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The Inner Framework of Personality: Pañca-Kośa, Guṇas, and Antaḥkaraṇa in Dialogue with Cognitive Neuroscience

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Abstract

Personality has been widely examined in Western psychology through psychoanalytic, trait, humanistic, and social–cognitive theories, which offer important insights into behavior, emotion, and cognition. However, these approaches largely emphasize observable psychological processes and often give limited attention to the deeper dimensions of inner awareness and consciousness. Indian philosophical traditions provide a more holistic understanding of personality by viewing the human being as an integration of body, vital energy, mind, intellect, and consciousness. Concepts such as Pañca-Kośa, Triguṇa, Antaḥkaraṇa, and the three bodies (*sthūla, sūkṣma,* and *kāraṇa śarīra*) describe personality as a gradual movement toward self-awareness and inner balance, emphasizing ethical discipline, mental refinement, and contemplative practices as central to human development. The present study aims to examine personality from both Western psychological and Indian philosophical perspectives, to explore the relevance of Yogic concepts in understanding human nature, and to identify points of convergence with contemporary cognitive neuroscience. Adopting a qualitative textual research approach, the study draws upon classical Indian scriptures including the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, and Yoga Sūtras, along with established psychological literature and neuroscientific research. Comparative and thematic analysis is employed to interpret conceptual relationships across traditions. The findings suggest that personality is not a fixed set of traits but a dynamic and evolving process shaped by awareness, ethical orientation, and inner transformation. This integrative understanding contributes to transpersonal psychology by offering a consciousness-centered framework with implications for education, mental health, and holistic human development.

Keywords: Personality, Transpersonal Psychology, Yoga Psychology, Pañca-Kośa, Triguṇa, Antaḥkaraṇa, Consciousness

1.1 INTRODUCATION

Personality can be understood as a multifaceted and dynamic aspect of human nature that reflects the habitual ways in which individuals think, feel, and behave in their daily lives. It is not limited to a single dimension; rather, it embraces cognitive processes, emotional responses, behavioral patterns, and even physiological tendencies. Together, these dimensions shape how a person relates to others, makes choices, and responds to the demands and challenges of the surrounding environment. In this sense, personality serves as the inner structure that guides a person's overall conduct, experiences, and way of engaging with

the world. Historically, the field of personality psychology has been largely shaped by Western theoretical traditions, which have introduced a variety of frameworks to explain and measure individual differences. Among these approaches, Trait Theory has received significant attention for its systematic understanding of personality. The well-known Five-Factor Model proposed by Costa and McCrae describes personality in terms of relatively enduring and measurable traits (Costa & McCrae, 2008). These traits provide a useful lens through which an individual's characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving can be observed, interpreted, and scientifically examined. Personality is the unique configuration of an individual's qualities, emotions, and ways of thinking that shapes how they perceive, understand, and respond to the world around them. It is not merely a collection of fixed characteristics; rather, it is a living, evolving, and integrated system that deeply influences a person's mental balance, self-awareness, and interactions with others. In this way, personality becomes the foundational force that guides an individual's overall behaviour, life experiences, and orientation toward the world (Singer, 2005).

Personality forms the foundation of how an individual thinks, works, and influences the world around them. It shapes the way a person faces challenges, makes decisions, builds relationships, and moves toward personal and professional goals. Whether in education, the workplace, leadership, social life, or spiritual pursuit, personality plays a central role in shaping identity, capability, and direction. Therefore, understanding personality is important not only from a psychological point of view, but also for achieving balance, effectiveness, and success in every area of life.

An integrative understanding of personality requires moving beyond isolated psychological models toward a more comprehensive vision of human nature. The Five-Factor Model (FFM) provides a scientifically validated structure for describing personality traits and their pathological expressions. Rather than viewing personality disorders as fixed diagnostic categories, this model interprets them as maladaptive intensifications or imbalanced configurations of normal traits. Such a dimensional approach enhances diagnostic sensitivity and corresponds with contemporary revisions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Widiger & Costa, 2013, pp. 421–423).

Classical psychoanalytic theory, emphasizes the influence of unconscious, early childhood experiences, and intrapsychic conflicts in shaping personality impulses (Freud 1923, pp. 12–15). Expanding this framework, introduced a psychosocial perspective, proposing that personality continues to evolve through social interaction and developmental challenges across the life span (Erikson 1950, pp. 219–235). Together, these theories highlight the dynamic and developmental nature of personality formation.

Humanistic psychology further deepened this understanding by emphasizing human potential and conscious growth (Maslow 1943, pp. 370–396). Personality development as a movement toward self-actualization, while (Rogers 1961, pp. 115–120) stressed self-awareness, authenticity, and the innate tendency toward psychological integration. In a complementary manner, Bandura's social–cognitive theory explained personality through reciprocal determinism, wherein behavior, cognition, and environmental influences continuously interact.

