

# 3GUNAS

**Prof. T. Subbarayudu,**

M.A (IR & PM), B.L., M.L (Labor Laws), PhD, Professor, Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, College of Arts and Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam - 530003

**CH. Maheswari Rambai,**

MHRM, MBA (Marketing), M.Phil, (PhD), Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, AGCET, Tadepalligudem-534101. E-mail: mahi26jeeva@gmail.com.

**Dr. G.S. Rama Krishna,**

MA(IRPM)., BL., Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, Dr.C.S.Rao P.G. Centre, Sri Y.N. College, Narsapur-534275. West Godavari District. Andhra Pradesh. E-mail: Krishnagandham@rediffmail.com. [www.gandham.info](http://www.gandham.info)

In Samkhya philosophy, a Guna is one or three tendencies: Sattva, Tamas, and Rajas. These categories have become a common means of categorizing behavior and natural phenomenon in Hindu Philosophy and also in Ayurvedic Medicine, as a system to assess conditions and diets. For this reason Triguna and Tridosha are considered to be related in the traditions of Ayurveda. Guna is the tendency not action itself. For instance, Sattva guna is the tendency towards purity but is not purity itself. Similarly Rajas guna is that force which tends to create action but is not action itself. Each of the 3 gunas is ever present simultaneously in every particle of creation but the variations in equilibrium manifest all the variety in creation including matter, mind, body and spirit.

Life in the universe is a wonderful mystery. Human beings have the privilege of seeking the meaning, experiencing the mystery and realizing the purpose of life. In a triadic approach based on the Vedas, existence of life can be described through God (Iswara), Universe (Jagat) and an individual Soul (Jeeva). Any individual could see the universe as an entity that consists of all beings including other individuals and nature.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna talks about the 3 gunas (Modes of Instinct) that are pre-installed in all beings. These modes of nature include Sattva (goodness or purity), Rajas (Passion) and Tamas (Darkness). All Jeevas (Souls) and their activities in the universe are bound to nature through the 3 modes and the ratio of these modes in an individual forms one's temperament. In Hindu thought, no one in the perceptible universe is supposed to escape the 3 gunas as any soul outside the range of nature is defined as Brahma (God) himself or is assumed to have reached the state of emancipation.

Lord Krishna (Embodiment of Wisdom) preached The Gita to Arjuna (Embodiment of Skills) to motivate him to perform his duty when he faced an ethical dilemma whether or not to kill his relatives and friends in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. There are 700 verses (Slokas) in eighteen chapters in the Bhagavad Gita which address spiritual, mental, intellectual and health problems of mankind.

In the Bagavad Gita, Arjuna asks Lord Sri Krishna how he can recognize the man who has gone beyond the 3 gunas and what has he done to have gone beyond them? Lord Sri Krishna replies by listing the characteristics of such a person and by reiterating the central theme in the Gita: non-attachment to the fruits of one's labour:

Whatever quality arises –

Light, activity, delusion-

He neither dislikes its presence

Nor desire it when it is not there.

He who is unattached,

Who is not disturbed by the gunas?

Who is firmly rooted and knows

That only the gunas are acting

Who is equally self-contained?

In pain or pleasure, in happiness

Or sorrow, who is content

With whatever happens, who sees

Dirt, rocks and gold as equal,

Who is unperturbed amid praise?

Or blame of him, indifferent,

To honor and disgrace,

Serene in success and failure,

Impartial to friend and foe,

Unattached to action – that man

Has gone beyond the three gunas.

He who faithfully serve me

With the yoga of devotion, going

Beyond the 3 gunas, is ready

To attain the ultimate freedom.

(Bhagavad Gita, A new Translation by Stephen Mitchell, 2000)

In the context of human actions, Sattva mode represents perfect or ideal behavior and it involves all good qualities like truth, honesty, discipline, punctuality, righteousness, perseverance, politeness and enthusiasm in work. In comparison Rajas karma is money-oriented and calculative, with a tinge of egoism. Work in this mode is performed to fulfill one's material greed. Tamas mode is active when we do something in a state of total confusion, when our intellect starts making wrong judgments.

Human qualities are something that cannot always be taught. When our parents and teachers brief us about it in our childhood days and try to instill these qualities in us, it is also up to the individual to imbibe them at the same time.

A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This is the need we may call urge for excellence, knowledge, confidence, self-actualization and concern for others (Sattvik Qualities)... referring to a person's desire for fulfillment, namely to the tendency to become actually what we are potentially.

