (Shl 28) ***Khsetrajna governs these three gunas. But he does not get caught by them.*** Because, he is himself *nirguna*. He only governs them. He is also the creator of these *gunas*. Therefore he is beyond them and greater than them.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 247**

(Shl 19) The *trigunas* viz *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* are born from their root cause, that is, *mool-prakriti*. These three *gunas* generally exist in all beings. They should be recognised based on the actions of the person.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 313**

Yajnavalkya said: (Shl 1) *Sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* are all *gunas* of *Prakriti*. These *gunas* have pervaded the whole world. These *gunas* never leave the world.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 313**

(Shl 15) *Prakriti* creates thousands of *gunas* purely with the desire to play (for sport). (Shl 16) Just as man lights several lamps with one lamp, in the same way for the sake of *Purusha*, *Prakriti* creates several *gunas* from one *guna*.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 248**

(Shl 11) Whatever *sattwic* etc states are there in the world, they are all in *manas*, *buddhi* & *ahankar* by their applicable names like spokes in a wheel. (If the *manas* is associated with *sattwa guna*, then *sattwic-manas* etc). In this manner, *manas*, *buddhi* & *ahankar* take the names of the dominant state.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 216**

(Shl 18) Scholars understand that *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamo-gunas* are the qualities of both *devas* & *asuras*. *Sattwa-guna* is the *guna* of *devatas*. The other two—*rajas* & *tamas*—are qualities of *asuras*.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 348**

(Shl 78) *Devatas* & *rishis* have predominantly *sattwa guna*. If any among either of these are without pure *sattwa*, they are called *vaikarikas*.

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The **Asuric Prakriti** is the **rajasic at its height**; it leads to the **slavery of the soul** in Nature, to **desire, wrath and greed, the three powers of the rajasid ego, and these are the threefold doors of Hell**, the Hell into which the natural being falls when it indulges the impurity and evil and error of its lower or perverted instincts. These three are again the doors of a great darkness, they fold back into

**tamas, the characteristic power of the original Ignorance;** for the unbridled force of the rajasic nature, when exhausted, falls back into the weakness, collapse, darkness, incapacity of the worst tamasic soul-status.

### According to Sankhya analysis

(Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 301)

#### **Sattwa**

(Shl 14) They found there are **ten qualities (gunas) in sattwa-guna** (*jnana-shakti, vairagya, swami-bhava, tapas, satya, kshama, dhairya, swacchata, atma-bodha and adhishtatritva*).

(Shl 16) They found that **sattwa has only one guna viz prakash**. (The ten gunas stated earlier are expansion of this quality called *prakash*).

#### **Rajas**

(Shl 14) They found there are **nine qualities in rajo-guna** (*asantosha, pascattapa, shoka, lobha, akshama, damana-pravritti, kaam, krodh & irshya*).

(Shl 16) They found that **rajo-guna has two gunas** (*pravritti & dukha*). (Others are expansion of these gunas).

#### **Tamas**

(Shl 14) They found that **tamo-guna had eight qualities** (*aviveka, moha, pramada, swapna, nidra, abhimaan, vishada and apriti*).

(Shl 15) That **tamo-guna has three gunas** (*apratipatti [state of being undecided or confused], vipratipatti [error, erroneous perception or notion] & viparita-pratipatti [perverted perception]*). (Others are expansion of these gunas).

#### **Related matters**

##### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 301**

(Shl 22, 23) They understood that *buddhi* is embedded in *tamo-guna*, *tamas* in *rajas*, *rajas* in *sattwa*, *sattwa* in *atma*, *atma* in *Isha Narayana*, *Narayana* in *moksha*, but that *moksha* is not included within anything else and it is indestructible and self-dependent.

(Shl 39) They knew that *sattwa-guna* resides in very few once *raaga & dwesha* enter human beings, and that only one in thousand may be interested in *moksha*.

(Shl 92-96) Yudhishtira! Parabrahma Paramatma pervades comprehensively through his *gunas* the *sattwa-gun*as, *rajo-gun*as, *tamo-gun*as, *gunas* of *buddhi*, *guna* of *manas*, *akash's gun*as, *vayu's gun*as, *tejas' gun*as, *water's gun*as and *prithvi's gun*as and resides in *kshetrajna*. (Parabrahma *tattva* pervades everything).

##### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 302**

(Shl 42) In this manner, though the *mahatma* who knows the *tattvas* of creation & dissolution (& is the cause of these) is *avikari*, he becomes *vikari* due to contact with *Prakriti*. Though devoid of *prakrat buddhi* he develops attachment that he is the body itself. (Shl 43) It is due to the contact with *Prakriti* that he gets associated with qualities of *sattwa-guna*, *rajo-guna* & *tamo-guna*. By virtue of being in the company of the ignorant, he also develops the feeling that he is nothing but body and due to that *sanskara* is later born in *sattwic*, *rajasic* & *tamasic* births.

##### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 329**

(Shl 44, 45) This entire world consisting of moving & unmoving things is made of *pancha-bhutas*.

Along with it, the *tattva* called *mahat*, its variations called *manas*, *buddhi* & *ahankar*, five *ijnanendriyas*, **three gunas called sattwa, rajas & tamas** – the group of these 17 are called **avyakta**.

## Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 31

### Ambarisha gita: *atma rajya*

Brahmana said: (Shl 1, 2) Human beings have three enemies called *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas*. (Note: even *sattwa* is an enemy). Due to differences in quality they are further subdivided into nine.

**Praharsha** (extreme joy), **priti** (love) and **ananda** (delight, beatitude) are three variations of *sattwa*.

**Trishna** (unquenched thirst, craving), **krodh** (anger) and **samrambha** (impetuosity, wrath against, feeling of hatred) are variations of *rajo-guna*.

**Shrama** (toil, labour), **tandra** (laziness, lassitude) and **moha** (ignorance, delusion) are three variations of *tamo-guna*.

(Shl 3) If a person who is of calm disposition, who is not lazy and is brave cuts these (these *gunas* with their variations) with arrows (of *shama*, *dama* etc), he can conquer other enemies.

### Symptoms of dominance

#### **Sattwa**

सर्वद्वारेषु देहेऽस्मिन्प्रकाश उपजायते ।

ज्ञानं यदा तदा विद्याद्विवृद्धं सत्त्वमित्युत ॥ (Gita 14:11)

*sarvadvāreṣu dehe'sminprakāśa upajāyate,*

*jñānaṃ yadā tadā vidyādvivṛddhaṃ sattwamityuta.*

When through all the doors in the body there comes a flooding of light, a light of understanding, perception and knowledge, one should understand that there has been a great increase and uprising of the *sattwic* guna in the nature. (14:11)

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194

When you experience joy in the body or mind understand that **sattwic bhava** has arisen. (Shl 31)

#### **Rajas**

लोभः प्रवृत्तिरारम्भः कर्मणामशमः स्पृहा ।

रजस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे भरतर्षभ ॥ (Gita 14:12)

*lobhaḥ pravṛttirārambhaḥ karmaṇāmaśamaḥ spṛhā,*

*rajasyetāni jāyante vivṛddhe bharatarṣabha*

Greed, seeking impulsions, initiative of actions, unrest, craving of desire — all these come forth when *rajas* increases. (14:12)

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194

(Shl 32) When in the body or mind unhappiness arises (unpleasantness to the mind), then understand that **rajo-guna** has arisen. One should not worry due to that. Because, worry only increases that state of unhappiness. (Shl 32)

#### **Tamas**

अप्रकाशोऽप्रवृत्तिश्च प्रमादो मोह एव च ।

तमस्येतानि जायन्ते विवृद्धे कुरुनन्दन ॥ (Gita 14:13)

*aprakāśo'pravṛttiśca pramādo moha eva ca,*

*tamasyetāni jāyante vivṛddhe kurunandana.*

Nescience/obscurity, inertia, negligence and delusion — these come forth when *tamas* increases. (14:13)

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194

When the state of *moha* arises in the body then information gathered from the five *indriyas* will be vague & unclear or not understood or not perceived clearly, discrimination would be lost and nothing will be clear; then it should be understood that **tamo-guna** has arisen. (Shl 33)

### Interaction of gunas

रजस्तमश्चाभिभूय सत्त्वं भवति भारत ।

रजः सत्त्वं तमश्चैव तमः सत्त्वं रजस्तथा ॥ (Gita 14:10)

*rajastamaścābhibhūya sattwaṃ bhavati bhārata,  
rajaḥ sattwaṃ tamaścaiva tamaḥ sattwaṃ rajastathā.*

### **Sattwa**

Sattwa leads, having overpowered rajas and tamas. (14:10)

### **Rajas**

Rajas leads having overpowered sattwa and tamas. (14:10)

### **Tamas**

Tamas leads having overpowered sattwa and rajas. (14:10)

### **Related matters**

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The three qualities of nature are evidently present and active in all human beings and none can be said to be quite devoid of one or another or free from any one of the three; none is cast in the mould of one guna to the exclusion of others.

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 39**

Brahma: (Shl 12) We can notice from a distance also that these three *gunas* are mutually combined. But we have never heard of the three *gunas* existing separately or individually.

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 314

(Shl 6) It is seen that *rajo-guna* has mixed with *sattwa guna* in a *jeevatma*. We also see that *tamo-guna* gets mixed with *rajo-guna*. *Sattwa guna* can mix with *tamo-guna*. It is also possible that *jeevatma* has only *sattwa guna*.

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 213

(Shl 12) When the *rajo-guna* merges with *tamo-guna*, when *sattwa-guna* merges with *rajo-guna*, *atma* who is the refuge for *jnana* and is unmanifest, becomes united with *buddhi & ahankara*.

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 36**

Brahma said: (Shl 4, 5) *Sattwa, rajas & tamas* – these three are called *gunas (trigunas)*. These are always combined with each other. They depend on each other. They strengthen/nourish each other. Each *guna* follows the other. One *guna* mixes with the other. *Pancha-maha-butras* consist of *trigunas*. (Shl 6) *Sattwa* will be with *tamas*. *Rajas* accompanies *sattwa*. *Sattwa* accompanies *rajas*. *Tamas* accompanies *sattwa*. (Shl 7) If *tamo-guna* is restrained, *rajo-guna* is born. If *rajo-guna* is restrained, *sattwa guna* is born.

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 39**

Brahma said: (Shl 1) **Maharshis! It is not at all possible to speak about the three gunas separately/individually. These three will always be together in human beings.** (Shl 2) These *gunas* rejoice together. They exist together. They each depend on the other. They each follow the



other. (Shl 3) As long as there is *sattwa guna* in this world, *rajo-guna* will also exist. There is no doubt about this. Similarly as long as *tamo-guna* & *sattwa guna* exist, so will *rajo-guna*. (Shl 4) They all travel together whether with a purpose/reason or without it. They always exist together in the body. (Shl 5) **Thus even though they all exist together they have the nature of increasing and decreasing. Even though each one follows the other, sometimes one *guna* will be more or less than the others.** Brahma said: (Shl 1) *Maharshis! It is not at all possible to speak about the three gunas separately/individually. Because, these three will always be together in human beings.* (Shl 2) these *gunas* rejoice together. They exist together. They each depend on the other. They each follow the other. (Shl 3) As long as there is *sattwa guna* in this world, *rajo-guna* will also exist. There is no doubt about this. Similarly as long as *tamo-guna* & *sattwa guna* exist, so will *rajo-guna*. (Shl 4) They all travel together whether with a purpose/reason or without it. They always exist together in the body. (Shl 5) **Thus even though they all exist together they have the nature of increasing and decreasing. Even though each one follows the other, sometimes one *guna* will be more or less than the others.**

### Everything is Trigunatmic

(Subjects ordered alphabetically)

### Introduction

न तदस्ति पृथिव्यां वा दिवि देवेषु वा पुनः ।

सत्त्वं प्रकृतिजैर्मुक्तं यदेभिः स्यात्त्रिभिर्गुणैः ॥ (Gita 18:40)

*na tadasti pr̥thivyām vā divi deveṣu vā punaḥ,*

*sattvaṃ prakṛtijairmuktaṃ yadebhiḥ syāttribhirmiṅṇaiḥ.*

There is not an entity, either on the earth or again in heaven among the gods, that is not subject to the workings of these three qualities (Gunas), born of nature.

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः ।

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसंततानि

कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके ॥ (Gita 15.2)

*adhaścordhvaṃ prasṛtāstasya śākhā*

*guṇapravṛddhā viṣayapravālāḥ,*

*adhaśca mūlānyanusantatāni*

*karmānubandhīni manuṣyaloke.*

The branches of this cosmic tree extend both below and above (below in the material, above in the supraphysical planes), **they grow nourished by the gunas of Nature**; the sense objects are its foliage, downward here into the world of men it plunges its roots of attachment and desire with their consequences of an endlessly developing action (which bind men with karma).

ये चैव सात्त्विका भावा राजसास्तामसाश्च ये ।

मत्त एवेति तान्विद्धि न त्वहं तेषु ते मयि ॥ (Gita 7.12)

*ye caiva sāt̥tvikā bhāvā rājasāstāmasāśca ye,*

*matta eveti tāt̥nviddhi na tvahaṃ teṣu te mayi.*

And the *bhavaḥ* (secondary subjective becomings of Nature; states of mind, affections of desire, movements of passion, the reactions of the senses, the limited and dual play of reason, the turns of

the feeling and moral sense), which are sattwic, rajasic and tamasic, they are verily from me, but I am not in them, it is they that are in Me.

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

"I am" says the Divine "the essential light, strength, desire, power, intelligence, but these derivations from them I am not in my essence, nor am I in them, yet are they all of them from me and they are all in my being." It is then upon the basis of these statements that we have to view the transition of things from the higher to the lower and again from the lower back to the higher nature.

The first statement offers no difficulty. The strong man in spite of the divine nature of the principle of strength in him falls into subjection to desire and to attachment, stumbles into sin, struggles towards virtue. But that is because he descends in all his derivative action into the grasp of the three gunas and does not govern that action from above, from his essential divine nature. **The divine nature of his strength is not affected by these derivations**, it remains the same in its essence in spite of every obscuration and every lapse. The Divine is there in that nature and supports him by its strength through the confusions of his lower existence till he is able to recover the light, illumine wholly his life with the true sun of his being and govern his will and its acts by the pure power of the divine will in his higher nature.

But what again is meant by saying that the Divine is not in the becomings, the forms and affections of the lower nature, even the sattwic, though they all are in his being? In a sense he must evidently be in them, otherwise they could not exist. But what is meant is that the true and supreme spiritual nature of the Divine is not imprisoned there; they are only phenomena in his being created out of it by the action of the ego and the ignorance. The ignorance presents everything to us in an inverted vision and at least a partially falsified experience. We imagine that the soul is in the body, almost a result and derivation from the body; even we so feel it: but it is the body that is in the soul and a result and derivation from the soul. We think of the spirit as a small part of us—the Purusha who is no bigger than the thumb—in this great mass of material and mental phenomena: in reality, the latter for all its imposing appearance is a very small thing in the infinity of the being of the spirit. So it is here; in much the same sense these things are in the Divine rather than the Divine in these things.

त्रिभिर्गुणमयैर्भावैरेभिः सर्वमिदं जगत् ।

मोहितं नाभिजानाति मामेभ्यः परमव्ययम् ॥ (Gita 7:13)

*tribhirguṇamayairbhāvairebhiḥ sarvamidaṃ jagat,  
mohitaṃ nābhijānāti māmēbhyaḥ paramavyayam.*

By these three kinds of becoming which are of the nature of the gunas, this whole world is bewildered and does not recognise Me supreme beyond them and imperishable.

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This lower nature of the three gunas which creates so false a view of things and imparts to them an inferior character is a Maya, a power of illusion, by which it is not meant that it is all non-existent or deals with unrealities, but that it bewilders our knowledge, creates false values, envelops us in ego, mentality, sense, physicality, limited intelligence and there conceals from us the supreme truth of our existence. **This illusive Maya hides from us the Divine that we are, the infinite and imperishable spirit.** If we could see that that Divine is the real truth of our existence, all else also would change to our vision, assume its true character and our life and action acquire the divine values and move in the law of the divine nature.

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।

मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥ (Gita 7:14)

*daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā,  
māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṃ taranti te.*

This is my divine Maya of the gunas and it is hard to overcome; to Me who turn and come, they alone cross over beyond this Maya.



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But why then, since the Divine is there after all and the divine nature at the root even of these bewildering derivations, since we are the Jiva and the Jiva is that, is this Maya so hard to overcome, *maya duratyaya*? Because it is still the Maya of the Divine, *daivi hyesa gunamayī mama maya*; “this is my divine Maya of the gunas.” It is itself divine and a development from the nature of the Divine, but the Divine in the nature of the gods; it is *daivi*, of the godheads or, if you will, of the Godhead, but of the Godhead in its divided subjective and lower cosmic aspects, *sattwic, rajasic and tamasic*. It is a cosmic veil which the Godhead has spun around our understanding; Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra have woven its complex threads; the Shakti, the Supreme Nature is there at its base and is hidden in its every tissue. We have to work out this web in ourselves and turn through it and from it leaving it behind us when its use is finished, turn from the gods to the original and supreme Godhead in whom we shall discover at the same time the last sense of the gods and their works and the inmost spiritual verities of our own imperishable existence.