Although these Western frameworks offer valuable explanations of personality in terms of behavior, emotion, and cognition, they largely remain confined to observable or measurable psychological domains. The deeper experiential dimensions of consciousness, self-awareness, and inner transformation—central to Eastern psychological traditions—receive limited attention within these models. Yoga Psychology provides a broader and more integrative understanding of personality by viewing the human being as a multilayered continuum of consciousness. According to yogic philosophy, personality is not merely a mental construct but an evolving expression of consciousness functioning through multiple levels of

existence. This is systematically explained through the theory of Pañcakosha, which describes five interrelated layers of human experience: the physical body (Annamaya), vital energy (Prāṇamaya), mental–emotional processes (Manomaya), intellectual–discriminative faculty (Vijñānamaya), and the innermost dimension of bliss and awareness (Ānandamaya). From this perspective, personality disturbances are not limited to mental imbalance alone but may arise due to disharmony across these interdependent layers.

In addition, Yoga Psychology explains individual differences in personality through the Triguṇa theory, which describes three fundamental qualities of nature—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. These guṇas influence cognition, emotion, motivation, behavior, and ethical orientation. A predominantly sattvic personality reflects clarity, balance, and self-awareness, whereas excessive rajas manifests as restlessness and emotional agitation, and tamas expresses inertia, confusion, and psychological dullness. Unlike static trait theories, the Triguṇa model emphasizes the dynamic and transformable nature of personality, allowing conscious evolution through yogic discipline.

When viewed integratively, Western personality theories explain *how* personality functions at the psychological and behavioral level, while yogic psychology explains *why* personality manifests differently across individuals and *how* it can be consciously refined. The integration of FFM with Pañcakosha and Triguṇa frameworks allows personality to be understood simultaneously as a measurable psychological structure and as a process of inner transformation. Such a synthesis bridges empirical psychology with contemplative science, offering a holistic model that aligns mental health with self-awareness, ethical living, and spiritual growth.

The Pañca-Kośa theory described in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* explains human personality as a multi-layered structure. According to this view, the human being is not limited to the physical body alone but exists through five interrelated layers, each influencing behavior, awareness, and inner experience.

The first layer is the Annamaya Kośa, the physical sheath formed and sustained by food. Physical health, nutrition, and bodily strength directly affect energy levels and behavior. The Upaniṣad states, *"अन्नात् पुरुषः। स वा एष पुरुषोऽन्नरसमयः"*, meaning "From food the human being is born; the body is truly made of food" (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1). The second layer, the Prāṇamaya Kośa, represents vital life energy (*prāṇa*). It governs breathing, circulation, and overall vitality, and plays an important role in maintaining physical and mental balance. The Manomaya Kośa, the third layer, relates to the mind. It includes thoughts, emotions, desires, and sensory perceptions, shaping daily reactions and emotional patterns. Beyond this lies the Vijñānamaya Kośa, associated with intellect, discrimination, understanding, and moral judgment. This sheath supports decision-making, clarity of thought, and ethical awareness. The innermost layer is the Ānandamaya Kośa, described as the sheath of bliss. It is experienced as deep peace, contentment, and spiritual fulfillment, as explained in the *Bhrigu Valli* of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*.

Indian philosophy further explains personality through the concept of the three Guṇas—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. The *Bhagavad Gītā* (14.5–14.7) states that *Sattva* represents purity, balance, and knowledge; *Rajas* represents activity, desire, and restlessness; and *Tamas* represents inertia, ignorance, and confusion (Prabhupada, 2006). These qualities constantly interact within an individual, creating differences in temperament and behavior. When *Sattva* dominates, a person shows calmness, compassion, and clarity. Dominance of *Rajas* or *Tamas* leads to excessive desire, instability, or dullness of mind.

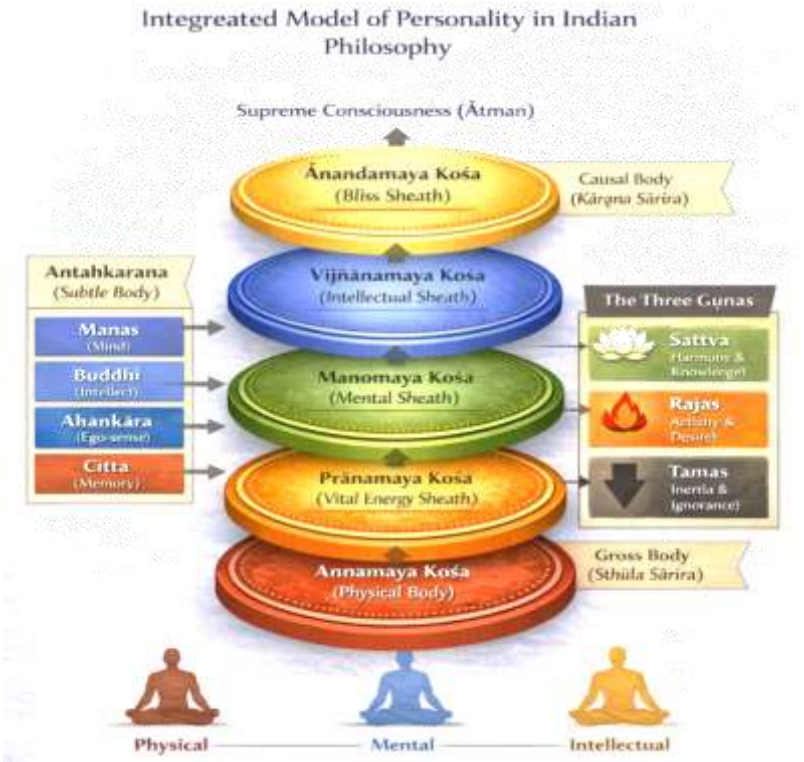
This understanding is further supported by the theory of the three Śarīras (bodies)—the Gross (*Sthūla*), Subtle (*Sūkṣma*), and Causal (*Kāraṇa*) bodies. The Gross body corresponds to the Annamaya Kośa; the Subtle body includes the Prāṇamaya, Manomaya, and Vijñānamaya Kośas; and the Causal body relates to