For millions of men, women and children in India. The epic of Ramayana has a profound effect on their spiritual progress and culture. It is not just a book of beautiful poetry, it is a Darma Shastra expounding lofty ethical ideal. The modern society needs to follow the Dharma that is contained in the Epic Ramayana. What is the reason? Today the son is not paying heed to his father's advice and the parents are not concerned about the future of the son. Devotion to the Guru should be the aim of the student. But the students are not having regard for their teachers and the teachers are not imparting anything good to them. In such a situation, everyone needs to follow the ideals of Ramayana. The Ramayana speaks of the true identity of the individual, the real significance of the family and the sanctity of the society. The Ramayana teaches the importance of human qualities and values.

According to the Bhagavad-Gita, the gunas (the primary qualities of nature) are 3 in number: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. They exist in all beings, including human beings, in various degrees of concentration and combination. Depending upon their relative strengths and combination. They determine nature of beings, its action, behavior, attitude and its attachment to the objective world in which it lives.

Bhagavad Gita which address Sattva, Rajas and Tamas Gunas in an individual:

Sattva = Goodness, Rajas = Passion, Tamas = Darkness.

### **The Sattvic Guna**

We always praise Sattva and regard it as a very desirable thing. But it is like a transparent glass that is placed between us and the truth. Sattva is a state of mind in which the mind is steady, calm and peaceful. A Sattvika man or woman works with no attachment to the results.

Sattvika individuals are always working for the welfare of the world. They are hardworking, alert, and generous. They live life moderately and have good memory and concentration. Sattvic qualities include leading a chaste life, eating moderately, using precise language and speaking truths palatably. A sattvic individual can be recognized if their mind, speech and actions synchronize: MANASA, VACHA, KARMANA are the 3 Sanskrit words used to describe such a state. Some of the people considered by Hindus to be Sattvika are;

- Holy men and Bhaktas like Tulasidas, Tukaram
- Ancient Rishis like Vasista, Kashyapa
- Modern day Sages like Ramana Maharishi and Swami Vivekananda

The quote from an Ancient Indian Text, Shilpa Shasta, “ A Sattvic person is a good human being, generous in spirit, not given to anger, holy, learned, self-controlled, devote, charitable and taking delight in the care of the self and the care of the earth.”

The Sattvic person embodies fairness courage, self-command, good sense and wisdom. The Sattvic mind leads to inner and outer freedom, freedom for self as well as for others. Thus the Sattvic tendency is always towards minimum impact.

### Characteristics

Sattva guna is the “spiritual quality”. When Sattva guna is dominant, a person has inherent desire to be good and caring. There is a resolute constancy of mind and senses. When Sattva is prevalent, the light of wisdom shines through the individual. Sattvic intellect clearly understands the difference between desirable and undesirable, undutiful and dutiful action. When Sattva is dominant a person does his work as a duty. An action is done with calm understanding and the person is free from doubts. The result of Sattvic actions is transparency and happiness. The outcome may appear like poison at first but gives happiness afterwards Sattva guna gives enlightenment and health. When Sattva guna is dominant, a person loves food that promotes longevity, vitality, endurance, health, cheerfulness. Sattvic food is aromatic, mild and agreeable to the body.

### Strength

Respect for gurus, non-violence, meditation, kindness, silence, self-control and purity of character are the motive force of Sattvic action.

### Limitations

Sattva guna binds a person through attachment to happiness and knowledge. It describes the limits of goodness through gives freedom from agitation. The Sattva guna also brings with it the problem of goodness. Being clean in all respect is good but when such person becomes obsessed with cleanliness and imposes this on others, they may develop negative feelings towards virtue of such clean habits.

### **The Rajasic Guna**

The Rajasic way is the way of diplomacy. Diplomacy can conceal a fixed position and self-interest, but outwardly show patience, politeness and peaceable intent. It tries to find a way to convince, to win over through argument, bargaining and even bribery. It tries to avoid confrontation or a breakdown in communication. It is the way of making deals, business contracts and political treaties.

### Characteristics

Rajas Guna is the “active quality”. Rajas guna is imbued with passion, giving birth to desire. When Rajas guna is dominant, it causes greed, activity, undertaking of works, restlessness and desire. Rajasic guna strongly binds the person to bodily activities and selfish interests.