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव विद्यनादि उभावपि ।

विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसंभवान् ॥ (Gita 13.19)

*prakṛtiṃ puruṣaṃ caiva vidyanādi ubhāvapi,  
vikārāṃśca guṇāṃścaiva viddhi prakṛtisambhavan.*

Know thou that Purusha (the Soul) and Prakriti (Nature) are both without origin and eternal; but the modes of Nature (*gunas*) and the lower forms she assumes (deformations) are born of Prakriti.

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The Soul and Nature are only two aspects of the eternal Brahman, an apparent duality which founds the operations of his universal existence. The Soul is without origin and eternal, Nature too is without origin and eternal; but the modes of Nature and the lower forms she assumes to our conscious experience have an origin in the transactions of these two entities. They come from her, wear by her the outward chain of cause and effect, doing and the results of doing, force and its workings, all that is here transient and mutable. Constantly they change and the soul and Nature seem to change with them, but in themselves these two powers are eternal and always the same. Nature creates and acts, the Soul enjoys her creation and action; but in this inferior form of her action she turns this enjoyment into the obscure and petty figures of pain and pleasure.

पुरुषः प्रकृतिस्थो हि भुङ्क्ते प्रकृतिजान्गुणान् ।

कारणं गुणसंगोऽस्य सदसद्योनिजन्मसु ॥ (Gita 13.21)

*puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho hi bhuṅkte prakṛtijānguṇān,  
kāraṇaṃ guṇasaṅgo'sya sadasadyonijanmasu.*

Purusha involved in Prakriti enjoys the qualities (*gunas*) born of Prakriti; attachment to the qualities (*gunas*) is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

Forcibly the soul, the individual Purusha, is attracted by her qualitative workings and this attraction of her qualities draws him constantly to births of all kinds in which he enjoys the variations and vicissitudes, the good and evil of birth in Nature.

## Ahankara

### Sattwa

*Sattwic-ahankara* promotes love.

### Rajas

*Rajasic ahankara* causes grief/sorrow.

### Tamas

Understand that *tamo-guna* is stupefying/perplexing.

## Related matters

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 212

(Shl 19) All the following are established in **ahankara**: *pancha-mahabhutas*, ten *indriyas*, *shabda*, *sparsha* etc *gunas*, **sattwa etc three gunas** and the three *lokas* associated with *loka-pals*.

(Shl 21) **Ahankara** is of three types: **sattwic, rajasic and tamasic**.

## Behaviour/Conduct

### Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 36

## Tamas

(Shl 17, 18) The following are behaviours (*vrta*, *vyavahara*) related to *tamo-guna*: Always abusing/criticising *devatas*, *brahmana* and *Vedas*, not giving to charity, having too much pride, *moha*, anger, intolerance and jealousy about others.

## Bhavas (Feelings)

## Sattwa

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194

*Sattwa-guna* causes feeling of happiness.

(Shl 34) In human mind in some ways at sometimes excessive joy, love, blissful feeling, happiness and pleasantness occurs. These *vikaras* (transformation, change) of the mind are said to be due to *sattwic guna*.

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 212

(Shl 23) The following are the effects of *sattwa guna*: blissful feeling, love born of joy, not having doubts, *dhriti* (courage) and *smriti* (memory power).

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 219

(Shl 26) Delight, love, joy/beatitude and peace of mind — whether these feelings arise due to a reason not known to us, due to devotion, indifference, *jnana* or *satsang* it is called *sattwic guna*.

(Shl 29) Of these whichever occurs in the body or mind due to love/affection is *sattwic bhava*. It should be understood that one who is always joyful has abundance of *sattwic guna*.

## Rajas

### From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194

*Rajo-guna* causes feeling of unhappiness.

(Shl 35) In mind sometimes due to explainable reasons or otherwise discontent, agony, sorrow, greed, intolerance etc arise. These are indicators of *rajo-guna* or are variations of the main characteristic of *rajo-guna* viz sorrow.

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 212

(Shl 23) The following are effects of **rajo-guna & tamoguna**: *kaam*, *krodh*, *pramaada* (carelessness), *lobh*, *moha*, fear, fatigue, depression/dullness, sorrow, unhappiness, pride/arrogance, haughtiness and vulgarity.

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 219

(Shl 27) Unhappiness (*asanthosh*), *santapa* (grief), *shok* (sorrow), *lobh* (greed) and *asahana-sheelata* (enviousness) — whether these feelings occur due to known or unknown reasons, it is due to *rajo-guna*.

(Shl 30) *Rajo-guna* consists of unhappiness. It causes *apriti* (aversion) in the mind. If the mind has unhappiness & aversion most of the time, it should be understood that there is increase in *rajo-guna*.

## **Tamas**

### **From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194**

(Shl 30) *Sattwa-guna* causes feeling of happiness. *Rajo-guna* causes feeling of unhappiness. When both these combine with *tamo-guna* it becomes *avyavahara* (improper conduct or practice). Meaning only the *moha* of *tamo-guna* remains and not the happiness & unhappiness.

(Shl 36) Humiliation, *moha*, carelessness, dreaming and laziness somehow take hold of man. These are the variations of *tamo-guna*.

### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 219**

(Shl 28) *Aviveka* (absence of discrimination or judgment), *moha* (delusion, confusion), *pramada* (carelessness, negligence), *swapna* (sleepiness) and *alasya* (idleness, laziness) — for whatever reason they occur, they are forms of *tamo-guna*.

(Shl 31) In the body or mind sometimes a feeling of delusion/confusion arises which cannot be explained or reasons guessed. It should be understood that such *moha* is born due to *tamo-guna*.

## **Related matters**

### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194**

(Shl 27, 28) Love (joy) is the *bhava* (state of mind) of *sattwa-guna*. Unhappiness/sadness is the *bhava* of *rajo-guna*. *Moha* is the *bhava* of *tamo-guna*. **Whatever bhavas are there in this world, they are all constituted of these three gunas.**

### **Shanti; Rajadharmanushasana; adhyaya 16**

(Shl 16) There are three mental qualities called *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. If these three are in equilibrium it is said to be the characteristic of mental health. (Shl 14) If any of these factor related to mind gets aggravated, the remedy is said to be: if grief which is based on *rajo-guna* increases, it can be neutralised by joy based on *sattwa-guna*. If joy based on *sattwa-guna* increases, then sadness rooted in *rajo-guna* will balance it. (Shl 15) It is for this reason that someone who is very happy likes to recollect his difficult and sad days. Similarly, one who is very sad likes to recollect the happy days he experienced.

### **Buddhi (understanding; reason)**

## **Sattwa**

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये ।

बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेत्ति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥ (Gita 18:30)

*pravṛttiṃ ca nivṛttiṃ ca kāryākārye bhayābhaye,*

*bandhaṃ mokṣaṃ ca yā veti buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī.*

That which knows the law of action and the law of abstention from action, the thing that is to be done and the thing that is not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what binds the spirit of man and what sets it free. (18:30)

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The **sattwic understanding** sees in its right place, right form, right measure the movement of the world, **the law of action and the law of abstention from action, the thing that is to be done and the thing that is not to be done, what is safe for the soul and what is dangerous, what is to be feared and shunned and what is to be embraced by the will, what binds the spirit of man and what sets it free.** These are the things that it follows or avoids by the persistence of its conscious will

according to the degree of its light and the stage of evolution it has reached in its upward ascent to the highest self and Spirit.

**The culmination** of this sattwic intelligence is found by a high persistence of the aspiring buddhi when it is settled on what is beyond the ordinary reason and mental will, pointed to the summits, turned to a steady control of the senses and the life and a union by Yoga with man's highest Self, the universal Divine, the transcendent Spirit. It is there that arriving through the sattwic guna one can pass beyond the gunas, can climb beyond the limitations of the mind and its will and intelligence and *sattwa* itself disappear into that which is above the gunas and beyond this instrumental nature. There the soul is enshrined in light and enthroned in firm union with the Self and Spirit and Godhead. Arrived upon that summit we can leave the Highest to guide Nature in our members in the free spontaneity of a divine action: for there there is no wrong or confused working, no element of error or impotence to obscure or distort the luminous perfection and power of the Spirit. All these lower conditions, laws, dharmas cease to have any hold on us; the Infinite acts in the liberated man and there is no law but the immortal truth and right of the free spirit, no Karma, no kind of bondage.

### **Rajas**

यया धर्ममधर्मं च कार्यं चाकार्यमेव च ।

अयथावत्प्रजानाति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ राजसी ॥ (Gita 18:31)

*yayā dharmamadharmam ca kāryam cākāryameva ca,  
ayathāvatprajānāti buddhiḥ sā pārtha rājasī.*

That by which one knows but incorrectly the right and the wrong law and also what should or should not be done. (18:31)

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And this is because **its reason and will are a reason of the ego and a will of desire**, and these powers misrepresent and distort the truth and the right to serve their own egoistic purpose. It is only when we are free from ego and desire and look steadily with a calm, pure, disinterested mind concerned only with the truth and its sequences that we can hope to see things rightly and in their just values.

### **Tamas**

अधर्मं धर्ममिति या मन्यते तमसावृता ।

सर्वार्थान्विपरीतांश्च बुद्धिः सा पार्थ तामसी ॥ (Gita 18:32)

*adharmam dharmamiti yā manyate tamasāvṛtā,  
sarvārthānviparītāṁśca buddhiḥ sā pārtha tāmasī.*

That which, enveloped in darkness, takes what is not the true law and upholds it as the law and sees all things in a cloud of misconceptions/in a perverted way. (18:32)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The tamasic reason is a false, ignorant and darkened instrument which chains us to see all things in a dull and wrong light, a cloud of misconceptions, a stupid ignoring of the values of things and people. This reason calls light darkness and darkness light, takes what is not the true law and upholds it as the law, persists in the thing which ought not to be done and holds it up to us as the one right thing to be done.

Timidity, shirking, evasion, indolence, the justification by the mind of its fears and false doubts and cautions and refusals of duty and its lapses and turnings from the call of our higher nature, a safe following of the line of least resistance so that there may be the least trouble and effort and peril in the winning of the fruit of our labour,—rather no fruit or poor result, it says, than a great and noble toil or a

perilous and exacting endeavour and adventure,—these are characteristics of the tamasic will and intelligence.

### Consequences/Effects

#### **Sattwa**

रजसि प्रलयं गत्वा कर्मसंगिषु जायते ।

तथा प्रलीनस्तमसि मूढयोनिषु जायते ॥ (Gita 14:14)

*rajasi pralayaṃ gatvā karmasaṅgiṣu jāyate,*  
*tathā pralīnastamasi mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate.*

ऊर्ध्वं गच्छन्ति सत्त्वस्था मध्ये तिष्ठन्ति राजसाः ।

जघन्यगुणवृत्तिस्था अधो गच्छन्ति तामसाः ॥ (Gita 14:18)

*ūrdhvaṃ gacchanti sattwasthā madhye tiṣṭhanti rājasāḥ,*  
*jaghanyaguṇavṛttisthā adho gacchanti tāmasāḥ.*

They rise upwards who are in *sattwa*. (14:18)

If *sattwa* prevails when the embodied soul meets with dissolution, then he attains to the spotless worlds of the knowers of the Highest. (14:14)

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 302**

(Shl 47) Those with *sattwa-guna* go to *deva-loka* and enjoy the happiness of *swarga*. (Shl 48) Those who do both *punya* & *paapas* are born as human beings. Those who do only *punya* are born as *devatas*.

#### **From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 314**

(Shl 6) In all living beings the *avyakta* (*jeevatma*) with *sattwa guna* obtains *devaloka*.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 212**

(Shl 33) Person rich in *sattwa-guna* will always and everywhere look for only *sattwic* feelings and will be devoted to them. He will be pure and bright. He will be rich in *shraddha* & *vidya* and these features will be predominating in him.

#### **Rajas**

रजसि प्रलयं गत्वा कर्मसंगिषु जायते ।

तथा प्रलीनस्तमसि मूढयोनिषु जायते ॥ (Gita 14:15)

*rajasi pralayaṃ gatvā karmasaṅgiṣu jāyate,*  
*tathā pralīnastamasi mūḍhayoniṣu jāyate.*

Those in *rajas* remain in the middle. (14:18)

Meeting with dissolution when *rajas* prevails, he is born among those attached to action. (14:15)

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 302**

(Shl 47) Those with *rajo-guna* are once again born as humans (Shl 48) Those who do both *punya* & *paapas* are born as human beings.

#### **From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 314**

(Shl 7) *Avyakta (Jeeva)* with *rajo-guna* & *sattwa guna* takes birth as human being. *Jeeva* with mix of *rajo-guna* & *tamo-guna* takes birth in lower forms like birds & animals. *Jeeva* with a mix of all three *gunas* takes birth as human being.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 212**

(Shl 31) When man is under the grip of *rajo-guna*, through that *guna* he starts doing many deeds of *adharma* and deeds desiring *artha*. He will develop keen & exclusive interest only in *artha* & *kaam*, and serves all kinds of pleasures of the senses.

#### **Tamas**

The tamasic, those enveloped in ignorance and inertia, the effect of the lowest quality (*guna*), go downwards. (14:18)

If dissolved when *tamas* prevails, he is born in the wombs of beings involved in nescience (*moodha yonishu jayate*). (14:15)

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 302**

(Shl 48) By doing only sinful deeds, *chetana* takes birth in *tiryag-yonis* like birds & animals.

#### **From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 314**

(Shl 7) *Jeeva* with mix of *rajo-guna* & *tamo-guna* takes birth in lower forms like birds & animals. *Jeeva* with a mix of all three *gunas* takes birth as human being.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 212**

(Shl 32) The person who is under control of *tamo-guna*, through that *guna* starts to do karmas which are dominated by *lobha* & born out of *krodha*. He will have special interest in acts of violence. *Tamasic* person will also be afflicted by sleep and drowsiness.

#### **Daana (giving/gift)**

#### **Sattwa**

दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे ।

देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् ॥ (Gita 17:20)

*dātavyamiti yaddānaṁ dīyate'nupakāriṇe,*

*deśe kāle ca pātre ca taddānaṁ sātत्वikaṁ smṛtam.*

Given for the sake of giving, to one from whom no benefit in return is expected and in the right place, at the right time and to the right person. (17:20)

#### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The sattwic way of giving is **to bestow with right reason and goodwill and sympathy in the right conditions of time and place and on the right recipient who is worthy or to whom the gift can be really helpful**. Its act is performed for the sake of the giving and the beneficence, without any view to a benefit already done or yet to be done to oneself by the receiver of the benefit and without any personal object in the action.

**The culmination** of the sattwic way of *dana* will bring into the action an increasing element of that wide self-giving to others and to the world and to God, *atma-dana*, *atma-samarpana*, which is the high consecration of the sacrifice of works enjoined by the Gita. And the transcendence in the divine nature will be a greatest completeness of self-offering founded on the largest meaning of existence.

**All this manifold universe comes into birth and is constantly maintained by God's giving of himself and his powers and the lavish outflow of his self and spirit into all these existences;** universal being, says the Veda, is the sacrifice of the Purusha. All the action of the perfected soul will

be even such a constant divine giving of itself and its powers, an outflowing of the knowledge, light, strength, love, joy, helpful *shakti* which it possesses in the Divine and by his influence and effluence (=process of flowing out) on all around it according to their capacity of reception or on all this world and its creatures. That will be the complete result of the complete self-giving of the soul to the Master of our existence.