the Ānandamaya Kośa (Srivastava, 2012). Together, these bodies explain the gradual movement of consciousness from the physical level toward spiritual realization. Within the Subtle body operates the Antaḥkaraṇa, the inner psychological system consisting of *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Ahaṃkāra* (ego), and *Citta* (memory). These components guide perception, emotional response, decision-making, and the sense of self.

Interestingly, modern cognitive neuroscience shows meaningful similarities with these traditional ideas. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for reasoning and self-control, reflects the functions of Buddhi and the Vijñānamaya Kośa. The limbic system, including the amygdala and hippocampus, regulates emotions and memory, corresponding to the Manomaya Kośa and Citta. The brainstem and autonomic nervous system maintain physiological balance, resembling the role of the Prāṇamaya Kośa (Davidson & McEwen, 2012). In addition, the Default Mode Network (DMN), which becomes active during self-reflection and inner awareness, parallels the experience of the Ānandamaya Kośa associated with peace and consciousness (Raichle, 2015).

Yoga ethics also play an important role in shaping personality. Practices such as Yama and Niyama help cultivate *Sattvic* qualities. Principles like *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), and *Tapas* (self-discipline) support emotional balance, moral strength, and inner stability (Iyengar, 2001). When these disciplines are neglected, *Rajas* and *Tamas* tend to dominate, leading to impulsive behavior, mental unrest, or confusion.

Figure:1 Integrated Model of Personality in Indian Philosophy.



This figure illustrates a holistic model of personality based on Indian philosophy. It shows how the five Kośas—from the physical body to the deepest level of bliss—interact with the Antaḥkaraṇa (mind, intellect, ego, and memory). The three Guṇas—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas—continuously influence these layers, shaping thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Overall, the diagram highlights that personality arises from the combined effects of bodily, mental, intellectual, and subtle dimensions working together.

Thus, Indian philosophy presents personality as a multidimensional integration of body, mind, and consciousness. Cognitive neuroscience complements this by identifying neural mechanisms that correspond to these levels. Personality, therefore, is not only shaped by genetics or environment but also by ethical conduct, mental discipline, and spiritual awareness. This synthesis between ancient wisdom and modern science reveals that personality evolves through both psychological development and spiritual realization, influencing every aspect of human life—from emotions and relationships to creativity and self-transcendence.

Table 1: Comparative Mapping of Western Personality Dimensions and Indian Psychophysical Constructs with Cognitive Neuroscience Markers.

Western Traits	Guṇas	Pańca-Kośa	Three Bodies	Antaḥkaraṇa	Cognitive Neuroscience Markers
Extraversion, Openness	Rajas	Pranamaya, Manomaya	Subtle Body	Mana (Mind)	Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex activation; mesolimbic reward pathways
Conscientiousness, Agreeableness	Sattva	Vijnanamaya	Subtle/Causal	Buddhi (Intellect)	Prefrontal cortical control; anterior cingulate cortex
Neuroticism	Tamas	Annamaya, Manomaya	Gross & Subtle Body	Ahamkara (Ego)	Amygdala hyperactivity; HPA-axis dysregulation
Creativity, Insight	Sattva-Rajas balance	Anandamaya	Causal Body	Chitta (Memory, Consciousness)	Default Mode Network activity; hippocampal engagement
Impulsivity, Restlessness	Rajas-Tamas	Pranamaya	Subtle Body	Mana-Ahamkara interaction	Dopaminergic reward circuits; limbic system

The table highlights the interconnectedness of traditional and modern frameworks, demonstrating that personality traits emerge from complex interactions across physical, vital, mental, and intellectual layers, modulated by Guṇas, and mirrored in neural circuits.

The concept of the three bodies—Gross (*Sthūla Śarīra*), Subtle (*Sūkṣma Śarīra*), and Causal (*Kāraṇa Śarīra*)—helps in clearly understanding the Pañcakośa system. The Gross body corresponds to the Annamaya Kośa, representing the physical aspect of human existence. The Subtle body includes the Prāṇamaya, Manomaya, and Vijñānamaya Kośas, which together regulate life energy, emotional responses, mental activity, and intellectual functioning. The Causal body is associated with the Ānandamaya Kośa, which reflects deeper consciousness, inner peace, and bliss (Srivastava, 2012).