When Rajas is dominant a person is full of attachment, full of longing for fruits of action, full of greed. Due to dominance of self interest, the intellect gives distorted picture of right or wrong. Rajasic acts are done in the hope of rewards. Self-importance, fame, honor and admiration are the motive forces of Rajasic action. The result of Rajasic action is little joy and many worries; it gives happiness in the beginning but delivers poison in the end

When Rajas guna is dominant a person derives happiness from conjunction of senses, she/he prefers food that are bitter, sour, salty, excessively hot and pungent.

### Strength

When Rajas guna is dominant a person has resolute inner patience along with desires. She/he pays homage to wealth and power and strives hard to acquire it.

### Limitations

Rajas Guna binds a person through attachment to activities and self-satisfaction. When Rajasic influence dominates there is desire for acquisition of things and attachment to things acquired already. The person normally remains in a stable equilibrium. But when she/he looks at an object of desire the equilibrium is disturbed and the mind is filled with ‘Passion’ expressing in a million different urges, desires, emotions and feelings.

## **The Tamasic Guna**

The tamasic way is the way of monologues. Monologue has blind faith in its own rightness. It starts from the position of "I am right, you are wrong." Monologue threatens, Cajoles, Calls names, denigrates, imposes and resorts to brute force. It leads o monopoly and monoculture. Tamas is trapped in Monologue. It wants its own way, regardless. It embraces violence and is driven by anger, pride, greed, illusion and lust. It justifies errors and never recognizes them, even when everyone can see that things have gone wrong; a Tamasic person finds it hard to say sorry.

### Characteristics

Tamas Guna is the 'material quality'. Tamas arises from hopes and illusions. Tamas produces ambiguity, idleness, fantasy and persistence. As things and objects appear solid, liquid or gaseous hiding the quantum energy within the Tamas guna eclipses the power of discrimination. Tamas guna attaches people to myth, immobility and rest.

When Tamas guna is dominant a person is cautious, unyielding and apprehensive. Tamasic action, such a person deals with others with contempt or without goodwill. Such a person pays homage to external factors, luck and outside forces. The result of Tamasic action is disillusionment and cynicism.

When Tamasic guna is dominant a person derives happiness which originates and and ends in self-delusion and miscomprehension. Under the influence of Tamas a person is not willing to abandon panic, distress and pride. Under the influence of Tamasic guna a person prefers foods that are non-nutritious, bland, decaying, stale and impure.

### Strength

A Tamasic act is done to satisfy physical and emotional needs. When Tamas guna is dominant a person is willing to work very hard, if required. Under the influence of Tamas a person looks at things in an unusual way.

A person can obtain self control by understanding the nature of Tamasic guna. Self control is obtained by control over tendency for sense enjoyment. This self control can be achieved by cultivating sensitiveness to rising feelings for sense enjoyment. This self control results in deep peace. Loss of self control results in duality of feelings for material objects such as pain and pleasure.

### Limitations

Tamas guna binds a person through attachment to possessions. When Tamas guna is dominant a person always acts in self-interest. But the world is not designed to cater to any particular individual. As a result these demands remain unfulfilled. Mind is always discontented disturbed.

## **Combination of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas Gunas Characteristics**

---

This is a blend of all the qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. This produces the values and belief systems of an individual. Ability to change as a combination of anger plus ambition plus hard work plus spirituality. Whatever is the dominant guna at any particular time people continue to reflect and learn from previous experience and continue to change?

Based on the stage in life, people may have variable measure of this combination. This combination denotes the ability of people to be flexible or rigid in their principles and beliefs. This enables them to keep their options open till the last moment of action. Such ability may also be termed as adaptability to situations.

### Strength

The combination helps in creating harmony, understanding and learning. It leads to understanding others resulting in some good work being. This combination gives rise to flexibility and adaptability in a person.

### Limitations

Sattva-Rajas-Tamas guna combination binds a person through attachment to need for harmony. Any deviation from harmony is troublesome to such a person. Taken to the extreme, the person may become compromising and lose focus.

The purpose of such an elaborate description of these 3 qualities in the Gita is not to encourage us to become Sattvic or eliminate other qualities. The gunas whether it is Sattva or Rajas or Tamas are responsible for our illusion and all suffering on earth. The Gita therefore aims to make us free from these qualities completely by making us clearly understand the nature of these qualities and how they tend to keep us in bondage and illusion. Even cultivation of Sattva is not an end in itself. It is only the means to overcome passion and ignorance and thereby achieve self-realization through the purity of the mind and the heart. One should forget that it actually binds us to the mortal world through its tendency to attach itself to happiness and knowledge.