### **Rajas**

यत्तु प्रत्युपकारार्थं फलमुद्दिश्य वा पुनः ।

दीयते च परिक्लिष्टं तद्दानं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥ (Gita 17:21)

*yattu prattyupakārārthaṃ phalamuddiśya vā punaḥ,  
dīyate ca parikliṣṭaṃ taddānaṃ rājasam smṛtam.*

Given grudgingly for the sake of a return or with a view to fruit & reward. (17:21)

### **Tamas**

अदेशकाले यद्दानमपात्रेभ्यश्च दीयते ।

असत्कृतमवज्ञातं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ (Gita 17:22)

*adeśakāle yaddānamapātrebhyaśca dīyate,  
asatkṛtamavajñātaṃ tattāmasamudāhṛtam.*

Given at an improper time and place and to an unworthy person, with disrespect and contempt. (17:22)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The *tamasic* gift is offered ignorantly with no consideration of the right conditions of time, place and object; it is a foolish, inconsiderate and in reality a self-regarding movement, an ungenerous and ignoble generosity, the gift offered without sympathy or true liberality, **without regard for the feelings of the recipient and despised by him even in the acceptance.**

### **Dhṛiti (persistence; will)**

### **Sattwa**

धृत्या यया धारयते मनःप्राणेन्द्रियक्रियाः ।

योगेनाव्यभिचारिण्या धृतिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥ (Gita 18:33)

*dhṛtyā yayā dhārayate manaḥprāṇendriyakriyāḥ,  
yogenāvyabhicāriṇyā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī.*

That unwavering persistence by which, through Yoga, one controls the activities of the mind, the senses and the life. (18:33)

### **Rajas**

यया तु धर्मकामार्थान्धृत्या धारयतेऽर्जुन ।

प्रसंगेन फलाकाङ्क्षी धृतिः सा पार्थ राजसी ॥ (Gita 18:34)

*yayā tu dharmakāmārthāndhṛtyā dhārayate'rjuna,  
prasāṅgena phalākāṅkṣī dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha rājasī.*

That by which from great attachment desirous of fruit, one holds fast right and justice (Dharma), interest/purpose (Artha) and desire (Kama). (18:34)



## Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

But the rajasic will fix its persistent attention on the satisfaction of its own attached clinging and desires in its pursuit of interest and pleasure and of what it thinks or chooses to think right and justice, Dharma. Always it is apt to put on these things the construction which will most flatter and justify its desires and to uphold as right or legitimate the means which will best help it to get the coveted (=Greatly desired, craved) fruits of its work and endeavour. That is the cause of three fourths of the falsehood and misconduct of the human reason and will. Rajas, with its vehement hold on the vital ego is the great sinner and positive misleader.

### Tamas

यया स्वप्नं भयं शोकं विषादं मदमेव च ।

न विमुंचति दुर्मेधा धृतिः सा पार्थ तामसी ॥ (Gita 18:35)

*yayā svapnaṁ bhayaṁ śokaṁ viṣādaṁ madameva ca,  
na vimuṁcati durmedhā dhṛtiḥ sā pārtha tāmāsī.*

That by which one from ignorance/perverted understanding does not abandon sleep, fear, grief, depression and also pride. (18:35)

## Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

**Its ignorance is invincible** and its persistence of will is a persistence in the satisfaction and dull pride of its ignorance. That is on its side of blind action; but it is pursued also by a heavy stress of inertia and impotence, a persistence in dullness and sleep, an aversion to mental change and progress, a dwelling on the fears and pains and depressions of mind which deter us in our path or keep us to base, weak and cowardly ways.

### Dream State

#### Sattwa

(Shl 26) *Ananda* (delight, joy), *karyasiddhi* (accomplishment of work, success), *kartvya-jnana* (knowledge of duty) & *uttama-gati* (higher states) are the *bhavas* of *sattwa guna*. The memory of a *sattwic* will depend on these four feelings or states of mind. Therefore a *sattwic* person will recollect same feelings of *Ananda* etc in dream state also.

#### Rajas & Tamas

(Shl 27) The memory of people who are different from *sattwic* and hence are *rajasic* & *tamasic* will have feelings depending on their karmas. Meaning, such people both in the awake & dream state will be seeing things which are *rajasic* or *tamasic* according to their desires.

#### Related matters

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 275

(Shl 23) When *indriyas* calm down due to the effort of doing their jobs then *jeevatma* gives them up and goes to sleep. (Shl 24) If the *indriyas* calm down but the mind does not, then it continues to experience the objects of *indriyas* in sleep also. This should be understood as *swapna-darshana-avastha*. (Shl 25) Human beings, who consist of the qualities of *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* in the awake state, see feelings influenced by same *gunas* in dream state also (Dreams will occur according to the mix of *gunas* in the person).

### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 212

(Shl 8) One who has a mind that has passionate interest in desires will experience several scenes in the dream **according to the samskars** (impression on the mind of acts done in a former state of existence) **of present and past several births**. *Samskars* of several past births are concealed in the human mind. Paramatma who dwells within us knows them all. (Shl 9) **The sookshma-bhutas show**



to the mind through the dream state the *guna* (*sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas*) that is established in *buddhi*, the fruits of past karmas and the *samskara* of mind. (Shl 10) Even as we are seeing our dreams, the *trigunas* with the purpose of making available to the sentient the experience of grief & happiness according to the karmas appear on the mind-stage of the sentient. (Shl 11) Then under the influence of *ajnana* man in dreams sees through *vata*, *pitta* & *kapha* variety of bodies pervaded by *rajas*, *tamas* & *sattwa* *bhavas*. It is said that unless *atma-jnana* is attained, it is very difficult to avoid these dreams.

## Food

### **Sattwa**

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्या आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥ (Gita 17:8)

*āyusṣattwabalārogyasukhaprītivivardhanāḥ,*

*rasyāḥ snigdḥāḥ sthirā hṛdyā āhārāḥ sāttvikapriyāḥ.*

That augment life, vitality, strength, health, joy and cheerfulness, are succulent, soft, sustaining & agreeable. (17:8)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The sattwic temperament in the mental and physical body turns naturally to the things that increase the life, increase the inner and outer strength, nourish at once the mental, vital and physical force and increase the pleasure and satisfaction and happy condition of mind and life and body; all that is succulent and soft and firm and satisfying.

### **Rajas**

कट्वम्ललवणात्युष्णतीक्ष्णरूक्षविदाहिनः ।

आहारा राजस्येष्टा दुःखशोकामयप्रदाः ॥ (Gita 17:9)

*kaṭvamlalavaṇātyuṣṇatīkṣṇarūkṣavidāhinaḥ,*

*āhārā rājasasyeṣṭā duḥkhaśokāmayapradāḥ.*

Bitter, sour, saltish, too hot, pungent, rough & burning and which produce pain, grief and disease. (17:9)

### **Tamas**

यातयामं गतरसं पूति पर्युषितं च यत् ।

उच्छिष्टमपि चामेध्यं भोजनं तामसप्रियम् ॥ (Gita 17:10)

*yātayāmaṁ gatarasaṁ pūti paryuṣitaṁ ca yat,*

*ucchiṣṭamapi cāmedhyaṁ bhojanaṁ tāmasapriyam.*

Which is spoiled, tasteless, putrid, stale, left half-eaten by others and impure. (17:10)

### **Related matters**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 215**

(Shl 22) A yogi should use whichever of the following becomes available as alms for his living: broken rice, porridge/gruel, sediments of seeds/oil-cake, vegetables, food prepared from barley, wheat flour and roots & fruits. (Shl 23) He should make a policy/regulation that *sattwic* food will be taken depending on place & time (*desh*, *kaal*). The *guna-dosh* (good & bad qualities) of the food items should be examined, and they should be consumed only if they help in accomplishment of yoga.

## Happiness/Pleasure

### **Sattwa**

यत्तदग्रे विषमिव परिणामेऽमृतोपमम् ।

तत्सुखं सात्त्विकं प्रोक्तमात्मबुद्धिप्रसादजम् ॥ (Gita 18:37)

*yattadagre viṣamiva pariṇāme'mṛtopamam,*

*tatsukhaṁ sāttvikam proktamātmabuddhiprasādajam.*

That in which one comes to rejoice by practice and which puts an end to pain, which at first is as poison but in the end is as nectar; born of clear understanding of the Self. (18:37)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

What the sattwic nature seeks, therefore, is the satisfaction of the higher mind and the spirit and when it once gets this large object of its quest, **there comes in a clear, pure happiness of the soul, a state of fullness, an abiding ease and peace.**

This happiness does not depend on outward things, but on ourselves alone and on the flowering of what is best and most inward within us. **But it is not at first our normal possession; it has to be conquered by self-discipline, a labour of the soul, a high and arduous endeavour.** At first this means much loss of habitual pleasure, much suffering and struggle, a poison born of the churning of our nature, a painful conflict of forces, much revolt and opposition to the change due to the ill-will of the members or the insistence of vital movements, but in the end the nectar of immortality rises in the place of this bitterness and as we climb to the higher spiritual nature we come to the end of sorrow, the euthanasia of grief and pain. That is the surpassing happiness which descends upon us **at the point or line of culmination of the sattwic** discipline.

The **self-exceeding of the sattwic nature** comes when we get beyond the great but still inferior sattwic pleasure, beyond the pleasures of mental knowledge and virtue and peace to the eternal calm of the self and the spiritual ecstasy of the divine oneness. **That spiritual joy is no longer the sattwic happiness, sukham, but the absolute Ananda.** Ananda is the secret delight from which all things are born, by which all is sustained in existence and to which all can rise in the spiritual culmination. Only then can it be possessed when the liberated man, free from ego and its desires, lives at last one with his highest self, one with all beings and one with God in an absolute bliss of the spirit.

### **Rajas**

विषयेन्द्रियसंयोगाद्यत्तदग्रेऽमृतोपमम् ।

परिणामे विषमिव तत्सुखं राजसं स्मृतम् ॥ (Gita 18:38)

*viṣayendriyasamyogādyattadagre'mṛtopamam,*

*pariṇāme viṣamiva tatsukhaṁ rājasam smṛtam.*

That which is born from the contact of the senses with their objects, which at first is as nectar, but in the end is like poison. (18:38)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The mind of the rajasic man drinks of a more fiery and intoxicating cup; the keen, mobile, active pleasure of the senses and the body and the sense-entangled or fiercely kinetic will and intelligence **are to him all the joy of life and the very significance of living.** This joy is nectar to the lips at the first touch, but there is a secret poison in the bottom of the cup and after it, the bitterness of disappointment, satiety, fatigue, revolt, disgust, sin, suffering, loss, transience. And it must be so because these pleasures in their external figure are not the things which the spirit in us truly demands from life; there is something behind and beyond the transience of the form, something that is lasting, satisfying, self-sufficient.

## Tamas

यदग्रे चानुबन्धे च सुखं मोहनमात्मनः ।

निद्रालस्यप्रमादोत्थं तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ (Gita 18:39)

*yadagre cānubandhe ca sukhaṁ mohanamātmanaḥ,  
nidrālasya pramādotthaṁ tattāmasamudāhṛtam.*

That of which delusion is the beginning and delusion is the end, which arises from sleep, indolence/sloth and ignorance/negligence. (18:39)

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

Thus the tamasic mind can remain well-pleased in its indolence and inertia, its stupor and sleep, its blindness and its error. Nature has armed it with the privilege of a smug (=having or showing an excessive pride in oneself or one's achievements) satisfaction in its stupidity and ignorance, its dim lights of the cave, its inert contentment, its petty or base joys and its vulgar pleasures. Delusion is the beginning of this satisfaction and delusion is its consequence; but still there is given a dull, a by no means admirable but a sufficient pleasure in his delusions to the dweller in the cave. There is a tamasic happiness founded in inertia and ignorance.

## Inana (Knowledge)

### Sattwa

सर्वभूतेषु येनैकं भावमव्ययमीक्षते ।

अविभक्तं विभक्तेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि सात्त्विकम् ॥ (Gita 18:20)

*sarvabhūteṣu yenaikaṁ bhāvamavyayamīkṣate,  
avibhaktaṁ vibhakteṣu tajjñānaṁ viddhi sāttvikam.*

By which one imperishable Being is seen in all existences, indivisible among the divisions. (18:20)

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

The sattwic knowledge on the contrary **sees existence as one indivisible whole in all these divisions, one imperishable being in all becomings; it masters the principle of its action and the relation of the particular action to the total purpose of existence;** it puts in the right place each step of the complete process.

At the highest top of knowledge this seeing becomes the knowledge of the one spirit in the world, one in all these many existences, of the one Master of all works, of the forces of cosmos as expressions of the Godhead and of the work itself as the operation of his supreme will and wisdom in man and his life and essential nature. The personal will has come to be entirely conscious, illumined, spiritually awake, and it lives and works in the One, obeys more and more perfectly his supreme mandate and grows more and more a faultless instrument of his light and power in the human person. The supreme liberated action arrives through this **culmination of the sattwic knowledge.**

### Rajas

पृथक्त्वेन तु यज्ज्ञानं नानाभावान्पृथग्विधान् ।

वेत्ति सर्वेषु भूतेषु तज्ज्ञानं विद्धि राजसम् ॥ (Gita 18:21)

*pṛthaktvena tu yajjñānaṁ nānābhāvānpṛthagvidhān,  
veti sarveṣu bhūteṣu tajjñānaṁ viddhi rājasam.*

Which sees the multiplicity of things only in their separateness and variety of operation in all these existences. (18:21)

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

The rajasic knowledge is unable to discover a true principle of unity or rightly coordinate its will and action, but follows the bent of ego and desire, the activity of its many-branching egoistic will and various and mixed motive in response to the solicitation of internal and enviroing impulses and forces. This knowing is a jumble of sections of knowledge, often inconsistent knowledge, put forcefully together by the mind in order to make some kind of pathway through the confusion of our half-knowledge and half-ignorance. Or else it is a restless kinetic multiple action with no firm governing higher ideal and self-possessed law of true light and power within it.

### Tamas

यत्तु कृत्स्नवदेकस्मिन्कार्ये सक्तमहैतुकम् ।

अतत्त्वार्थवदल्पं च तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ (Gita 18:22)

*yattu kṛtsnavadekasminkārye saktamahaitukam,*

*atattvārthavadalpaṃ ca tattāmasamudāhṛtam.*

Which is petty and clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without reason, and without grasping the essential significance. (18:22)

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

The tamasic ignorant knowledge is a small and narrow, a lazy or dully obstinate way of looking at things which has no eye for the real nature of the world or of the thing done or its field or the act or its conditions. The tamasic mind does not look for real cause and effect, but absorbs itself in one movement or one routine with an obstinate attachment to it, can see nothing but the little section of personal activity before its eyes and does not know in fact what it is doing but blindly lets natural impulsion work out through its deed, results of which it has no conception, foresight or comprehending intelligence.

### Karma (Action)

### Sattwa

नियतं संगरहितमरागद्वेषतः कृतम् ।

अफलप्रेप्सुना कर्म यत्तत्सात्त्विकमुच्यते ॥ (Gita 18:23)

*niyataṃ saṅgarahitamaraḡadveṣataḥ kṛtam,*

*aphalaprepsunā karma yattatsāttvikamucyate.*

All action which is rightly regulated, performed without attachment, without liking or disliking, done by one undesirous of fruit. (18:23)

### Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

Sattwic action is that which a man does calmly in the clear light of reason and knowledge and with an impersonal sense of right or duty or the demand of an ideal, **as the thing that ought to be done whatever may be the result to himself in this world or another**, a work performed without attachment, without liking or disliking for its spur or its drag, for the sole satisfaction of his reason and sense of right, of the lucid intelligence and the enlightened will and the pure disinterested mind and the high contented spirit.

**At the line of culmination** of *sattwa* it will be transformed and become a highest impersonal action dictated by the spirit within us and no longer by the intelligence, an action moved by the highest law of the nature, free from the lower ego and its light or heavy baggage and from limitation even by best opinion, noblest desire, purest personal will or loftiest mental ideal. There will be none of these impedimenta; in their place there will stand a clear spiritual self-knowledge and illumination and an imperative intimate sense of an infallible power that acts and of the work to be done for the world and for the world's Master.

## Rajas

यत्तु कामेप्सुना कर्म साहंकारेण वा पुनः ।

क्रियते बहुलायासं तद्राजसमुदाहृतम् ॥ (Gita 18:24)

*yattu kāmepsunā karma sāhaṁkāreṇa vā punaḥ,  
kriyate bahulāyāsaṁ tadrājasamudāhṛtam.*

Which a man undertakes for satisfaction of desire, or with an egoistic sense of his own personality in the action, and which is done with inordinate effort (with a great heaving and straining of the personal will to get at the object of desire) (18:24)

**Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 37**

(Shl 8) Whatever *sanskaras* (consecrations?) are done to women, men, animals, money and abodes are all done due to the promptings of *rajo-guna*.

## Tamas

अनुबन्धं क्षयं हिंसामनपेक्ष्य च पौरुषम् ।

मोहादारभ्यते कर्म यत्तत्तामसमुच्यते ॥ (Gita 18:25)

*anubandhaṁ kṣayaṁ hiṁsāmanapekṣya ca pauruṣam,  
mohādārabhyate karma yattattāmasamucyate.*

Undertaken from delusion (in mechanical obedience to the instincts, impulses and unseeing ideas), without regarding the strength or capacity, without regarding the consequences, the waste of effort or injury to others. (18:25)

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Tamasic action is that done with a confused, deluded (=make (someone) believe something that is not true) and ignorant mind, in mechanical obedience to the instincts, impulses and unseeing ideas, without regarding the strength or capacity or the waste and loss of blind misapplied effort or the antecedent and consequence and right conditions of the impulse, effort or labour.