Within the Subtle body functions the Antaḥkaraṇa, the inner psychological system composed of *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Ahaṃkāra* (ego), and *Citta* (memory). These components collectively influence perception, emotional reactions, decision-making, and the formation of self-identity.

Modern cognitive neuroscience offers meaningful scientific parallels to these traditional ideas. The prefrontal regions of the brain, especially the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, are responsible for reasoning, self-control, planning, and decision-making. These functions closely resemble the role of Vijñānamaya Kośa and *Buddhi*. Emotional regulation and memory processing are carried out by the limbic system, including the amygdala and hippocampus, which reflect the functions of Manomaya Kośa and *Citta*. The brainstem and autonomic nervous system maintain physiological balance and vital functioning, similar to the role of Prāṇamaya Kośa, and are influenced by *Rajas* and *Tamas* (Davidson & McEwen, 2012).

The Default Mode Network (DMN), which becomes active during introspection, creativity, and self-reflection, shows similarities with the Ānandamaya Kośa, associated with inner awareness and blissful states of consciousness (Raichle, 2015).

Ethical and behavioral disciplines also play a significant role in personality development. According to Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, the practices of Yama and Niyama provide a moral foundation for psychological balance. Observing values such as *Satya* (truthfulness), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), and *Tapas* (self-discipline) encourages the growth of *Sattvic* qualities, leading to stability, emotional maturity, and harmony in personality. When these disciplines are ignored, *Rajas* and *Tamas* may dominate, resulting in impulsive behavior, excessive desire, confusion, or mental disturbance (Iyengar, 2001).

By integrating Western personality trait theories with the concepts of Guṇas, Pañcakośa, the three bodies, Antaḥkaraṇa, and findings from cognitive neuroscience, a comprehensive understanding of personality emerges. This integrated approach places observable behavior, emotional patterns, and cognitive tendencies within wider physiological and spiritual contexts. Such a framework is valuable not only for theoretical study but also for practical applications in mental health care, meditation-based therapies, and personality development programs.

In conclusion, personality can be understood as a complex interaction between biological processes, mental functions, emotional tendencies, and spiritual awareness. Western psychology provides structured tools for measurement and intervention, while Indian philosophical systems offer deeper insight into inner transformation and consciousness. Cognitive neuroscience acts as a connecting bridge by identifying neural patterns related to thought, emotion, and awareness that align with Yogic principles. When these perspectives are combined, they offer a richer and more balanced understanding of personality, supporting holistic growth, well-being, and the possibility of self-realization.

1.2 Western Models of Personality

Western psychology explains personality through several theoretical approaches, each focusing on different aspects of human behaviour and experience. The psychoanalytic model, introduced by Sigmund Freud, emphasised the role of unconscious motives and early childhood experiences in shaping personality (McLeod, 2019). Later thinkers such as Jung and Erikson expanded this view by examining symbolic patterns, archetypes, and social stages of development across the lifespan.

The humanistic approach, developed by Maslow and Rogers, presented a more positive understanding of human nature. This perspective viewed individuals as capable of choice, growth, and self-development, with personality shaped by meaning, values, and personal experience (Feist et al., 2020).

The trait perspective, beginning with Allport and later refined into the Five-Factor Model, focused on identifying stable characteristics of personality. Traits such as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were proposed as universal dimensions present across cultures (McCrae & Costa, 2010).

Social-cognitive theories, especially those proposed by Bandura and Mischel, highlighted the continuous interaction between thought, behaviour, and environment. This interactional process, known as reciprocal determinism, explains personality as flexible and context-dependent rather than fixed (Funder, 2023). Together, these Western models form the foundation of modern psychology. They provide valuable insight into individual differences, emotional regulation, motivation, and behaviour, and continue to guide psychotherapy, personality assessment, and neuroscientific research.

1.2.1 Psychoanalytic Perspective

The psychoanalytic approach, initiated by Sigmund Freud, was among the earliest systematic attempts to explain personality through the interaction of conscious and unconscious mental processes. Freud proposed the structural model of personality consisting of the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. The *id* represents instinctual desires, the *ego* mediates between inner impulses and external reality, and the *superego* functions as the moral guide. Personality develops through the ego's ongoing effort to balance these forces (Freud, 1923).

Later theorists expanded Freud's ideas in important ways. Alfred Adler emphasised the individual's striving for superiority and the role of social interest in shaping behaviour and self-concept (Adler, 1939). Erik Erikson reinterpreted personality development as a lifelong process involving psychosocial conflicts, ranging from trust versus mistrust in infancy to integrity versus despair in old age (Erikson, 1963). Carl Jung introduced the concepts of the personal and collective unconscious, suggesting that archetypes such as the *shadow* and *anima* influence personality, creativity, and meaning-making (Jung, 1969).

Together, these psychoanalytic views describe personality as a dynamic and evolving process shaped by unconscious forces, symbolic patterns, and internal conflicts.

Within the broader framework of "From Consciousness to Cognition: the Pañca-Kośa framework and antaḥkaraṇa in light of cognitive neuroscience," psychoanalytic thought finds meaningful parallels. The emphasis on unconscious processes resembles the Yogic understanding of subtler layers of the self, where inner tendencies and impressions gradually move toward awareness. In both systems, transformation occurs through the gradual integration of hidden forces into conscious understanding.