### **The Fourth guna - Nirguna**

The three gunas are themselves felt qualities or colorations of awareness, the pure awareness of them is itself a "Fourth" guna. One free of and beyond all gunas - "Nirguna". Nirguna is characterized by a sense of the colorless translucency of pure awareness as such. The pure 'White' of the Sattva guna is but the best reflector of the translucent, colorless light of pure awareness of Nirguna.

Behind the symbolism and experienced reality of the three gunas and Nirguna lies a particular experience of awareness in relation to being. The three gunas express a triadic 'ontology' of awareness (From Greek ONTOS - Being)

TAMAS, BLACK - the essentially Tamasic dimension of pure awareness is the experience of it as a negation of being and of beings - as non-being. Yet non-being is not a black hole of



nothingness or an annihilating void but the of all our hidden, obscured, unknown or unrealized potentialities of being – in contract to the actualities of our being and existence that belong to the realm of being (Sat)

RAJAS, RED – the essentially Rajasic dimension of pure awareness is the active COMING-TO-BE or BECOMING of our potentialities of being out of the realm of NON – BEING that is Tamas. Out of pure awareness arises the autonomous power of action and actualization that is felt is Rajas – the impulse to BE and Become all that we potentially ARE.

SATTVA, WHITE – the essentially Sattvic dimension of pure awareness is the experience of awareness as an affirmation of BEING (Sat), feelings one’s very being brought to light, illuminated by, reflecting and radiating the light of pure awareness.

NIRGUNA, COLOURLESS – The Nirgunic dimension of is the experience of its pure, colorless, transcendent and translucent light. Whereas through Tamas, awareness is experienced as NON-BEING, through Rajas as BECOMING or COMING TO BE and through Sattva as BEING, as Nirguna it is experienced as that light that first brings all beings to light from the darkness of NON-BEING – letting them both BE (Sattva) and BECOME (Rajas) all that they potentially are (Tamas).

Sri Krishna said from the Bhagvad Gita “Sattva or Goodness, Rajas or Activity and Tamas or Inertia; these three gunas of mind bind the imperishable soul to the body”.

The culture of Bharat says: Sathyam Bruyath, Priyam Bruyath, and Na Bruyath Sathyamapriyam (Speak the truth, speak sweetly and softly and never utter truth in an unpalatable way).

- Sathyam Bruyath is the Moral value.
- Priyam Bruyath is the social value.
- Na Bruyath Sathyamapriyam is the spiritual value.

So the moral, social and spiritual values are all contained in the above statement. People should understand that god is their best friend. All the worldly friends are lured by your position and power. Once your position and power has gone, gone are your friends too. God is the only friend in the real sense of the term. The principle of Atma, which reveals the secrets of your mind, is your true Guru. Guru is one who is formless and beyond all attributes.

**Gurur-Brahma Gurur-Vishnu Gurur-Devo Maheswara,**

**Guru Sakshath Parm Brahma Thasmai Sri GFurave Namah.**

Consider god as your mother, father, friend and everything. Take god as your guru, follow him and merge in him. If you have god as your guru, you can achieve everything in life.

The Tamasic approach shows a fear of losing from the outset, while the Sattvic approach is based in trust: trust in oneself, trust in the other and trust in the process of communication.



I have written about the 3 Gunas as Satvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. Many have taken a simplistic view point of this without understanding the inner meaning. Even Satvic Qualities have limitations. They are not the ultimate.

### References

- Dr. B. K. Chaturvedi (2010) Mahabharata, Diamond Pocket Books Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi.
- Dr. P. Subbarao (2009) Essential of Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations, Himalaya Publishing House, Mumbai.
- K. Aswathappa (2009) Organizational Behavior, Himalaya Publishing house, Mumbai.
- Satish Kumar (2007) Sattvik Qualities, Green Books Ltd, and
- Aswamedha Parva Sections from Mahabharata

### Links

- [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
- <http://wikipedia.org>
- <http://www.saidarshan.org>
- [triguna.org/rajasic-guna.php](http://triguna.org/rajasic-guna.php)
- [www.hinduwebsite.com/gunas.asp](http://www.hinduwebsite.com/gunas.asp)
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guna)
- [mukulshri.goel.com/articles/bhagavadgita.htm](http://mukulshri.goel.com/articles/bhagavadgita.htm)
- [www.expressionsofspirit.com/yoga/gunas.htm](http://www.expressionsofspirit.com/yoga/gunas.htm)