## Related matters

**From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 215**

(Shl 13) Man indulges in gratification of senses by way of *indriyas* prompted by *rajo-guna*. Such person will not only suffer grief here, he will also go to *narak* after death. Therefore man should do only such deeds through speech, mind and body which give constancy and courage to the mind (karmas driven by *rajo-guna* make the mind fickle). (Shl 14) As long as thieves are carrying on their shoulders the weight of a slaughtered sheep they will have a fear that someone may be chasing them. They will then be perplexed. There will no weight of any kind if they throw it down realising that it is dangerous; they will lose the fear also. Similarly, as long as the *ajnani* human being bears the weight of this *samsara*, grief & fear will not leave him. Therefore as soon as he liberates himself from *rajasic* & *tamasic* karmas his fear and grief will vanish.

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 201**

(Shl 19) **Vedas say that karmas are of three types: *sattwic*, *rajasic* & *tamasic*.** In the same way the *mantras*, the related prescribed procedures, the practice or application of karmas, the intent or desires of those who do the karmas and the man who enjoys the fruits of karmas are all also of the same three types.

## Karma-phala (Fruits of work)

### **Sattwa**

कर्मणः सुकृतस्याहुः सात्त्विकं निर्मलं फलम् ।

रजसस्तु फलं दुःखमज्ञानं तमसः फलम् ॥ (Gita 14:16)

*karmaṇaḥ sukṛtasyāhuḥ sāttvikam nirmalam phalam,  
rajasastu phalam duḥkhamajñānam tamasaḥ phalam.*

It is said the fruit of works rightly done is pure and sattwic. (14:16)

### **Rajas**

Pain is the consequence of rajasic works. (14:16)

### **Tamas**

Ignorance is the result of tamasic action. (14:16)

### **Related matters**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 201**

(Shl 23) Man who is driven by *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamo-gunas*, who is keenly interested in the fruits and desiring fruits does karmas which are of type *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* will obtain the same kind of fruits corresponding to the nature of karmas. (Commentary: There are three types of karmas: *sattwic*, *rajasic* & *tamasic*. Among men also there are same three types. *Sattwic* persons will have interest in *sattwic* karmas. They will engage in such karmas and obtain *sattwic* fruits. Similarly for the other two types. Even among *devatas* there are these three types. That is why those interested in karmas choose different types of *devatas*. They are attracted to the *devatas* which match their own nature. Even though the *Parabrahma-vastu* is one, three types of *devatas* have been created for this reason. This is a uniqueness of *sanatana dharma*).

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 241**

(Shl 17) Think of the man interested in karmas as born like the Moon on next to *amavasya* day with eleven *vikaras* (ten *indriyas* and mind). **He has a body acquired due to *karma-phalas* which is driven by *trigunas*.** Just as decay & growth are everlasting for Moon so it is to such a man.

## Karta (Doer)

### **Sattwa**

मुक्तसंगोऽनहंवादी धृत्युत्साहसमन्वितः ।

सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योर्निर्विकारः कर्ता सात्त्विक उच्यते ॥ (Gita 18:26)

*muktasango'naḥmavādī dhṛtyutsāhasamanvitaḥ,  
siddhyasiddhyornirvikāraḥ kartā sāttvika ucyate.*

Free from attachment, free from egoism, full of a fixed (impersonal) resolution and zeal, unaffected by success or by failure. (18:26)

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The sattwic doer is free from all this attachment, this egoism, this violent strength or passionate weakness; **his is a mind and will unelated by success, undepressed by failure, full of a fixed impersonal resolution, a calm rectitude of zeal or a high and pure and selfless enthusiasm in the work that has to be done.**

The sattwic doer becomes the Jiva in contact with his source, united with the Purushottama; he is no longer the personal doer of the act, but a spiritual channel of the works of the transcendent and universal Spirit. His natural being transformed and illumined remains to be the instrument of a universal and impersonal action, the bow of the divine Archer. What was sattwic action becomes the free activity of the perfected nature in which there is no longer any personal limitation, any tethering to this or that quality, any bondage of sin and virtue, self and others or any, but a supreme spiritual self-determination. That is the **culmination of works** uplifted to the sole Divine Worker by a God-seeking and spiritual knowledge.

At and **beyond the culmination of sattwa** this resolution, zeal, enthusiasm become the spontaneous working of the spiritual Tapas and at last a highest soul-force, the direct God-Power, **the mighty and steadfast movement of a divine energy in the human instrument**, the self-assured steps of the Seer-will, the gnostic intelligence and with it the wide delight of the free spirit in the works of the liberated nature.

### **Rajas**

रागी कर्मफलप्रेप्सुर्लुब्धो हिंसात्मकोऽशुचिः ।

हर्षशोकान्वितः कर्ता राजसः परिकीर्तितः ॥ (Gita 18:27)

*rāgī karmaphalaprepsurlubdho hiṃsātmako'suciḥ,  
harṣaśokānvitaḥ kartā rājasah parikīrtitaḥ.*

Eagerly attached to the work passionately desirous of/eagerly seeks fruit, greedy, impure, often violent and cruel and brutal in the means he uses, moved by joy (in success) and grief (in failure) (18:27)

### **Tamas**

अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः ।

विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते ॥ (Gita 18:28)

*ayuktaḥ prākṛtaḥ stabdhaḥ śaṭho naiṣkṛtiko'lasaḥ,  
viṣādī dīrghasūtrī ca kartā tāmasa ucyate.*

One who acts with a mechanical mind (who does not put himself really into the work), is stupid/vulgar (*prakrat*), obstinate, deceitful, insolent, lazy, easily depressed, procrastinating. (18:28)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The tamasic doer of action is one who **does not put himself really into the work, but acts with a mechanical mind**, or obeys the most vulgar thought of the herd, follows the common routine or is wedded to a blind error and prejudice. He is obstinate in stupidity, stubborn in error and takes a foolish pride in his ignorant doing; a narrow and evasive cunning replaces true intelligence; he has a stupid and insolent contempt for those with whom he has to deal, especially for wiser men and his betters. A dull laziness, slowness, procrastination, looseness, want of vigour or of sincerity mark his action. The tamasic man is ordinarily slow to act, dilatory (= *slow to act*) in his steps, easily depressed, ready soon to give up his task if it taxes his strength, his diligence or his patience.

### **Related matters**

#### **From Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 232**

(Shl 40) In seasons like Spring etc we see different characteristics such as trees having buds, flowering, yielding fruits and then leaves falling off etc. Similarly there are differences in *gunas* & *karyas* among Brahma, Vishnu & Maheshwara. (Brahma's is *rajo-guna* and is the characteristic of creation. Vishnu's is *sattwa-guna* and is characteristic of *sthithi-karyas*. Rudra's is *tamo-guna* and is



characteristic of *laya-karya*. Though the 'doer' of *srishti-sthithi-laya* is the same Bhagawan, the differences in characteristics are stated according to the corresponding actions to be done).

### Level of persons

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 314**

#### **Sattwa**

(Shl 3) Scholars who think about *adhyatma shastra* say that person with *sattwa guna* is superior (*uttama*).

#### **Rajas**

Person with *rajas guna* is medium (*madhyama*).

#### **Tamas**

Person with *tamas guna* is inferior (*adhama*).

### Manas

#### **Sattwa**

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 210**

(Shl 35) It is said that *manas* is of *sattwa-guna*. That *sattwa* originated from unmanifest Paramatma. For this reason an intelligent person should understand that Paramatma is the *atmaroopa* for all living beings.

### Personality characteristics

**Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 36, 37, 38**

#### **Sattwa**

(Shl 4) One who thinks that variety of worldly knowledge is a waste, worldly affairs are a waste, serving the unethical/immoral is a waste and struggle for material pleasures is a waste and is dedicated to dharma consisting of *sattwa guna* will enjoy unlimited happiness in *paraloka*. (Shl 5) It is the *sanatana dharma* of *satpurushas* to be free of the feeling of 'mine', ego and desires, to have equality towards all and to be with *nishkaam bhava* (No desires). (Shl 9, 10) Those brahmanas who consider *daan, yajna, adhyayan, vrat, parigraha, dharma & tapas* associated with desires to be fulfilled as waste, do only acts of *sattwa guna* like modesty, tolerance etc, completely depend only on *sattwa guna* and have dedication only to Parabrahma Paramatma are brave and *sadhu darshis* (well discerning). (Shl 11) Such brave brahmanas will clear all their sins and become free of sorrows. After death they will go to *Swarga* and **take on several bodies to enjoy the pleasures there**.

(Shl 12) *Mahatmas* who are rich in *sattwa guna* will obtain mental accomplishments like *ishitva* (one of the eight attributes of Shiva, supremacy), *vashitva* (supernatural power of subduing to ones own will), *laghutva* (lightness) just like *devathas* (These are also constituents of *ashta-siddhis*). They are also called *urdhva-srotasas* and *vaikarika devatas*. (Shl 13) After going to *Swarga* with their power of yoga, their mind undergoes changes due to the influence of pleasures there. At that time they will get whatever they desire. Not only will they obtain it for themselves they also share it with others who pray for it.

#### **Rajas**

(Shl 15, 16) Those who think about the past, present & future, are always engaged in serving *dharma, artha & kaam* and who enjoy acting as they like and all the pleasures of senses are under the influence of *rajo-guna*. They are *arvaksrotasas* (they have upward flow from earth – like towards *swarga*). (Shl 17) Such people are again & again born on earth and are immersed in enjoying. They also keep trying various ways to enjoy happiness in this world & other worlds. That is why they give to



charity with an eye on fulfilling their desires. They also accept things, satisfy guests and perform *yajnas*.

### **Tamas**

(Shl 20-22) **Persons with following characteristics are said to be *tamasic***: talking too much, not having forbearance/endurance, envy, ego and lack of faith. It is clear what kind of birth such sinners with dominance of *tamo-guna* will have in next births. Some of these will fall into lowly *Naraka* and some others will be born in *tiryag yonis*.

### **Shraddha (faith)**

त्रिविधा भवति श्रद्धा देहिनां सा स्वभावजा ।

सात्त्विकी राजसी चैव तामसी चेति तां शृणु ॥ (Gita 17:1)

*trividhā bhavati śraddhā dehināṃ sā svabhāvajā,*  
*sāttvikī rājasī caiva tāmasī ceti tāṃ śṛṇu.*

The faith in embodied beings is of a triple kind like all things in Nature and varies according to the dominating quality of their nature, *sattwa*. *rajas* or *tamas*. Hear thou of these.

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When we live, when we are and do according to our desires, that is a persistent act of *sraddha* belonging mostly to our vital and physical, our *tamasic* and *rajasic* nature. And when we try to be, to live and to do according to the *Shashtra*, we proceed by a persistent act of *sraddha* which belongs, supposing it to be not a routine faith, to a *sattwic* tendency that is constantly labouring to impose itself on our *rajasic* and *tamasic* parts. When we leave both these things and try to be, to live and to do according to some ideal or novel conception of truth of our own finding or our own individual acceptance, that too is a persistent act of *sraddha* which may be dominated by any one of these three qualities that constantly govern our every thought, will, feeling and act. And again when we try to be, to live and to do according to the divine nature, then too we must proceed by a persistent act of *sraddha*, which must be according to the Gita the faith of the *sattwic* nature when it culminates and is preparing to exceed its own clear-cut limits.

सत्त्वानुरूपा सर्वस्य श्रद्धा भवति भारत ।

श्रद्धामयोऽयं पुरुषो यो यच्छ्रद्धः स एव सः ॥ (Gita 17:2)

*sattvānurūpā sarvasya śraddhā bhavati bhārata,*  
*śraddhāmayo'yaṃ puruṣo yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ.*

The faith of each man takes the shape given to it by his stuff of being, O Bharata. This Purusha, this soul in man, is, as it were, made of *shraddha*, a faith, a will to be a belief in itself and existence, and whatever is that will, faith or constituting belief in him, he is that and that is he.

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If we look into this pregnant saying a little closely, we shall find that this single line contains implied in its few forceful words almost the whole theory of the modern gospel of pragmatism. For if a man or the soul in a man consists of the faith which is in him, taken in this deeper sense, **then it follows that the truth which he sees and wills to live is for him the truth of his being**, the truth of himself that he has created or is creating and there can be for him no other real truth. This truth is a thing of his inner and outer action, a thing of his becoming, of the soul's dynamics, not of that in him which never changes. He is what he is today by some past will of his nature sustained and continued by a present will to know, to believe and to be in his intelligence and vital force, and whatever new turn is taken by this will and faith active in his very substance, that he will tend to become in the future. **We create our own truth of existence in our own action of mind and life, which is another way of saying that we create our own selves, are our own makers.**

## Sacrifice offered to

### **Sattwa**

यजन्ते सात्त्विका देवान्यक्षरक्षांसि राजसाः ।

प्रेतान्भूतगणांश्चान्ये यजन्ते तामसा जनाः ॥ (Gita 17:4)

*yajante sātṭvikā devānyakṣarakṣāṃsi rājasāḥ,  
pretānbhūtagaṇāṃścānye yajante tāmasā janāḥ.*

The gods (17:4)

### **Rajas**

Yakshas & rakshasas (17:4)

### **Tamas**

Ghosts & elemental spirits (17:4)

The tamasic man does not offer his sacrifice to the gods but to inferior elemental powers or to those grosser spirits behind the veil who feed upon his works and dominate his life with their darkness.

## How the sacrifice is offered

### **Sattwa**

अफलाङ्क्षिभिर्यज्ञो विधिदृष्टो य इज्यते ।

यष्टव्यमेवेति मनः समाधाय स सात्त्विकः ॥ (Gita 17:11)

*aphalāṅkṣibhīryajño vidhidṛṣṭo ya ijyate,  
yaṣṭavyameveti manaḥ samādhāya sa sātṭvikaḥ.*

According to the right principle, without desire for fruit, with a mind concentrated and fixed on the idea of the thing to be done as a true sacrifice (17:11)

## **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

The true sattwic sacrifice on the other hand is distinguished by **three signs** that are the quiet seal of its character.

**First**, it is dictated by the effective truth, executed according to the *vidhi*, the right principle, the exact method and rule, the just rhythm and law of our works, their true functioning, their dharma; that means that the reason and enlightened will are the guides and determinants of their steps and their purpose.

**Secondly**, it is executed with a mind concentrated and fixed on the idea of the thing to be done as a true sacrifice imposed on us by the divine law that governs our life **and therefore performed out of a high inner obligation or imperative truth and without desire for the personal fruit**,—the more impersonal the motive of the action and the temperament of the force put out in it, the more sattwic is its nature.

And **finally** it is offered to the gods without any reservation; it is acceptable to the divine powers by whom—for they are his masks and personalities—the Master of existence governs the universe.

This sattwic sacrifice comes then very near to the ideal and leads directly towards the kind of action demanded by the Gita; **but it is not the last and highest ideal, it is not yet the action of the perfected man who lives in the divine nature**. For it is carried out as a fixed dharma, and it is offered as a sacrifice or service to the gods, to some partial power or aspect of the Divine manifested in ourselves or in the universe. Work done with a disinterested religious faith or selflessly for humanity or impersonally from devotion to the Right or the Truth is of this nature, and action of that kind is necessary for our perfection; **for it purifies our thought and will and our natural substance**.

The culmination of the sattwic action at which we have to arrive is of a still larger and freer kind; it is the high last sacrifice offered by us to the supreme Divine in his integral being and with a seeking for the Purushottama or with the vision of Vasudeva in all that is, the action done impersonally, universally, for the good of the world, for the fulfilment of the divine will in the universe. That culmination leads to its own transcending, to the immortal Dharma. For then comes a freedom in which there is no personal action at all, no sattwic rule of dharma, no limitation of Shastra; the inferior reason and will are themselves overpassed and it is not they but a higher wisdom that dictates and guides the work and commands its objective. There is no question of personal fruit; for the will that works is not our own but a supreme Will of which the soul is the instrument. **There is no self-regarding and no selflessness; for the Jiva, the eternal portion of the Divine, is united with the highest Self of his existence and he and all are one in that Self and Spirit.** There is no personal action, for all actions are given up to the Master of our works and it is he that does the action through the divinised Prakriti. **There is no sacrifice**,—unless we can say that the Master of sacrifice is offering the works of his energy in the Jiva to himself in his own cosmic form.

This is the supreme self-surpassing state arrived at by the action that is sacrifice, this the perfection of the soul that has come to its full consciousness in the divine nature.