1.2.2 Humanistic Perspective

The humanistic approach emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a response to the deterministic views of psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Humanistic psychologists emphasised freedom, personal meaning, and the innate potential for growth. Abraham Maslow proposed the hierarchy of needs, suggesting that human motivation progresses from basic survival needs toward higher psychological fulfilment and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943).

Carl Rogers further developed this perspective by focusing on the *self-concept*. According to Rogers, psychological well-being depends on congruence between one's real self and ideal self. He emphasised empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity as essential conditions for healthy personality development (Rogers, 1961).

Humanistic psychology therefore views personality not as a fixed structure, but as an ongoing process of becoming. In contemporary psychology, this tradition continues through positive psychology, which explores wellbeing, strengths, flow, and meaning in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within an

integrative Yogic framework, the humanistic view closely parallels the movement through the kośas—from *annamaya* toward *ānandamaya*. Both perspectives recognise growth, self-awareness, and inner integration as essential to personality development. From a cognitive and neuroscientific standpoint, this emphasis on awareness and authenticity aligns with higher cognitive processes and refined functioning of the antaḥkaraṇa.

1.2.3 Trait Perspective

The trait approach to personality focuses on identifying relatively stable patterns of behaviour, emotion, and thinking. Gordon Allport (1937) was among the earliest contributors, distinguishing between cardinal traits, central traits, and secondary traits. Later, Raymond Cattell applied statistical methods to identify sixteen personality factors (Cattell, 1957).

The most widely accepted trait framework today is the Five-Factor Model (FFM) developed by McCrae and Costa. This model identifies five broad dimensions of personality: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN) (Widiger & Crego, 2019). Extensive research has demonstrated the cross-cultural stability of these traits, with heritability estimates ranging between 40–60% (Power & Pluess, 2015).

Neuroscientific studies further suggest that personality traits are associated with specific brain systems and neural functioning, supporting the biological basis of trait differences (DeYoung, 2016). In relation to the theme "from consciousness to cognition," the trait perspective represents the observable cognitive and emotional patterns expressed through the antaḥkaraṇa. While Yogic psychology emphasises the fluid and layered nature of consciousness through the kośas, trait theory helps explain how these deeper layers manifest as consistent behavioural tendencies. In this way, traits may be understood as outward expressions of subtler inner processes shaped by both neurobiology and consciousness.

1.2.4 Social–Cognitive Perspective

The social–cognitive perspective explains personality as a result of interaction between thought, behaviour, and environment. Bandura described this process as reciprocal determinism, where each factor continuously influences the other (Bandura, 1986). A key concept in this model is self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to manage situations and achieve goals. Individuals with higher self-efficacy show better emotional control, persistence, and adaptive behaviour (Bandura, 2016). This perspective also emphasises that personality is flexible and can vary across situations, challenging the idea of fixed traits. From a neuroscientific viewpoint, this aligns with neuroplasticity, suggesting that personality develops through ongoing interaction between the brain, body, and environment.

When viewed through the Yogic framework, social–cognitive theory reflects the dynamic functioning of the guṇas (*sattva, rajas, tamas*) and the regulatory role of the antaḥkaraṇa. The movement from inner mental states to outward behaviour mirrors the transition from subtle consciousness to manifest cognition. Overall, social–cognitive theory complements other Western models by explaining learning, adaptability, and situational behaviour. When integrated with Yogic concepts such as the Pañca-Kośa, guṇas, and antaḥkaraṇa, it supports a holistic understanding of personality that bridges consciousness and cognition (DeYoung, 2016; Widiger & Crego, 2019).

1.3 Indian Philosophical Perspective of Personality

Indian philosophy understands personality (*puruṣa–vyakti*) not as a fixed structure but as a gradual unfolding of consciousness (*cit*). The individual is seen as a microcosm (*piṇḍa*) that reflects the universal order (*brahmāṇḍa*). Personality therefore develops through the integration of body, vital energy, mind,

intellect, and spirit, presenting a holistic view beyond the division of matter and consciousness (Rao, 2011).

Unlike Western approaches that focus mainly on traits or cognition, Indian philosophical psychology views the human being as consciousness in evolution. Psychological growth and spiritual realization are therefore inseparable. This perspective also resonates with modern cognitive neuroscience, which highlights the role of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and neural integration in shaping identity and well-being (Newberg & Waldman, 2016).

1.3.1 Guṇas and Personality

The theory of Triguṇa, explained in the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* and the *Bhagavad Gītā* (14.5–8), identifies Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas as the fundamental forces governing personality, cognition, and behaviour. These guṇas are not moral labels but psychological principles that regulate motivation, emotion, and ethical orientation (Kumar & Prasad, 2017; Sharma, 2015). The *Bhagavad Gītā* states:

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः
निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम्।(*Bhagavad Gītā* 14.5)

Sattva represents clarity, balance, and awareness, leading to compassion and ethical stability. *Rajas* reflects activity and desire, producing ambition, movement, and attachment. *Tamas* signifies inertia and ignorance, resulting in confusion, lethargy, and resistance to change.

The *Siddha Siddhāntapaddhati* further explains each guṇa through five action qualities (*kārya-guṇas*). *Sattva* expresses qualities such as compassion (*dayā*), righteousness (*dharma*), devotion (*bhakti*), and faith (*śraddhā*). *Rajas* manifests as enjoyment (*bhoga*), possession (*vastugraha*), and self-interest (*svārthasaṅgraha*). *Tamas* gives rise to conflict (*kalah*), grief (*śoka*), violence (*vadha*), and deceit (*vancanam*) (Dwarikadas Shastri, 2014). The condition of the mind, known as citta-ki-bhūmi, reflects the dominance of these guṇas. A *sāttvika* citta supports clarity, wisdom, and emotional balance; a *rājasika* citta leads to restlessness and desire-based thinking; and a *tāmasika* citta results in dullness and ethical confusion. Thus, personality is continuously shaped by the changing interaction of the three guṇas (Dwarikadas Shastri, 2014; Srivastava, 2012). The *Bhagavad Gītā* further explains that transcendence of the guṇas leads to liberation:

जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते। (*Bhagavad Gītā* 14.20)

One who rises beyond the three guṇas becomes free from birth, death, aging, and suffering, attaining inner peace and bliss.

Table 1: Guṇas, Their Action Qualities, Chitta, and Personality Outcomes

Guṇa	Five Action Qualities (Kāryaguṇas)	Chitta (Mind) Quality	Personality Outcome
Sattva	Compassion, Dharma, Action, Devotion, Faith	Luminous, calm, balanced	Wisdom, clarity, ethical conduct, spiritual aspiration
Rajas	Knowledge-seeking, Enjoyment, Aesthetic indulgence, Possession, Self-interest	Active, desire-driven, restless	Ambition, attachment, emotional variability
Tamas	Quarrel, Conflict, Grief, Harm, Deceit	Dull, inert, confused	Laziness, confusion, ethical negligence

The table demonstrates how each Guna governs the Chitta, which mediates between consciousness and experience. A Sattva-dominant Chitta promotes virtue and clarity, Rajas drives activity but increases attachment, and Tamas impairs cognition and ethical engagement (Dwarikadas Shastri, 2014). This conceptualization integrates classical Indian insights with modern personality and cognitive neuroscience perspectives.

Sattva reflects an integrated state of cognition and emotion, Rajas denotes goal-oriented drive, while Tamas corresponds to reduced cognitive clarity. These Guṇas coexist dynamically, much like fluctuating neural states in the brain's default mode and salience networks, influencing self-regulation and perception (Sharma, 2015).

3.2 The Pañca-Kośa Framework

The Pañca-Kośa doctrine of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (II.1–5) conceptualizes human personality as five concentric sheaths (Kośas)—from the physical to the transcendental—encasing the Ātman, the innermost consciousness.

"Annamayaḥ prāṇamayaś ca manomayo 'tha vijñānamayaḥ, ānandamayaś ceti ātmānaṃ pañcadhā viduḥ." (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.1)

Table 2: Five layers correspond closely with modern biopsychological models.

Kośa (Sheath)	Description	Function in Personality	Cognitive-Neural Parallel
Annamaya	Physical sheath (body, senses)	Embodiment, health, sensory identity	Somatosensory and motor systems
Prāṇamaya	Vital-energy sheath	Breath, emotion, vitality	Autonomic regulation, vagal tone
Manomaya	Mental sheath	Thought, emotion, desire	Limbic-emotional network
Vijñānamaya	Intellectual sheath	Reason, moral discernment	Prefrontal cortex, executive function
Ānandamaya	Bliss sheath	Intuitive joy, transcendence	Meditative awareness, gamma coherence

Psychological imbalance arises when awareness becomes confined to lower sheaths. Movement through the Kośas—from body awareness to transcendental bliss—parallels cognitive integration and neural coherence seen in meditative states. Contemporary neuroscience supports these correspondences, showing increased synchronization and reduced reactivity during deep mindfulness and yogic absorption (Josipovic, 2019).

1.3.3 The Three Bodies and Antaḥkaraṇa

Indian philosophy explains human existence through the Śarīra-traya—the gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*), and causal (*kāraṇa*) bodies. The subtle body contains the Antaḥkaraṇa, the inner psychological system connecting consciousness with experience. It includes *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect), *Citta* (memory and impressions), and *Ahaṃkāra* (ego-sense).

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* states:

Dhyāyate 'nantaṃ brahma yonim, yo veda nihitaṃ guhāyāṃ parame vyoman. (Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.11)

When the **guṇas** remain balanced, the Antaḥkaraṇa becomes purified, allowing the Ātman to be experienced as pure awareness (Rao, 2011). Psychologically, this reflects harmony among emotion, memory, and cognition. Yoga philosophy also explains the changing states of mind through citta-ki-bhūmi, ranging from restless (*kṣipta*) and distracted (*vikṣipta*) to focused (*ekāgra*) and restrained (*niruddha*) states (Rukmani, 2020). A balanced personality reflects a purified citta and aligned conduct. Together, the guṇas, kośas**,** and Antaḥkaraṇa present a layered, consciousness-based understanding of personality, which resonates with modern views on neural integration and awareness.