### Rajas

अभिसंधाय तु फलं दम्भार्थमपि चैव यत् ।

इज्यते भरतश्रेष्ठ तं यज्ञं विद्धि राजसम् ॥ (Gita 17:12)

*abhisandhāya tu phalaṃ dambhārthamapi caiva yat,*

*ijyate bharataśreṣṭha taṃ yajñaṃ viddhi rājasam.*

With a view to fruits, and also for ostentation. (17:12)

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The rajasic man **offers his sacrifice to lower godheads or to perverse powers**, the Yakshas, the keepers of wealth, or to the Asuric and the Rakshasic forces. His sacrifice may be performed outwardly according to the Shastra, but its motive is ostentation, pride or a strong lust after the fruit of his action, **a vehement demand for the reward of his works. All work therefore that proceeds from violent or egoistic personal desire or from an arrogant will intent to impose itself on the world for personal objects is of the rajasic nature**, even if it mask itself with the insignia of the light, even if it be done outwardly as a sacrifice. Although it is ostensibly given to God or to the gods, it remains essentially an Asuric action. **It is the inner state, motive and direction which give their value to our works, and not merely the apparent outer direction, the divine names we may call to sanction them or even the sincere intellectual belief which seems to justify us in the performance.** Wherever there is a dominating egoism in our acts, there our work becomes a rajasic sacrifice.

### Tamas

विधिहीनमसृष्टान्नं मन्त्रहीनमदक्षिणम् ।

श्रद्धाविरहितं यज्ञं तामसं परिचक्षते ॥ (Gita 17:13)

*vidhihīnamasṛṣṭānnaṃ mantrahīnamadakṣiṇam,*

*śraddhāviraḥitaṃ yajñaṃ tāmasaṃ paricakṣate.*

Performed without observance of the right rules, without giving food, without the mantra, without gifts to priests, empty of faith. (17:13)

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The tamasic sacrifice is work which is done without faith, without, that is to say, any full conscious idea and acceptance and will towards the thing Nature yet compels us to execute. It is done mechanically, because the act of living demands it, because it comes in our way,

**because others do it, to avoid some other greater difficulty which may arise from not doing it, or from any other tamasic motive.**

And it is apt to be done, if we have in the full this kind of temperament, carelessly, perfunctorily, in the wrong way. It will not be performed by the *vidhi* or right rule of the Shastra, will not be led in its steps according to the right method laid down by the art and science of life and the true science of the thing to be done.

There will be no giving of food in the sacrifice,—and that act in the Indian ritual is symbolic of the element of helpful giving inherent in every action that is real sacrifice, the indispensable giving to others, **the fruitful help to others**, to the world, without which our action becomes a wholly self-regarding thing and a violation of the true universal law of solidarity and interchange.

The work will be done without the dakshina, the much-needed giving or self-giving to the leaders of the sacrificial action, whether to the outward guide and helper of our work or to the veiled or manifest godhead within us.

It will be done without the mantra, without the dedicating thought which is the sacred body of our will and knowledge lifted upwards to the godheads we serve by our sacrifice.

### Tapas

#### **Sattwa**

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।

ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते ॥ (Gita 17:14)

*devadvijaguruprājñapūjanaṁ śaucamāṛjavam,  
brahmacaryamahimsā ca śārīraṁ tapa ucyate.*

अनुद्वेगकरं वाक्यं सत्यं प्रियहितं च यत् ।

स्वाध्यायाभ्यसनं चैव वाङ्मयं तप उच्यते ॥ (Gita 17:15)

*anudvegakaraṁ vākyaṁ satyaṁ priyahitaṁ ca yat,  
svādhyāyābhyasanaṁ caiva vāṅmayam tapa ucyate.*

मनः प्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः ।

भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते ॥ (Gita 17:16)

*manah prasādaḥ saumyatvaṁ maunamātmavinigrahaḥ,  
bhāvasaṁśuddhirityetattapo mānasamucyate.*

श्रद्धया परया तप्तं तपस्तत्त्रिविधं नरैः ।

अफलाकाङ्क्षभिर्युक्तैः सात्त्विकं परिचक्षते ॥ (Gita 17:17)

*śraddhayā parayā taptam tapastattrividhaṁ naraiḥ,  
aphalākāṅkṣibhiryuktaiḥ sāttvikam paricakṣate.*

Threefold tapas (of body [17:14], speech [17:15] & mind) [17:16] practiced with a supreme faith, by men of Yoga and with no desire for fruit. (17:17)

#### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

Sattwic tapasya is that which is done with a highest enlightened faith, as a duty deeply accepted or for some ethical or spiritual or other higher reason and with no desire for any external or narrowly personal fruit in the action. It is of the character of self-discipline and asks for self-control and a harmonising of one's nature. The Gita describes **three kinds of sattwic askesis**. (*Kaya, Vacha, Manasa*)

**First comes the physical**, the askesis of the outward act; under this head are especially mentioned worship and reverence of those deserving reverence, cleanness of the person, the action and the life, candid dealing, sexual purity and avoidance of killing and injury to others.

**Next is askesis of speech**, and that consists in the study of Scripture, kind, true and beneficent speech and a careful avoidance of words that may cause fear, sorrow and trouble to others.

**Finally there is the askesis of mental and moral perfection**, and that means the purifying of the whole temperament, gentleness and a clear and calm gladness of mind, self-control and silence. Here comes in all that quiets or disciplines the rajasic and egoistic nature and all that replaces it by the happy and tranquil principle of good and virtue. This is the askesis of the sattwic dharma so highly prized in the system of the ancient Indian culture.

**Its greater culmination** will be a high purity of the reason and will, an equal soul, a deep peace and calm, a wide sympathy and preparation of oneness, a reflection of the inner soul's divine gladness in the mind, life and body. There at that lofty point the ethical is already passing away into the spiritual type and character. And this culmination too can be made to transcend itself, can be raised into a higher and freer light, can pass away into the settled godlike energy of the supreme nature. And what will remain then will be the spirit's immaculate Tapas, a highest will and luminous force in all the members acting in a wide and solid calm and a deep and pure spiritual delight, Ananda. There will then be no farther need of askesis, no tapasya, because all is naturally and easily divine, all is that Tapas.

### **Rajas**

सत्कारमानपूजार्थं तपो दम्भेन चैव यत् ।

क्रियते तदिह प्रोक्तं राजसं चलमध्रुवम् ॥ (Gita 17:18)

*satkāramānapūjārthaṁ tapo dambhena caiva yat,*  
*kriyate tadiha proktaṁ rājasam calamadhruvam.*

Performed for ostentation for the sake of gaining respect, honour and worship. (17:18)

### **Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita**

Rajasic energisms of askesis (tapasya) are those which are undertaken to get honour and worship from men, for the sake of personal distinction and outward glory and greatness or from some other of the **many motives of egoistic will and pride**.

**This kind of askesis is devoted to fleeting particular objects which add nothing to the heavenward growth and perfection of the soul;** it is a thing without fixed and helpful principle, an energy bound up with changeable and passing occasion and itself of that nature.

Or even if there is ostensibly a more inward and noble object, and the faith and will are of a higher kind, **yet if any kind of arrogance or pride or any great strength of violent self-will or desire enters into the askesis** or if it drives some violent, lawless or terrible action contrary to the Shastra, opposed to the right rule of life and works and afflicting to oneself and to others, **or if it is of the nature of self-torture and hurts the mental, vital and physical elements or violates the God within us who is seated in the inner subtle body**, then too it is an unwise, an Asuric, a rajasic or rajaso-tamasic tapasya.

### **Tamas**

मूढग्राहेणात्मनो यत्पीडया क्रियते तपः ।

परस्योत्सादनार्थं वा तत्तामसमुदाहृतम् ॥ (Gita 17:19)

*mūḍhagrāheṇātmano yatpīḍayā kriyate tapaḥ,*  
*parasyotsādanārthaṁ vā tattāmasamudāhṛtam.*

Done with a deluded obstinacy, with self-torture or with a view to hurt others. (17:19)

## Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

Tamasic tapasya is that which is pursued under a clouded and deluded idea hard and obstinate in its delusion, **maintained by an ignorant faith in some cherished falsehood**, performed with effort and suffering imposed on oneself **in pursuit of some narrow and vulgar egoistic object empty of relation to any true or great aim** or else with a concentration of the energy in a will to do hurt to others. **That which makes this kind of energism tamasic is not any principle of inertia, for inertia is foreign to tapasya, but a darkness in the mind and nature, a vulgar narrowness and ugliness in the doing or a brutish instinct or desire in the aim or in the motive feeling.**

### Tyaga (Renunciation)

#### **Sattwa**

कार्यमित्येव यत्कर्म नियतं क्रियतेऽर्जुन ।

संगं त्यक्त्वा फलं चैव स त्यागः सात्त्विको मतः ॥ (Gita 18:9)

*kāryamityeva yatkarma niyataṁ kriyate'rjuna,  
saṅgaṁ tyaktvā phalaṁ caiva sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ.*

Performs the rightly regulated actions as a thing that ought to be done, renouncing attachment to action as well as to the fruit. (18:9)

The wise Tyagi, fully imbued with *sattwa* and with doubts cast away, has no aversion to unpleasant action, no attachment to pleasant action. (17:10)

न हि देहभृता शक्यं त्यक्तुं कर्माण्यशेषतः ।

यस्तु कर्मफलत्यागी स त्यागीत्यभिधीयते ॥ (Gita 18:11)

*na hi dehabhṛtā śakyaṁ tyaktuṁ karmāṇyaśeṣataḥ,  
yastu karmaphalatyaāgī sa tyāgītyabhidhīyate.*

Verily, One who gives up the fruit of work is called a Tyagi (18:11)

#### **Rajas**

दुःखमित्येव यत्कर्म कायक्लेशभयात्त्यजेत् ।

स कृत्वा राजसं त्यागं नैव त्यागफलं लभेत् ॥ (Gita 18:8)

*duḥkhamityeva yatkarma kāyakleśabhayāttyajet,  
sa kṛtvā rājasam tyāgaṁ naiva tyāgaphalaṁ labhet.*

Giving up works (karmas) because they bring sorrow or out of fear of physical suffering (does not obtain fruits of renunciation) (18:8)

#### **Tamas**

नियतस्य तु संन्यासः कर्मणो नोपपद्यते ।

मोहात्तस्य परित्यागस्तामसः परिकीर्तितः ॥ (Gita 18:7)

*niyatasya tu saṁnyāsaḥ karmaṇo nopapadyate,  
mohāttasya parityāgastāmasaḥ parikīrtitaḥ.*

Renunciation of rightly regulated actions (*niyata karmas*) is not proper; to renounce them out of delusion is tamasic (18:7)

## Varnas & colour codes

ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परंतप ।

कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥ (Gita 18:41)

*brāhmaṇakṣatriyaviśāṃ śūdrāṇāṃ ca paraṃtapa,  
karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāvaprabhavairguṇaiḥ.*

The works of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are divided according to the qualities (gunas) born of their own inner nature (Swabhava, self-nature).

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 188, 189**

### **Sattwa**

Brahmanas had predominantly *sattwa-guna* which is represented by white.

### **Rajas**

Kshatriyas had predominantly *rajo-guna* represented by red. Vysyas had mix of *rajas* & *tamas* and hence yellow.

### **Tamas**

Shudras had predominantly *tamo-guna* and hence black

### **Related matters**

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 280**

(Shl 33) The six colours of *jeevas* are the ultimate evidence of their states. Of these black & grey indicate lowest state. Blue & red indicate middle state consisting of happiness & grief. Yellow indicates a better state than this, having more tolerable happiness. White indicates most pure happiness.

(See table below: data given by the commentators. (This is a long adhyaya which describes the transition of various states and includes colours like bluish yellow, reddish-yellow, blue-red etc. This is a part representation)

<b>Sattwa</b>	<b>Rajas</b>	<b>Tamas</b>	<b>Colour</b>	<b>State</b>
Nil	Right proportion	Excess/ dominant	Black	Immovable/Inanimate
Right proportion	Deficient	Excess	Grey	Birds & animals
Deficient	Excess	Right proportion	Blue	Transition state
Right proportion	Excess	Nil	Red ( <i>anugraha varna</i> )	Human being
Excess	Deficient	Right proportion	Yellow	<i>Devata</i>
Excess	Right proportion	Deficient	White ( <i>Kaumara sarga</i> )	-

(Shl 39) Once *jeeva* acquires some *sattwa-guna* then through its *buddhi* it tries to push away the tendencies of *tamo-guna* and tries for its auspiciousness. Then *jeeva* gives up its blue colour and gains red colour and moves in the world of humans in cycles of birth & death.

(Shl 46) *Daityendra!* All the following create hurdles to the mind of *yogis*: *Prakriti, mahat-tattva,*

*ahankara* and *pancha-tanmatras*; sixty *tattvas* (five *jnanedriyas*, five *karmedriyas*—these ten, and due to differences in *sattwa, rajas* & *tamas*, and *jagrat, swapna, sushupti* each *indriya* undergoes six modifications resulting in a total of sixty variations—10x6). **The white coloured state which is the ultimate state is achieved by preventing or suppressing the three gunas.**



## Yugas

### **Vana parva, Tirthayatra upa-parva; Adhyaya 149**

Hanuman to Bhimasena

#### **Sattwa**

In Treta the *brahma-nishta* declined. Several desires germinated. To fulfil those desires they started performing *yajna*, *yaaga* and *daan*). People in Treta never lapsed from their respective *dharmas*. **People of that Yuga had *sattwa-guna* as the dominant quality.**

#### **Rajas**

People started indulging in *yajna*, *yaagas* and *daans* to overcome diseases and to fulfil desires. Some performed *yajnas* for fulfilment of material pleasures and some to attain *swarga*. In this way **people of Dwapara are becoming dominant in *rajo-guna* and are indulging in *adharma*** and hence being destroyed.

#### **Tamas**

Bhimasena! In **Kali Yuga** only one-fourth dharma will survive. In that Yuga Shriman Narayana will shine with black colour. **That Yuga will be dominated by *tamo-guna*.**

#### **Related matters**

(Shl 22) Dharma founded on *atma-yoga* is the main characteristic of **Krita Yuga**. The dharma of all four *varnas* was complete with all four legs. ***Pravritti, prakasha, moha* or *rajas-tamas-sattwa gunas* did not exist in that Yuga.** Bhimasena! That greatest Yuga was full of only *brahma-nisht* people.

## Entities & guna Composition

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 36, 39**

#### **Sattwa**

(Shl 8) Among yogis who are *urdhva-retaskas* when *sattwa guna* becomes more, *tamo-guna* will be less and *rajo-guna* will be very less.

#### **Rajas**

(Shl 7) In human beings with *madhya-srota* *rajo-guna* will be more, *tamo-guna* will be less and *sattwa guna* will be very less.

#### **Tamas**

(Shl 23, 24, 25) **The following will always be immersed in *tamo-guna*:** Trees, mountains etc non-moving entities, animals, means of conveyance (vehicles including horses & elephants), *rakshasas*, carnivorous beings, serpents, insects & worms, birds, those born from egg, four legged animals, the insane, the deaf, the dumb and those suffering from sinful diseases. Because they have characteristics of bad deeds in them and their mental tendencies are always towards the lowly they are all called *avaksrotasa* (tending downwards).

(Shl 17) In non-moving beings (*sthavara*) *tamo-guna* will be more. The quality of changing in them is *rajo-guna*. Smoothness is *sattwa guna*.

(Shl 6) In *tiryag yonis* *tamo-guna* will be more. In them *rajo-guna* will be less and *sattwa guna* very less.

## Other examples

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 39**

(Shl 13) As soon as the Sun rises the wicked are scared. Those who are thirsty and travellers who are tired feel anguished. (Shl 14) Sun rise is the origination of *sattwa guna*. Fear of the wicked is the work of *tamo-guna*. Anguish of travellers is the work of *rajo-guna*.



(Shl 15) The light in Sun is *sattwa guna*. The anguish caused by him is *rajo-guna*. The Setting of Sun and other afflictions like eclipses are *tamo-guna*. (Shl 16) **In this manner in all forms of light these three *gunas* appear in the same sequence and merge back.**

(Shl 18) Day has three variations because of the variations in *gunas*. Night is also of three types. Month, fortnight, year, season, *sandhis* are all of three types (?).

Shl 19) According to the differences in *gunas*, three types of *daan* are given. There are also three types of *yajnas*. There are three types of *lokas*. There are three types of *devathas*, three types of *vidyas* and three types of paths.

(Shl 20) Past, present and future, *dharma*, *artha* and *kaam*, *prana*, *apana* & *udana* all consist of *trigunas*.

(Shl 21) In any object in this world the three *gunas* are seen alternatively in the same manner. (Shl 22) The three *gunas* are involved in every work. They are unseen (*avyakta*) as also permanent. The creation of these *gunas* is *sanatana*.

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 36**

(Shl 33) The following five are called ***tamasi prakriti***: *tamas* (*avidya*), *moha* (*ahambhava*), *maha-moha*, *tamisra* called *krodha* (anger, indignation) and *andha-tamisra* in the form of death.

### **Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; 24**

(Shl 10) It is the command of Veda that *agni* is the form of all *devatas*. Therefore it is from *agni* that brahmana obtains *jnana* combined with intelligence (*jnana buddhi samanvitam*). (Shl 11) **The smoke of such *agni* is the form of *tamas*. Its ash is *rajas*. Therefore when *havis* is offered in such *agni*, *sattwa* is generated from it.**

### **On Action/functioning of Trigunas**

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥ (Gita 14.5)

*sattvaṃ rajastama iti guṇāḥ prakṛtisambhavāḥ,*

*nibadhnanti mahābāho dehe dehinamavyayam.*

The three *gunas* born of *Prakriti*, *Sattwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* bind in the body, O great-armed one, the imperishable dweller in the body.

प्रकृतेः क्रियमाणानि गुणैः कर्माणि सर्वशः ।

अहंकारविमूढात्मा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ (Gita 3:27)

*prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ,*

*ahaṅkāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate.*

While the actions are being entirely done by modes of Nature (*trigunas*), he whose self is bewildered by egoism thinks that it is his "I" which is doing them.

तत्त्ववित्तु महाबाहो गुणकर्मविभागयोः ।

गुणा गुणेषु वर्तन्त इति मत्वा न सज्जते ॥ (Gita 3.28)

*tattvavittu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ,*

*guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate.*

But one, O mighty-armed, who knows the true principles of the divisions of the modes and of works, realises that it is the modes which are acting and reacting on each other and is not caught in them by attachment.

प्रकृतेर्गुणसंमूढाः सज्जन्ते गुणकर्मसु ।

तानकृत्स्नविदो मन्दान्कृत्स्नविन्न विचालयेत् ॥ (Gita 3:29)

*prakṛterguṇasaṁmūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇakarmasu,*

*tānakṛtsnavido mandānkṛtsnavinna vicālayet.*

Those who are bewildered by the modes, not knowers of the whole, let not the knower of the whole disturb (them) in their mental standpoint.

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 212**

(Shl 13) That unmanifest *atma* is in the form of seed for living beings having a body. **This seed-like**

***atma* when associated with *gunas* is called *jeeva*.** It is this *jeeva* who prompted by *karmas* in accordance with *kaal* keeps revolving in this wheel of *samsara*.

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; 224**

Bali: (Shl 9) Vajrapani! Just as sea is the end for all rivers, death is the ultimate destination of all living beings. Those who have understood this well, are not confused. (Shl 10) Those who do not understand this but are under control of *rajo-guna* & *tamo-guna* will lose their thinking when difficulties grip them and are destroyed. (Shl 11) **The person who has the advantage of intelligence/wisdom will get rid of all his sins by doing *sat-karmas* (virtuous deeds). Having become devoid of sins he will become rich in *sattwa-guna*. One who is so established in *sattwa-guna* will attain *prasannata* (be soothed, settle down quietly).** (Shl 12) **The unfortunate ones who fall from that *sattwa-guna* will take birth repeatedly and suffer agony subject to the promptings of *rajo* & *tamo-gunas*.**

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; 211**

(Shl 1) *Vatsa*! Living beings are of four classes: *jarayuja* (born from the womb), *andaja* (born from an egg), *swedaja* (born from sweat/water) and *udbhija* (those who emerge out of earth like plants etc). All these take birth from the *avyakta* and finally merge into *avyakta* (unmanifest). Those things whose characteristics are not visible manifestly are called *avyakta*. **Even though something may be *avyakta* it will not be beyond *gunas*. Even though *Prakriti* is *avyakta* it is *trigunatmik*. Similarly though *manas* is *avyakta*, it is *trigunatmik*.**

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; 303**

(Shl 31) The goddess *Prakriti* does both creation & dissolution. Just as the Sun spreads his rays in the morning and withdraws them into himself in the evening, in the same way **Parabrahma who is *adipurusha* spreads the *trigunas* all over the universe in the beginning of *kalpa* and then at the end of the *kalpa* merges them in him.** (Shl 32) In this way the *chetana* associated with *Prakriti*, before realising the *tattva* (*tattva-jnana*) **keeps repeatedly experiencing the objects of senses as if a game/sport and believes that experiencing these *gunas* is his duty.** (Shl 33, 34) In this way, **the *chetana*, the lord of *trigunas*, controls the *trigunatmic* *Prakriti* which has the dharma of *pralaya*, and attaching to & engaging in *karma-marga*, believes that such and such *karmas* have such and such fruits.** (Shl 35) It is by *prakriti* that this whole *jagat* has been made blind. **It is due to the association of *Prakriti* that all things are pervaded to different extents by *trigunas*.**

**Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; Adhyaya 36**

Brahma said: (Shl 1, 2) *Maharshis*! **When there is equilibrium of *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamo-gunas* then it is called *avyakta* (*prakriti*; unmanifest). It is *sarva vyapi* (all pervasive). It is fixed and indestructible. If there is imbalance in these three *gunas*, *pancha-dhatus* or *pancha-bhutas* are generated.**

**Anushasana; Daandharma; adhyaya 1**

(Shl 52) All living beings consisting of *sattwa*, *tamas* & *rajas* act/behave under the control of *kaal*.

### Liberation and Trigunas

नान्यं गुणेभ्यः कर्तारं यदा द्रष्टानुपश्यति ।

गुणेभ्यश्च परं वेत्ति मद्भावं सोऽधिगच्छति ॥ (Gita 14:19)

*nānyam guṇebhyaḥ kartāraṁ yadā draṣṭānupaśyati,  
guṇebhyaśca paraṁ veti madbhāvaṁ so'dhigacchati.*

When the seer perceives that Gunas (the modes of Nature) are the doer and none else and knows That which is beyond the Gunas he attains to *mad-bhava* (My status of being).

गुणानेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्भवान् ।

जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ (Gita 14:20)

*guṇānetānatītya trīndehī dehasamudbhavān,  
janmamṛtyujarāduḥkhairvimukto'mṛtamaśnute.*

When the embodied soul thus rises above the three Gunas born of the embodiment (in Nature), he is freed from subjection to birth and death (and their concomitants), decay, old age and suffering, and enjoys Immortality (of its self-existence).

त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदा निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन ।

निर्द्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ॥ (Gita 2:45)

*traiguṇyaviṣayā vedā nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna,  
nirdvandvo nityasattvastho niryogakṣema ātmavān.*

The action of the three gunas is the subject-matter of the Veda; but do thou become free from the triple guna, O Arjuna; without the dualities, ever based in the true being, without getting or having, possessed of the self.

प्रकाशं च प्रवृत्तिं च मोहमेव च पाण्डव ।

त द्वेष्टि संप्रवृत्तानि न निवृत्तानि काङ्क्षति ॥ (Gita 14:22)

*prakāśam ca pravṛttiṁ ca mohameva ca pāṇḍava,  
ta dveṣṭi saṁpravṛttāni na nivṛttāni kāṅkṣati.*

The Blessed Lord said: O Pandava, he who does not abhor illumination/enlightenment (result of rising *sattwa*) nor impulsion to works/action (the result of rising *rajas*) nor the delusion when they occur (the result of rising *taṁas*), nor longs for them when they cease;

उदासीनवदासीनो गुणैर्यो न विचाल्यते ।

गुणा वर्तन्त इत्येव योऽवतिष्ठति नेङ्गते ॥ (Gita 14:23)

*udāsīnavadāsīno guṇairyo na vicālyate,  
guṇā vartanta ityeva yo'avatiṣṭhati neṅgate.*

He who is seated as one unconcerned (*udasīna vat aasīno*), unperturbed by the Gunas; who stands apart, unwavering, knowing that it is only the Gunas that act (are in process of action);

समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकांचनः ।

तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरस्तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥ (Gita 14:24)

*samaduḥkhasukhaḥ svasthaḥ samaloṣṭāśmakāṁcanaḥ,*

*tulyapriyāpriyo dhīrastulyanindātmasaṁstutiḥ.*

मानापमानयोस्तुल्यस्तुल्यो मित्रारिपक्षयोः ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी गुणातीतः स उच्यते ॥ (Gita 14:25)

*mānāpamānayostulyastulyo mitrāripakṣayoḥ,  
sarvārambhaparityāgī guṇātītaḥ sa ucyate.*

He who, established in the self, imperturbable, regards happiness and suffering alike, regards gold, mud and stone as of equal value, to whom the pleasant and the unpleasant, praise and blame, honour and insult, the faction of his friends and the faction of his enemies are equal things; who initiates no action or has abandoned all initiative (but leaves all works to be done by the Gunas of Nature) — he is said to be above the Gunas.

मां च योऽव्यभिचारेण भक्तियोगेन सेवते ।

स गुणान्समतीत्यैतान्ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥ (Gita 14:26)

*mām ca yo'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate,  
sa guṇānsamatītyaitānbrahmabhūyāya kalpate.*

He who loves and strives after Me with an undeviating love and adoration, passes beyond the three Gunas and is prepared for becoming the Brahman.

**Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 194**

#### **Buddhi & trigunas**

(Shl 14) That which pervades (*chetana*: sentient) from bottom to top of the body will be observing everywhere as a witness. **That chetana pervades the body completely.** Understand this clearly. (Everything that happens in the body is known to this *chetana*). (Shl 15) Every human being should know the activities of his *indriyas*, *manas* and *buddhi*. **The gunas of sattwa, rajas & tamas dwell in manas & buddhi.** (Shl 16) By understanding in depth the nature of birth & death of living beings using his intelligence, man gradually attains the highest level of peace (*atma-sakshatkara*).

(Shl 17) **The three gunas of sattwa, rajas & tamas are the prompters/impellers of buddhi.** All the *indriyas*, of which mind is the sixth, function according to this **buddhi which is coloured by the gunas** (These three *gunas* come with birth accompanying the *jeeva*. In each human being they will be present in unequal proportions. It is not possible for them to be present in their pure and single form. Some will be predominantly of *sattwa-guna*, some of *rajo-guna* etc. Other *gunas* will also be present to lesser extent. These *gunas* which have come with the *jeeva* reflect themselves in the *buddhi*. This is just like a clear crystal which would appear to be the colour of the object kept behind it. The mind and *indriyas* function according to the *buddhi*. **Without the existence of buddhi there will be no mechanism for the gunas to reflect.**) (Shl 18) This whole world consisting of *chara-achara* things is born after the birth of *buddhi*. When *buddhi* merges this creation also merges. Therefore this whole world is of *buddhi*. That is why *shruthis* have stated that everything is form of *buddhi*.

(Shl 19) **That through which the buddhi sees is the eye.** That through which it hears is ear. That through which it smells is nose. That through which it tastes is tongue. (Shl 20) *Buddhi* experiences touch through skin. **In this manner the buddhi is constantly undergoing changes. When it sees something, that 'seeing' itself becomes buddhi.** It is not possible to see without the co-operation of *buddhi*. Similarly when a sound is heard, that 'hearing' itself becomes *buddhi*. **Buddhi takes the form of that experience which it wishes to gather through some relevant instrument.** (Shl 21) The five instruments that *buddhi* has for understanding different things are called *panchendriyas*. **Invisible jeevatma is the prompter for all.**

(Shl 22) **Buddhi which is under the shelter of jeevatma consists of three bhavas viz sukha, dukha & moha** (happiness, unhappiness and confusion/delusion) **which are constituted by sattwa, rajas & tamogunas.** Some times it (*buddhi*) will be joyous (quality of *sattwa-guna*); sometimes unhappy (*Rajo-guna*); sometimes it is devoid of both and is in *moha* (*tamo-guna*). (Shl 24) **In this**

manner *buddhi* which consists of three *bhavas*, goes beyond all three *bhavas* in the state of *samadhi*, just as the sea sometimes overflows its shores. (Shl 25) Even when *buddhi* in such state of *samadhi* goes beyond the three *bhavas* or beyond the three *gunas*, they remain in subtle form. Once the *samadhi* state is exited, *rajo-guna* which has the quality of action attaches to the *buddhi-bhava* (Commentators: Just as vessels in which garlic or onion has been cooked do not lose that smell in spite of washing thoroughly, in the same way even though *ajnana* is destroyed, according to the *prarabdha karmas* at least some influence of *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamo-gunas* persist. Only after the *prarabdha-karmas* are exhausted, unrestricted *kaivalya* is attained). (GHV: Note the strong link between *gunas* & *karmas*) (Shl 26) At that time *buddhi* constituted of *rajo-guna* activates all *indriyas*. As a consequence, due to love/joy and excessive interest *sattwa* & *taamas* are also invoked.

(Shl 41) Because the *sattwa* etc *gunas* are *jada* (inanimate) they cannot grasp *atma*. But since *atma* is *chetana* (sentient) he can fully understand these *gunas*. Though *atma* is different from *gunas* and is only its witness, he thinks that these *gunas* are associated with him.

(Shl 48) A person, who is a *jnani*, should after realising through his *buddhi* that *atma-tattva* is purified & unattached entity, should become free of blemishes such as joy, sorrow, jealousy etc and live with equality towards all. (Shl 49) Just as a spider spins a web around it and sits in the centre, *atma* dwells in its own form and creates *gunas* like *sattwa* etc. It should be understood that *sattwa* etc *gunas* are like the web of a spider.

(Shl 50, 51) (After self-realisation (*atma-sakshatkara*)) *sattwa* etc *gunas* are destroyed. It is the opinion of some that they do not return. But they do not vanish completely; because, they are not visible to us, is the opinion of some others. That which happens unseen has to be confirmed by inference. In this way some scholars hold that *trigunas* retire soon after *atma-sakshatkara* and some that it does not. These two views have to be thought through carefully and according to one's own *buddhi* it has to be decided. (At the time of *atma-sakshatkara*—*samadhi-sthithi*—none of the *gunas* exist. Because *buddhi* which reflects the *gunas*, would have merged in *atma*. At that time the *jnanis* are beyond the *trigunas*. Once they change from the state of *antarmukhi* to *bahirmukhi* (inward gaze to outward gaze) the *buddhi-manas-indriyas* return to previous state. *Gunas* will also start their functions. But for the *atma-jnani* they may not act with the same force. Love, joy etc *sattwic* feelings will exist. Therefore even in *jnanis*, other than at the time of *samadhi*, the *trigunas* do exist). (Shl 52) In this way one should give up this strong knot in the heart (*hridaya-granthi*) which causes changes in *buddhi* and become happy. One who has cleared doubts will not have sorrow.

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 249

Vyasa said: (Shl 1) Child! It is *Prakriti* that creates *gunas*. The *atma* as *kshetrajna* remains disinterested and merely observes these changing *gunas* and he is the master of these. (Shl 2) Just as spider creates the threads of web from its own body, in the same way *Prakriti* creates all things consisting of *trigunas*. (Shl 3) 'Even though these *gunas* are destroyed by *tattva-jnana* they do not leave the *jnani*. But the *jnani* will not have tendencies arising from them'. This is the opinion of some. Some others say that as soon as *tattva-jnana* occurs the *trigunas* will completely go away. (Shl 4) Both these opinions have to be properly grasped, and should be thought over duly with one's intelligence. It is by analysing in this manner that the *jeeva* residing in the depths of heart becomes *mahatma*.

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 212

The following are effects of *rajo-guna* & *tamo-guna*: *kaam*, *krodh*, *pramaada* (carelessness), *lobh*, *moha*, fear, fatigue, depression/dulness, sorrow, unhappiness, pride/arrogance, haughtiness and vulgarity. (Shl 24) One should constantly try to avoid/overcome all these blemishes by examining within oneself which of these are present, how big or small are they etc.

Bhishma said: (Shl 27) Root cause for these defects is *ajnana*. Therefore only when these are totally uprooted, the man is purified. Then he will be liberated from the shackles of *samsara*. Just as a chisel made of iron loses its sharp edge even as it cuts iron, *buddhi* honed with *dhyana* destroys defects born of *tamo-guna* and along with it is itself destroyed too. (As long as *trigunas* are in *buddhi* it will be different from *atma-vastu*. But once it transcends *trigunas* it merges with the *trigunatita Paramatma*. Therefore *buddhi* which destroyed the defects self-destructs also in the process. (A beautiful way of expressing). (Shl 28) Even though *rajo-guna*, *tamo-guna*, pure *sattwa guna* devoid of *kaam*, *krodh* etc are the root causes for the rebirth of *jeeva*, to *jitendriyas* *sattwa-guna* itself becomes



a means to achieve *samata* (equality) with Paramatma (*brahma-prapti*). (Shl 29) Therefore a *jitendriya* should completely reject *rajo-guna* & *tamo-guna*. **Jeeva freed of these *gunas* becomes purified.**

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 348

Vaishampayana said: (Shl 68) Maharaja! Parameshwara has created three kinds of *prakritis* called *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* for the sake of *jeeva* imprisoned in the body. (Shl 69) **Among the *jeevas* imprisoned in the bodies, the *purusha* with *sattwa guna* is greater. It is clearly known that only he is eligible for *moksha*.** (Shl 70) Such a *sattwic* will know that Purushottama is the greatest among those who know Brahma and that *moksha* depends only on Narayana. Therefore he is considered a *sattwic*. (Shl 71) A *sattwic* person will always meditate upon Purushottama Shrihari and obtain whatever he desires. Undivided devotion (*ekanta bhakti*) always depends only on Narayana. (Shl 72) **Shrihari himself takes over the responsibility of *yoga-kshema* (welfare & prosperity) of those few**

***yatis* who are dedicated to the accomplishment of *moksha* and have no desires (*tesham vicchinna trishnanam yogakshemavaho harih*). (Shl 73) That person caught in the vortex of birth & death, whom Madhusudana sees with loving kindness/grace, should be considered as *sattwic*.**

**Such a person is assuredly qualified for *moksha*.** (Shl 74) The dharma practiced by single minded devotees is equal to that of Sankhya or Yoga dharmas. Because *moksha* is nothing but the form of Narayana, those *satvata dharmis* who always meditate upon him with single minded devotion will attain greatest state (*paraam gatim*). (Shl 75) **If Shriman Narayana looks with kind eyes, the person will immediately become a *jnani*. No one becomes a *jnani* by merely wishing to be one** (God's grace is essential to become a *jnani*). (Shl 76) *Rajasi* & *tamasi prakritis* have been said to be mixed *prakritis*. The person born with these two *gunas* will normally have a nature of *pravriti*. **Shrihari does not even bother to look at such *kamya-karmi*.** (Shl 77) ***Loka pitamaha* Brahma takes care of those whose minds are immersed in *rajas* & *tamas*.** (He graces them by fulfilling their desires).