1.3.4 Integration with Western Models and Neuroscience

Personality develops through interaction among body, mind, intellect, and consciousness. Western psychology explains this through traits, cognition, and emotional regulation, while Indian philosophy understands it through Guṇas, Pañca-Kośa, Antaḥkaraṇa, and Śarīra-traya.

Cognitive neuroscience increasingly bridges these perspectives by showing how mental and contemplative practices influence neural functioning (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). This integration supports a holistic view of personality that connects cognition with consciousness.

Table 3: Kośas, Guṇas, and Neuroscientific Correlates

Dimension / Layer	Pañca-Kośa	Three Bodies	Antaḥkaraṇa	Western Traits	Guṇas	Neuroscience Correlates	Personality Implications
Physical	Annamaya Kośa	Gross Body (Sthūla Śarīra)	Body	Sensation-seeking, physical fitness	Tamas	Somatosensory & motor cortex	Physical vitality, embodiment, habitual behaviors
Vital	Prāṇamaya Kośa	Subtle Body (Sūkṣma Śarīra)	Prāṇa	Activity, goal orientation	Rajas	Autonomic nervous system, heart-rate variability	Motivation, energy regulation, action readiness
Mental	Manomaya Kośa	Subtle Body	Manas	Neuroticism, emotional reactivity	Rajas & Tamas	Amygdala, limbic system	Emotional regulation, social adaptability
Intellectual	Vijñānamaya Kośa	Subtle Body	Buddhi	Openness, conscientiousness	Sattva	Prefrontal cortex, executive function	Reasoning, moral judgment, creativity
Blissful	Ānandamaya Kośa	Causal Body (Kāraṇa Śarīra)	Citta	Self-actualization, spiritual intelligence	Sattva	Default Mode Network, insula, medial PFC	Self-awareness, transcendence, inner peace

This table illustrates how each Kośa corresponds to physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the self. Sattva promotes clarity, ethical conduct, and executive function. Rajas energizes action, ambition, and goal-directed behavior, whereas Tamas contributes to inertia and cognitive sluggishness. Neuroscientific findings demonstrate that Sattva aligns with parasympathetic dominance and cortical coherence, Rajas with dopaminergic arousal and reward system engagement, and Tamas with reduced cortical activity and motivational inhibition (Rao, 2011).

Table 4: Comparative Perspectives: Western and Vedāntic Models

Western Perspective	Vedāntic Perspective	Integration
Trait Theory (Big Five)	Triguṇa Typology	Both recognize enduring but modifiable personality tendencies
Psychoanalytic Theory	Antaḥkaraṇa Dynamics	Conscious–unconscious parallels: Buddhi ≈ ego, Chitta ≈ subconscious memory
Developmental Stages (Erikson)	Pañca-Kośa Evolution	Both emphasize gradual development across layers of being
Humanistic Psychology	Sattva Cultivation, Self-Realization	Focus on actualizing higher human potential

Vedāntic frameworks align with Western psychology in recognizing stable yet flexible dispositions. The Upaniṣadic verse: "annaṃ brahmeti vyajānāt" (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.2) – "Food is verily Brahman" emphasizes that the physical layer (Annamaya Kośa) forms the foundation of experience. Similarly, modern neuroscience shows that body–mind integration influences cognition and emotional regulation (Damasio, 1999).

1.3.5 Neuroscientific Correlates of the Kośas

The Pañca-Kośa model can be meaningfully related to modern neuroscience. Annamaya Kośa corresponds to sensorimotor networks responsible for bodily awareness. Prāṇamaya Kośa relates to autonomic and vagal systems that maintain physiological balance (Porges, 2009). Manomaya Kośa reflects limbic and amygdala circuits involved in emotional responses. Vijñānamaya Kośa aligns with prefrontal cortical regions supporting reasoning, self-control, and decision-making. Ānandamaya Kośa corresponds to integrated networks such as the Default Mode Network (DMN), insula, and medial prefrontal regions activated during meditative awareness (Raichle, 2015).

This movement from bodily regulation to higher awareness reflects a gradual ascent of consciousness. While comparable to Maslow's hierarchy, the Kośa model presents this growth as inner layers of the self rather than external needs (Maslow, 1971). The *Bhagavad Gītā* states: "prakāśakaṃ ca karmaṇāṃ sattvaṃ niḥsaṅgaṃ anāmayam" (BG 14.6), indicating that *Sattva* brings clarity and purity to action. Neuropsychologically, this corresponds to balanced prefrontal functioning and regulated neural activity, supporting emotional clarity and ethical awareness (Davidson & Lutz, 2008).

1.3.6 Dialogue between Guṇas and Cognitive Networks

The three guṇas can also be understood through neural functioning. *Sattva* is associated with parasympathetic balance, alpha coherence, and empathy-related networks. *Rajas* relates to dopaminergic activation, reward processing, and goal-oriented behaviour. *Tamas* reflects reduced cortical arousal, excessive default mode activity, and diminished motivation (Rao, 2011). These correlations suggest that

yogic disciplines, especially Yama and Niyama, help shift mental functioning toward *Sattva*, thereby improving emotional stability, attention, and executive control (Lutz et al., 2008).

Table 5: Antaḥkaraṇa and Self-Processing Layers.

Component	Function	Cognitive / Neural Correlate
Manas	Sensory coordination, emotion	Thalamus, limbic circuits
Buddhi	Discrimination, reasoning	Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex
Chitta	Memory, subconscious patterning	Hippocampal networks
Ahaṃkāra	Self-identity, agency	Medial prefrontal cortex, DMN

The layers of Antaḥkaraṇa correspond to neural systems involved in automatic responses, reflective thinking, and self-related processing. Research shows that meditation decreases excessive activity of the Default Mode Network and improves attentional regulation (Brewer et al., 2011). This integration is clearly expressed in the *Yoga Sūtra* (1.2): "yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ", Yoga is the calming of the fluctuations of consciousness.

1.3.7 Toward an Integrative Personality Science

An integrative view of personality combines Western psychology with Vedāntic philosophy, understanding the human being as body, mind, and consciousness. Personality develops through three interconnected levels: the Embodied Self, related to physical and vital functioning; the Cognitive–Affective Self, associated with the *Manomaya* and *Vijñānamaya Kośas* governing thought and emotion; and the Transcendent Self, corresponding to the *Ānandamaya Kośa* representing awareness beyond ego (Rao, 2011).

This structure parallels Freud's *id–ego–superego* model and the Vedāntic theory of the three bodies—*Sthūla, Sūkṣma,* and *Kāraṇa*—offering a holistic understanding of personality as a dynamic process leading toward self-realization (Freud, 1923).

1.4 Discussion and Conclusion

This study integrates Western psychology, Indian philosophical thought, and cognitive neuroscience to develop a holistic understanding of personality. Western models mainly explain observable behavior, traits, emotions, and cognition, but often overlook deeper aspects such as consciousness, ethical awareness, and inner transformation. Indian philosophical systems—especially the Pañca-Kośa, Triguṇa, Antaḥkaraṇa, and three-body theory—provide a layered view of personality in which growth occurs through increasing self-awareness and refinement of consciousness.

From this integrative perspective, Western trait models such as the Big Five can be understood as surface expressions of deeper mental and intellectual layers, particularly the *Manomaya* and *Vijñānamaya Kośas*, influenced by the dominance of the Guṇas. Neuroscientific findings support these links by identifying brain systems related to bodily regulation, emotional processing, cognitive control, and contemplative awareness. Yogic practices such as Yama–Niyama, prāṇāyāma, and meditation help reduce Rajas and Tamas while strengthening Sattva, leading to measurable neuroplastic changes and improved emotional regulation (Davidson & Lutz, 2008).

The Guṇa framework also explains how personality is not fixed. Although individuals show dominant tendencies, these can be consciously transformed through ethical discipline and meditation. Neuroscience confirms this possibility by demonstrating prefrontal regulation over automatic emotional responses

(Ochsner & Gross, 2005). Similarly, when developmental stages are viewed through the Pañca-Kośa model, human growth appears not only chronological but evolutionary—moving toward ethical maturity and self-awareness.

Indian philosophy emphasizes that personality development ultimately aims at self-transcendence. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1.2.12) highlights that true fulfillment lies beyond conditioned action, pointing toward realization of the Ātman (Sastri, 2017). This idea resonates with Maslow's concept of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943) and Rogers' fully functioning person (Rogers, 1961), showing that authentic personality development includes moral and spiritual dimensions. Neuroscientific studies further strengthen this integration by showing that meditation influences brain regions related to attention, empathy, and self-awareness (Lazar et al., 2005), while autonomic balance reflects inner calm and regulation (Porges, 2009). This combined approach aligns with neurophenomenology, which integrates inner experience with objective observation (Varela, 1996).

In conclusion, personality emerges as a dynamic interaction of body, mind, cognition, ethics, and consciousness. Integrating Western psychology with Indian philosophical wisdom and neuroscience offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human development. Future research may develop culturally grounded assessment tools based on Guṇas and Kośas and apply these models in education, therapy, and well-being programs, thereby advancing psychology as a science of consciousness and self-realization (Sahdra et al., 2017).

This study attempted to understand personality through a combined view of Western psychology, Indian philosophy, and modern neuroscience. Western theories explain personality mainly through behavior, emotions, and thinking patterns. However, they do not fully explain the deeper inner nature of the human being. Indian philosophical systems such as Pañca-Kośa, Triguṇa, Antaḥkaraṇa, and the three bodies describe personality as a gradual development of awareness and consciousness.

The study shows that personality is not fixed from birth. It changes through self-discipline, ethical living, and inner practices such as meditation. Neuroscientific studies also support this idea by showing changes in brain functioning through awareness-based practices. Therefore, personality can be understood as a continuous process of psychological balance, moral growth, and inner transformation. This integrated understanding is useful for education, mental health, and personal development.

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