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 308

(Shl 12) When that *chetana* which is *nirguna* understands that *Prakriti* is *trigunatmic* & *jada*, then it will attain *kaivalya* (Oneness). (Shl 13) Having attained this *kaivalya* he is totally liberated and attains Paramatma. It is this which *jnanis* call as beyond *tattvas*, without old age & death and *paramartha-tattva*.

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 194

(Shl 60) That *samsara* which *ajnanis* fear greatly does not exist for *jnanis*. **After *atma-jnana* all attain the same state (*mukti*).** It is not that one gets better state than the other. **All *atma-jnanis* will transcend the *trigunas*. For those who have *trigunas* it is natural that there will be differences based on the amount and proportions of these three. Once they are transcended, there is equality/sameness.**

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 206

(Shl 8) Worldly knowledge, its fruits, knowable things and karmas—after all these decay, the *jnana* established in Parabrahma that one obtains should be understood as the great fruit of *atma-jnana*. (Shl 9) Only yogis see this great *tattva* with their inner eye. **Those attached to *trigunas* cannot see the Paramatma who is within themselves.**

#### Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 329

(Shl 22) The person who wishes to win *moksha*, which is very difficult to win and which has not yet been won, should be engaged in *tapas* everyday. He should be a *jitendriya*. He should have control over his mind. He should be disinterested in objects of senses. (Shl 23) **That *brahmana* who is disinterested in matters of *trigunas*, who lives alone and is thinking of *adhyatma* all the time will very soon attain the great happiness of *moksha*.**

#### Shanti parva; Rajadharmanushasana; Adhyaya 64-66

(Shl 38) When all desires retire from a man, then he will be in *sattwa-guna*. He will realise the Brahma.

#### Ashwamedhika parva; Anugita; adhyaya 35

Sri Krishna said: Arjuna! .. (Shl 19) One who knows the secret of *sattwa* etc *gunas* of *prakriti*, knows the secret of creation of all living beings, has given up the feeling of 'me & mine', and has no ego will be liberated. There is no doubt about this.

### **Application of / working with Trigunas**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 195**

(Shl 4) Pursuers of *dhyana-yoga* should transcend dualities. **They should always be driven by *sattwa-guna*.** They should be free of all blemishes. Should practice *niyamas* or prescribed regulations strictly. Should study *shastras* which preach *nissanga* (no-attachments), have no contradictions and which bring peace to the mind.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 196**

(Shl 14) The method for practicing *japa-yoga* is as follows: The doer of *japa* should sit on a *kushasana*.....(Shl 15) Should bid good bye to the attractions of sensory pleasures. They should never be thought about. **Should achieve equilibrium of *trigunas* and merge the mind in the mind (*manasyeva mano dadhat*).**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; Adhyaya 201**

(Shl 19) **Vedas say that karmas are of three types: *sattwic*, *rajasic* & *tamasic*.** In the same way the *mantras*, the related prescribed procedures, the practice or application of karmas, the intent or desires of those who do the karmas and the man who enjoys the fruits of karmas are all also of the same three types.

(Shl 23) **Man who is driven by *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamo-gunas*, who is keenly interested in the fruits and desiring fruits does karmas which are of type *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas* will obtain the same kind of fruits corresponding to the nature of karmas.** (Commentary: There are three types of karmas: *sattwic*, *rajasic* & *tamasic*. Among men also there are same three types. *Sattwic* persons will have interest in *sattwic* karmas. They will engage in such karmas and obtain *sattwic* fruits. Similarly for the other two types. **Even among *devatas* there are these three types. That is why those interested in karmas choose different types of *devatas*.** They are attracted to the *devatas* which match their own nature. Even though the *Parabrahma-vastu* is one, three types of *devatas* have been created for this reason. This is a uniqueness of *sanatana dharma*).

(Shl 9) The body is constituted of *pancha-bhutas*. **It is associated with the *trigunas*.** Who can blame the *atma*, who is *nirvikara* (unchangeable) inhabiting such body? Whom will he praise?

(Shl 17) Those who are not *jitendriyas* will, due to *ajnana*, **be deluded by *sattwa*, *rajas* & *tamas*** and will always be revolving like a wheel.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 240**

(Shl 4, 5) Five types of blemishes stated by scholars should be completely removed. These five *yoga-doshas* are *kaam*, *krodh*, *lobh*, *bhay* and *swapna*. *Krodh* should be kept under control by *mano-nigraha*. *Kaam* should be conquered by giving up *sankalps* (desire oriented resolves). **Sleep should be conquered by taking refuge in *sattwa-guna*.**

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 251**

(Shl 13) **For *santosha*** (delight, contentedness) **you should depend on *sattwa-guna*. *Sattwa-guna* is the characteristic of highest peace.** This *guna* douses thirst and grief arising due to *sankalpa-vikalpa* (resolves, irresolution/option), worries & unhappiness.

#### **Shanti parva; Mokshadharma; adhyaya 298**

(Shl 13) Just like oil of mustard will take on different smells when in contact with different fragrant flowers, according as human beings take refuge in people of purified soul, **their *sattwa-guna* will increase.**

#### **Udyoga; Sanjayayana; adhyaya 28**

(Shl 6) **Whoever wishes to control his mind in order to transcend the *trigunas* (*Sattwa*, *rajas*, *tamas*) should find company of *satpurushas* and lead his life.** Those who are not brahmanas or those who do not know *brahma-vidya* should live in the society according to the ordained principles of the *varnas*.



## Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Gita

The **Asuric Prakriti** is the **rajasic at its height**; it leads to the **slavery of the soul** in Nature, **to desire, wrath and greed, the three powers of the rajasid ego, and these are the threefold doors of Hell**, the Hell into which the natural being falls when it indulges the impurity and evil and error of its lower or perverted instincts. These three are again the doors of a great darkness, they fold back into **tamas, the characteristic power of the original Ignorance**; for the unbridled force of the rajasid nature, when exhausted, falls back into the weakness, collapse, darkness, incapacity of the worst tamasic soul-status.

To escape from this downfall one must get rid of these three evil forces and **turn to the light of the sattwic quality**, live by the right, in the true relations, according to the Truth and the Law; then one follows one's own higher good and arrives at the highest soul status. **To follow the law of desire is not the true rule of our nature; there is a higher and juster standard of its works.** But where is it embodied or how is it to be found? In the first place, the human race has always been seeking for this just and high Law and whatever it has discovered is embodied in its Shashtra, its rule of science and knowledge, rule of ethics, rule of religion, rule of best social living, rule of one's right relations with man and God and Nature.

## Sri Aurobindo's treatise on Trigunas

Sri Aurobindo in his 'Essays on Gita' has beautifully woven together all these concepts in Gita with a great insight. The same is presented below (I have done some formatting and have added sub-headings to the original text):

### **Trigunas & creation**

For Prakriti is constituted of three *gunas* or essential modes of energy. **When these three powers of the energy of Prakriti are in a state of equilibrium, all is in rest, there is no movement, action or creation and there is therefore nothing to be reflected in the immutable luminous being of the conscious Soul.** But when the equilibrium is disturbed, then the three *gunas* fall into a state of inequality in which they strive with and act upon each other and the whole inextricable business of ceaseless creation, conservation and dissolution begins, unrolling the phenomena of the cosmos.

**This continues so long as the Purusha consents to reflect the disturbance which obscures his eternal nature and attributes to it the nature of Prakriti;** but when he withdraws his consent, the *gunas* fall into equilibrium and the soul returns to its eternal, unchanging immobility; it is delivered from phenomena.

But it is to be noted that, although in the end we must arrive at a superiority to all the three *gunas* of the lower nature, it is yet in its incipience (=Beginning to exist or to be apparent) by a resort to one or other of the three that the movement must begin.

### **Trigunas in the scale of Nature**

How the passage from subjection to mastery works out is best seen if we observe the working of the *gunas* in the scale of Nature from the bottom to the top.

#### **Play of *trigunas* in inanimate objects, plants & animals**

- **At the bottom** are the existences in which the principle of *tamas* is supreme, the beings who have not yet attained to the light of self-consciousness and are utterly driven by the current of Nature. There is a will even in the atom, but we see clearly enough that it is not free will, because it is mechanical and the atom does not possess the will, but is possessed by it. **Here the buddhi, the element of intelligence and will in Prakriti,** is actually and plainly what the Sankhya asserts it to be, *jada*, a mechanical, even **an inscscient (=without conscious thought) principle in which the light of the conscious Soul has not at all struggled to the surface:** the atom is not conscious of an intelligent will; *tamas*, the inert and ignorant principle has its grip on it, contains *rajas*, conceals *sattwa* within itself and holds a high holiday of mastery, **Nature compelling this**

form of existence to act with a stupendous force indeed, but as a mechanical instrument, *yantrarudham mayaya*.

- Next, in the plant the principle of *rajas* has struggled to the surface, with its power of life, with its capacity of the nervous reactions which in us are recognisable as pleasure and suffering, but *sattwa* is quite involved, has not yet emerged to awaken the light of a conscious intelligent will; all is still mechanical, sub-conscious or half-conscious, *tamas* stronger than *rajas*, both gaolers (=Jailers) of the imprisoned *sattwa*.
- In the animal, though *tamas* is still strong, though we may still describe him as belonging to the *tamasic* creation, *tamasa sarga*, yet *rajas* prevails much more against *tamas*, brings with it its developed power of life, desire, emotion, passion, pleasure, suffering, while *sattwa*, emerging, but still dependent on the lower action, contributes to these the first light of the conscious mind, the mechanical sense of ego, conscious memory, a certain kind of thought, especially the wonders of instinct and animal intuition. But as yet the *buddhi*, the intelligent will, has not developed the full light of consciousness; therefore, no responsibility can be attributed to the animal for its actions.
  - The tiger can be no more blamed for killing and devouring than the atom for its blind movements, the fire for burning and consuming or the storm for its destructions. If it could answer the question, the tiger would indeed say, like man, that if it had free will, it would have the egoism of the doer, it would say, "I kill, I devour"; but we can see clearly enough that it is not really the tiger, but Nature in the tiger that kills, it is Nature in the tiger that devours; and if it refrains from killing or devouring, it is from satiety, from fear or from indolence, from another principle of Nature in it, from the action of the *guna* called *tamas*.

As it was Nature in the animal that killed, so it is Nature in the animal that refrained from killing. Whatever soul is in it, sanctions passively the action of Nature, is as much passive in its passion and activity as in its indolence or inaction. The animal, like the atom, acts according to the mechanism of its Nature, and not otherwise, *sadrsam cestate svasyah prakrteh* (Gita 3-33), as if mounted on a machine, *yantra-rudho mayaya* (Gita 18-61).

## Play of *trigunas* in human being

Well, but in man at least is there another action, a free soul, a free will, a sense of responsibility, a real doer other than Nature, other than the mechanism of Maya?

So it seems, because in man there is a conscious intelligent will; *buddhi* is full of the light of the observing Purusha, who through it, it seems, observes, understands, approves or disapproves, gives or withholds the sanction, seems indeed at last to begin to be the lord of his nature.

Man is not like the tiger or the fire or the storm; he cannot kill and say as a sufficient justification, "I am acting according to my nature", and he cannot do it, because he has not the nature and not, therefore, the law of action, *svadharma*, of the tiger, storm or fire. He has a conscious intelligent will, a *buddhi*, and to that he must refer his actions. If he does not do so, if he acts blindly according to his impulses and passions, then the law of his being is not rightly worked out, *svadharma su-anusthitah* (Gita 3-35, 18-47), he has not acted according to the full measure of his humanity, but even as might the animal.

It is true that the principle of *rajas* or the principle of *tamas* gets hold of his *buddhi* and induces it to justify any and every action he commits or any avoidance of action; but still the justification or at least the reference to the *buddhi* must be there either before or after the action is committed. And, besides, in man *sattwa* is awake and acts not only as intelligence and intelligent will, but (i) as a seeking for light, (ii) for right knowledge and right action according to that knowledge, (iii) as a sympathetic perception of the existence and claims of others, (iv) as an attempt to know the higher law of his own nature, which the *sattwic* principle in him creates, and to obey it, and as a conception

of the greater peace and happiness which virtue, knowledge and sympathy bring in their train. He knows more or less imperfectly **that he has to govern his *rajasic* and *tamasic* by his *sattwic* nature** and that thither (=towards that) tends the perfection of his normal humanity.

## Does human being have free will?

**But is the condition of the predominantly *sattwic* nature freedom, and is this will in man a free will?** That, the Gita from the standpoint of a higher consciousness in which alone is true freedom, denies. The *buddhi* or conscious intelligent will is still an instrument of Nature and when it acts, even in the most *sattwic* sense, it is still Nature which acts and the soul which is carried on the wheel by Maya.

... He (man) is enslaved by the *gunas*, now hampered in the dull case of *tamas*, now blown by the strong winds of *rajas*, now limited by the partial lights of *sattwa*, **not distinguishing himself at all from the nature-mind which alone is thus modified by the *gunas***. He is therefore mastered by pain and pleasure, happiness and grief, desire and passion, attachment and disgust: **he has no freedom**.

- To escape from this tangle, **to rise beyond the ignorance, the ego and the *gunas*** is the first real step towards divine perfection. By that transcendence the Jiva finds his own divine nature and his true existence.

## Why are *gunas* qualitative and not quantitative?

The modes of Nature are all qualitative in their essence and are called for that reason its *gunas* or qualities (=a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something). In any spiritual conception of the universe this must be so, because the connecting medium between spirit and matter must be psyche or soul power and the primary action psychological and qualitative, not physical and quantitative; for quality is the immaterial (=spiritual, rather than physical), the more spiritual element in all the action of the universal Energy, her prior dynamics.

- The predominance of physical Science has accustomed us to a different view of Nature, because there the first thing that strikes us is the importance of the quantitative aspect of her workings and her dependence for the creation of forms on quantitative combinations and dispositions. And yet even there the discovery that matter is rather substance or act of energy than energy, a motive power of self-existent material substance or an inherent power acting in matter, has led to some revival of an older reading of universal Nature.
- The analysis of the ancient Indian thinkers allowed for the quantitative action of Nature, *matra*; but that it regarded as proper to its more objective and formally executive working, while the innately ideative executive power which disposes things according to the quality of their being and energy, *guna*, *svabhava*, is the primary determinant and underlies all the outer quantitative dispositions. In the basis of the physical world this is not apparent only because there the underlying ideative spirit, the *Mahad Brahman*, is overlaid and hidden up by the movement of matter and material energy.

But in fact the mental, the vital, the physical existence are all subject to the limitations of quality, all are governed by its determinations, even though that truth seems more and more obscured as we descend the scale of existence. Only the Spirit, which by the power of its idea-being and its idea-force called *mahat* and *vijnana* fixes these conditions, is not so determined, **not subject to any limitations either of quality or quantity** because its immeasurable and indeterminable infinity is superior to the modes which it develops and uses for its creation. (Gita 14-3)

But, again, the whole qualitative action of Nature, **so infinitely intricate in its detail and variety, is figured as cast into the mould of three general modes of quality**, everywhere present, intertwined, almost inextricable, *sattwa*, *rajas*, *tamas*. These modes are described in the Gita only

by their **psychological action** in man or incidentally in things such as food according as they produce a psychological or vital effect on human beings.

### Why these three?

If we look for a more general definition, we shall perhaps catch a glimpse of it in the symbolic idea of Indian religion which attributes each of these qualities respectively to one member of the **cosmic Trinity**,

- **sattwa** to the preserver **Vishnu**,
- **rajas** to the creator **Brahma**,
- **tamas** to the destroyer **Rudra**.

Looking behind this idea for the rationale of the triple ascription (=Assigning some quality or character to a person or thing), we might define the three modes or qualities in terms of the motion of the universal Energy as Nature's three concomitant and inseparable powers of (i) equilibrium, (ii) kinesis and (iii) inertia.

Therefore, since consciousness is always there even in an apparently unconscious Force, we must find a corresponding psychological power of these three modes which informs their more outward executive action.

On their psychological side the three qualities may be defined,

- **tamas** as Nature's power of nescience (Ignorance),
- **rajas** as her power of active seeking ignorance enlightened by desire and impulsion,
- **sattwa** as her power of possessing and harmonising knowledge.

The three qualitative modes of Nature are inextricably intertwined in all cosmic existence.

### Mixed, varied and varying composition in human beings

These three qualities of Nature are evidently present and active in all human beings and none can be said to be quite devoid of one and another or free from any one of the three; **none is cast in the mould of one guna to the exclusion of the others**. All men have in them in whatever degree,

- the *rajasic* impulse of desire and activity and
- the *sattwic* boon of light and happiness, some balance, some adjustment of mind to itself and its surroundings and objects, and
- all have their share of *tamasic* incapacity and ignorance or nescience.

But **these qualities are not constant in any man** in the quantitative action of their force or in the combination of their elements; **for they are variable and in a continual state of mutual impact, displacement and interaction**. Now one leads, now another increases and predominates, and each subjects us to its characteristic action and consequences. Only **by a general and ordinary predominance** of one or other of the qualities can a man be said to be either *sattwic* or *rajasic* or *tamasic* in his nature; **but this can only be a general and not an exclusive or absolute description**.

### General classes of Human beings

The general nature of all human beings is the same, it is a mixture of the three *gunas*; it would seem then **that in all there must be the capacity to develop and strengthen the *sattwic* element** and turn it upward towards the heights of the divine transformation.

- That **our ordinary turn is actually towards making our reason and will the servants of our *rajasic* or *tamasic* egoism**, the ministers of our restless and ill-balanced kinetic desire or our self-indulgent indolence, and static inertia, can only be, one would imagine, a temporary

characteristic of our undeveloped spiritual being, a rawness of its imperfect evolution and must disappear when our consciousness rises in the spiritual scale.

- But we actually see that men, at least men above a certain level, **fall very largely into two classes**,
  - **those who have a dominant force of *sattwic* nature** turned towards knowledge, self-control, beneficence, perfection **and**
  - **those who have a dominant force of *rajasic* nature** turned towards egoistic greatness, satisfaction of desire, the indulgence of their own strong will and personality which they seek to impose on the world, not for the service of man or God, but for their own pride, glory and pleasure.

**These are the human representatives of the Devas and Danavas or Asuras**, the Gods and the Titans.

### **All Creation is *trigunatmic***

For, everything here, **including physical things**, partakes of this triple character... **All pervading is the principle of the three *gunas***. The *gunas* apply at the other end in the same way **to the things of the mind and spirit**, to sacrifice, giving and askesis, and the Gita distinguishes under each of these three heads between the three kinds in the customary terms of these things as they were formulated by the symbolism of the old Indian culture. (Gita 17-7)

It is this element of the *gunas* that makes all the difference to our view of the thing known and to the spirit in which the knower does his work. (Gita 18-19)

### ***Triguna*, bondage & works**

But then there is the question, how does our infinite and imperishable spirit, even involved in Nature, come thus to confine itself to the lower action of Prakriti and undergo this bondage and how is it not, like the supreme spirit of which it is a portion, free in its infinity even while enjoying the self-limitations of its active evolution?

- **The reason**, says the Gita, **is our attachment to the *gunas* and to the result of their workings**. *Sattwa*, it says, attaches to happiness, *rajas* attaches to action, *tamas* covers up the knowledge and attaches to negligence of error and inaction.
- Or again, “***sattwa* binds** by attachment to knowledge and attachment to happiness, ***rajas* binds** the embodied spirit by attachment to works, ***tamas* binds** by (attachment to) negligence and indolence and sleep.”
- In other words, **the soul by attachment to the enjoyment of the *gunas* and their results, concentrates its consciousness on the lower and outward action of life, mind and body in Nature, imprisons itself in the form of these things and becomes oblivious of its own greater consciousness behind in the spirit, unaware of the free power and scope of the liberating Purusha.**

**Evidently, in order to be liberated and perfect, we must get back from these things, away from the *gunas* and above them and return to the power of that free spiritual consciousness above Nature.** (Gita 14-9)

### **Giving up fruits of action or action itself**

But this would seem to imply a cessation of all doing, since all natural action is done by the *gunas*, by Nature through her modes. The soul cannot act by itself, it can only act through Nature and her modes. And yet the Gita, while it demands freedom from the modes, insists upon the necessity of action.



Here comes in the importance of its insistence on the abandonment of the fruits; for it is the desire of the fruits which is the most potent cause of the soul's bondage and by abandoning it the soul can be free in action.

- Ignorance is the result of *tamasic* action, pain the consequence of *rajasic* works, pain of reaction, disappointment, dissatisfaction or transience (=the state or fact of lasting only for a short time), and therefore in attachment to the fruits of this kind of activity attended as they are with these undesirable accompaniments there is no profit.
- But of works rightly done the fruit is pure and *sattwic*, the inner result is knowledge and happiness. **Yet attachment even to these pleasurable things must be entirely abandoned,**
  - first, because in the mind they are limited and limiting forms and
  - secondly because, since *sattwa* is constantly entangled with and besieged by *rajas* and *tamas* which may at any moment overcome it, there is a perpetual insecurity in their tenure.
- But, even if one is free from any clinging to the fruit, **there may be an attachment to the work itself,**
  - either for its own sake, the essential *rajasic* bond, or
  - owing to a lax subjection to the drive of Nature, the *tamasic*, or
  - for the sake of the attracting rightness of the thing done which is the *sattwic* attaching cause, powerful on the virtuous man or the man of knowledge.

And here evidently the resource is in that other injunction of the Gita, **to give up the action itself to the Lord of works and be only a desire-less and equal-minded instrument of his will.** To see that the modes of Nature are the whole agency and cause of our works and to know and turn to that which is supreme above the *gunas*, is the way to rise above the lower nature. **Only so can we attain to the movement and status of the Divine *mad-bhava*,** by which free from subjection to birth and death and their concomitants decay, old age and suffering, the liberated soul shall enjoy in the end immortality and all that is eternal.

### Signs of a man above *trigunas*

But what, asks Arjuna, **are the signs of such a man,** what his action and how is he said even in action to be above the three *gunas*?

**The sign,** says Krishna, **is that equality** of which I have **so constantly** spoken;

- the sign is that inwardly he regards happiness and suffering alike, gold and mud and stone as of equal value and that to him the pleasant and the unpleasant, praise and blame, honour and insult, the faction of his friends and the faction of his enemies are equal things.
- **He is steadfast in a wise, imperturbable and immutable inner calm and quietude.**
- He initiates no action, but leaves all works to be done by the *gunas* of Nature.

***Sattwa*, *rajas* or *tamas* may rise or cease** in his outer mentality and his physical movements **with their results of enlightenment, of impulsion to works or of inaction and the clouding over of the mental and nervous being, but he does not rejoice when this comes or that ceases, nor on the other hand does he abhor or shrink from the operation or the cessation of these things.**

**He has seated himself in the conscious light of another principle than the nature of the *gunas* and that greater consciousness remains steadfast in him,** above these powers and unshaken by their motions like the sun above clouds to one who has risen into a higher atmosphere. **He from that height sees that it is the *gunas* that are in process of action** and that their storm and calm are not himself but only a movement of *Prakriti*; **his self is immovable above and his spirit does not participate in that shifting mutability of things unstable.**

This is the impersonality of the Brahmic status; for, that higher principle, that greater wide high-seated consciousness, *kutastha*, is the immutable Brahman. (Gita 14-21 to 14-25)

## Ishwara and Prakriti

On the other hand it is no less clearly, no less emphatically laid down **that in every natural existence here on earth the three *gunas* are there in their inextricable working and it is even said that all action of man or creature or force is merely the action of these three modes upon each other**, a functioning in which **one or other predominates and the rest modify its operation and results**, *guna gunesu varante*. How then can there be another dynamic and kinetic nature or any other kind of works?

...The Ishwara, the Supreme who is master of all her works, and functions and guides and determines them by his divine will, **is indeed above this mechanism of quality, not touched or limited by her modes**, but still it would seem that he acts always through them, always shapes by the power of the swabhava and through the psychological machinery of the *gunas*. These three are fundamental properties of Prakriti, necessary operations of the executive Nature-force which takes shape here in us, and **the Jiva himself is only a portion of the Divine in this Prakriti**.

.... But the Gita has said exactly the opposite that the liberated Yogin is delivered from the *guna* reactions and whatever he does, however he lives, moves and acts in God, in the power of his freedom and immortality, in the law of the supreme eternal Infinite, *sarvatha vartamanopi sa yogi mayi vartate* (Gita 6-31)

...What moves the world is not really the modes of Prakriti,—these are only the lower aspect, the mechanism of our normal nature. **The real motive power is a divine spiritual Will** which uses at present these inferior conditions, but is itself not limited, not dominated, not mechanised, as is the human will, by the *gunas*. **No doubt, since these modes are so universal in their action, they must proceed from something inherent in the power of the Spirit**; there must be powers in the divine Will-force from which these aspects of Prakriti have their origin. **For, everything in the lower normal nature is derived from the higher spiritual power of being of the Purushottama, *mattah pravartate***; it does not come into being *de novo* (=starting from the beginning; anew) and without a spiritual cause. Something in the essential power of the spirit there must be from which the *sattwic* light and satisfaction, the *rajasic* kinesis, the *tamasic* inertia of our nature are derivations and of which they are the imperfect or degraded forms. **But once we get back to these sources in their purity above this imperfection and degradation of them in which we live, we shall find that these motions put on a quite different aspect as soon as we begin to live in the spirit.**

Being and action, and the modes of being and action become altogether different things, far above their present limited appearance.

... **The soul that lives in God acts by this spiritual will and not by the normal will of the unliberated mind**: its kinesis takes place by this spiritual force and not by the *rajasic* mode of Nature, precisely because it no longer lives in the lower movement to which that deformation belongs, but has got back in the divine nature to the pure and perfect sense of the kinesis.

## Triguna & Liberation

The Gita has laid it down from the beginning **that the very first precondition of the divine birth, the higher existence is the slaying of *rajasic* desire and its children**, and that means the exclusion of sin... And in order to get rid of this crude compulsion of the being by the lower Prakriti in its inferior modes we must have recourse to the highest mode of that Prakriti, the *sattwic*, which is seeking always for a harmonious light of knowledge and for a right rule of action... **The *sattwic* will in our nature has to govern us and not the *rajasic* and *tamasic* will. This is the meaning of all high reason in action as of all true ethical culture**; it is the law of Nature in us striving to evolve from her lower and disorderly to her higher and orderly action, to act not in passion and ignorance with the



result of grief and unquiet, but in knowledge and enlightened will with the result of inner happiness, poise and peace. **We cannot get beyond the three *gunas*, if we do not first develop within ourselves the rule of the highest *guna*, *sattwa*.**

## **Purushottama, greater than Akshara & kshara**

But still **there is evidently here a double status**, there is a scission of the being between two opposites: **a liberated spirit in the immutable Self or Brahman watches the action of an unliberated mutable Nature,—Akshara and Kshara.**

- Is there no greater status, no principle of more absolute perfection, or is this division the highest consciousness possible in the body, and
- is the end of Yoga to drop the mutable nature and the *gunas* born of the embodiment in Nature and disappear into the impersonality and everlasting peace of the Brahman? **Is that *laya* or dissolution of the individual Purusha the greatest liberation?**

**There is, it would seem, something else;** for the Gita says at the close, always returning to this one final note, **“He also who loves and strives after Me with an undeviating love and adoration, passes beyond the three *gunas* and he too is prepared for becoming the Brahman.” This “I” is the Purushottama** who is the foundation of the silent Brahman and of immortality and imperishable spiritual existence and of the eternal dharma and of an utter bliss of happiness. **There is a status then which is greater than the peace of the Akshara as it watches unmoved the strife of the *gunas*.** There is a highest spiritual experience and foundation above the immutability of the Brahman, there is an eternal dharma greater than the *rajasic* impulsion to works, *pravrtti*, there is an absolute delight which is untouched by *rajasic* suffering and beyond the *sattwic* happiness, **and these things are found and possessed by dwelling in the being and power of the Purushottama.**

**But since it is acquired by bhakti, its status must be that divine delight, Ananda,** in which is experienced the union of utter love [*niratisaya-prema-aspadatvam anandatattvam*] and possessing oneness the crown of bhakti. **And to rise into that Ananda, into that imperishable oneness, must be the completion of spiritual perfection and the fulfilment of the eternal immortalising dharma.** (Gita 14-26, 14-27)

And while among the *gunas* of the lower Nature there is a necessary disequilibrium, a shifting inconstancy of measures and a perpetual struggle for domination, (i) the greater light and bliss, (ii) calm, (iii) will of kinesis of the Spirit do not exclude each other, are not at war, are not even merely in equilibrium, but each an aspect of the two others and in their fullness all are inseparable and one.

**Our mind when it approaches the Divine may seem to enter into one to the exclusion of another,** may appear for instance to achieve calm to the exclusion of kinesis of action, but that is because we approach him first through the selecting spirit in the mind. **Afterwards when we are able to rise above even the spiritual mind, we can see that each divine power contains all the rest and can get rid of this initial error.** [*The account given here of the supreme spiritual and supramental forms of highest Nature action corresponding to the *gunas* is not derived from the Gita, but introduced from spiritual experience. The Gita does not describe in any detail the action of the highest Nature, rahasyam uttamam; it leaves that for the seeker to discover by his own spiritual experience. It only points out the nature of the high *sattwic* temperament and action through which this supreme mystery has to be reached and insists at the same time on the overpassing of Sattwa and transcendence of the three *gunas*.]*

We see then that **action is possible without the subjection of the soul to the normal degraded functioning of the modes of Nature.** That functioning depends on the mental, vital and physical limitation into which we are cast; it is a deformation, an incapacity, a wrong or depressed value imposed on us by the mind and life in matter. **When we grow into the spirit, this dharma or inferior law of Nature is replaced by the immortal dharma of the spirit;** there is the experience of a free immortal action, a divine illimitable knowledge, a transcendent power, an unfathomable repose.

## Transformation from lower Nature to highest state

But still there remains the question of the transition; **for there must be a transition, a proceeding by steps, since nothing in God's workings in this world is done by an abrupt action without procedure or basis.** We have the thing we seek in us, but we have in practice to evolve it out of the inferior forms of our nature. [This is from the point of view of **our nature ascending upwards by self-conquest, effort and discipline.** There must also intervene more and more **a descent of the divine Light, Presence and Power into the being to transform it; otherwise the change at the point of culmination and beyond it cannot take place. That is why there comes in as the last movement the necessity of an absolute self-surrender].**

Therefore in the action of the modes itself there must be some means, some leverage, some *point d'appui* (=a support or prop), by which we can effect this transformation. **The Gita finds it in the full development of the *sattwic guna* till that in its potent expansion reaches a point at which it can go beyond itself and disappear into its source.** The reason is evident, because *sattwa* is a power of light and happiness, a force that makes for calm and knowledge, and at its highest point it can arrive at a certain reflection, **almost a mental identity with the spiritual light and bliss** from which it derives.

**The other two *gunas* cannot get this transformation, *rajas* into the divine kinetic will or *tamas* into the divine repose and calm, without the intervention of the *sattwic* power in Nature.**

### ***Traigunatītya***

***Trigunatītya*, transcendence of the *gunas*,** is the unperturbed spirit's superiority to that flux of action of the modes of Nature which is in its constant character perturbed and unequal; if it has to enter into relations with the conflicting and unequal activities of Nature, if the free soul is to allow its nature any action at all, it must show its superiority by an impartial equality towards all activities, results or happenings.

**And yet this liberation does not at all prevent him from acting.** Only, he knows that it is not he who is active, but the modes, the qualities of Nature, her triple *gunas*. He himself, safe in the immutable, unmodified soul, is beyond the grip of the three *gunas*, *trigunatītya*; he is neither *sattwic*, *rajasic* nor *tamasic*; he sees with a clear untroubled spirit the alternations of the natural modes and qualities in his action, their rhythmic play of light and happiness, activity and force, rest and inertia. **This superiority of the calm soul observing its action but not involved in it, this *traigunatītya*, is also a high sign of the divine worker.**

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