



Western psychology and eastern psycho-spirituality in dialogue: A comparative analysis of Freudian structural model of the psyche and *Triguna* model of the *Bhagavad Gita*

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ABSTRACT

Background: This article attempts to examine the shared perspectives of Sanatan psycho-spirituality and Freudian psychoanalytic theory apropos of the construction of human personality and understanding the nature of human psychology. The study also endeavours to demonstrate how a theological text, composed in the 2nd century BCE (approximately 2,200 years ago), articulates some crucial concepts that exhibit remarkable parallels with modern psychological theories, which are grounded in empirical inquiry and theoretical speculation. By examining these intersections, it aims to contribute to the development of an interdisciplinary framework, bridging ancient philosophical thought with contemporary psychological discourse and opening new avenues for scholarly exploration. **Methods:** Employing a qualitative textual analysis method, the study, therefore, aims to foreground how Eastern and Western paradigms, participating in an interdisciplinary dialogue, can render complementary insights into the nature of human psychology. **Findings:** Operating from this perspective, this article uncovers the deeper philosophical and psychological underpinnings common to both Freudian and Sanatan psycho-spiritual schools of thought, focusing on the concepts of *Tamas*, *Rajas*, and *Sattva*, and their potential Western equivalents—*Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*. **Conclusion:** The comparative analysis of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s concept of *Tri-gunas* and Freud's structural model of the psyche reveals a shared perspective that human personality and behavior are fundamentally shaped by underlying biological constructs. This framework highlights the intricate entanglement of determinism and free will within both schools of thought. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** By disentangling these connections, this paper proposes to offer new insights into how Eastern and Western thought systems converge in their understanding of human nature, mind and psyche. The theoretical synthesis delineated in this article uncovers new coordinates for dialogue, fostering a scholarly paradigm that will deepen our perspectives and contribute to the advancement of interdisciplinary scholarship.

KEYWORDS: Bhagavad-Gita; determinism; Freud, psycho-spirituality, structural model.

1. Introduction

Religion, which is not tantamount to *Dharma*, a boon and a bane, is the most distinctive human phenomenon, encompassing a vast spectrum of beliefs, practices, and experiences. With its inherent complexity and multifaceted nature, it serves as a bridge to the spiritual or supra-personal, offering individuals meaning, purpose in life, and a sense of community. On the other hand, many critics view psychoanalysis as either a substitute for religion or a

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form of religion in itself, "with its holy texts, . . . promise of salvation, and claims to truth" (Wards & Zarate, 2011). According to D. M. Wulff (1997), "the interest in bringing psychology and religion together may also be highly practical". He further submits that the founding figures of psychology, such as Freud and Jung, despite their drastically differing views, exhibited a deep interest in religion and its influence on human behavior, thought, and emotion. Freud (1927), universally recognized as the founder of psychoanalysis, labels religious beliefs and sentiments as mass illusion. According to him, human beings crave a father figure, a parental figure for protection. In his *Totem and Taboo* (1989), he postulates the origin of religious sentiment and posits that an individual's "relation to God depends on his relation to his father . . . and that at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father". In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), he further expounds this 'son-father relationship' and submits: "God was the exalted father and the longing for the father was the root of the need for religion". To his reader, Freud offers a prudent prediction that "defenders of religion will by the same right make use of psycho-analysis in order to give full value to the affective significance of religious doctrines". Therefore, at this point, it can be assumed that conducting research to uncover the commonalities between his theories and religious scriptures would be unconvincing and a betrayal of his forewarning.

However, since then, the scenario has changed drastically, and an exponential increase has been observed in the number of empirical studies directly testing the potentially positive link between religion and psychological wellbeing (Hood et al., 2009). Therefore, the discipline of *psychology of religion* has emerged as a significantly relevant area of research. On the contrary, to the psychologists, it is still of very little interest to explore what religion can offer to the human being, interpreting its psyche, its nature, origin, and development. At this juncture, the article aims to consolidate the idea that a nuanced understanding of the human psyche can emerge from various theological scriptures. Therefore, the psychological foundations embedded in influential religious texts should be recognized as a legitimate and valuable domain of scholarly inquiry.

Operating from this perspective, this paper conducts a parallel reading of Western psychoanalytic theory and Sanatan psycho-spiritual concepts embedded in the *Bhagavad Gita*, aiming to uncover profound similarities, particularly in their exploration of the human psyche and the development of personality. Sigmund Freud, one of the most influential figures in modern psychology, developed a *tripartite model of the psyche* consisting of the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*, which he used to explain the tensions between instinctual drives, reality, and moral judgment. In a striking parallel, the ancient Sanatan scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*, alongside a number of *Upanishads*, also outlines a framework for understanding human behavior and the different topography of human consciousness. While Freud is often viewed as a product of Western scientific rationalism, according to Edmundson (2003), "there is something Eastern in Freudian Ethos".

This article, of course, is not the first attempt of this kind. Prof. Hisham Abu-Raiya (2012), an internationally known expert in the field of the psychology of religion, conducted a comparative study between a *Qur'anic* theory of personality and Freud and Jung's ideas. Following the same trajectory and drawing on the psycho-spiritual teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and Freud's postulation apropos of construction of human personality, the paper aims to highlight how both the perspectives, one scientific and another religious, concur on a singular opinion that personality is inherently biological and to some degree, can exhibit deterministic qualities. Most notably, both schools of thought converge on the idea that this deterministic fate can be altered through self-regulation and the control of one's drives, wishes, or desires.

Furthermore, comparative work in this domain remains limited. While Abu-Raiya (2014) and Haque (2024) conducted a study comparing Qur'anic personality theory with Freud and Jung, few attempts have been made to place Freudian psychoanalysis in direct conversation with Indian psycho-spiritual thought. This paper addresses that gap by analyzing the intersections and divergences between Freud's structural theory and the *Bhagavad Gita's* Triguna model. In doing so, it highlights not only points of convergence such as the recognition of biological determinism and the role of desire, but also points of

divergence, especially the Gita's emphasis on transcendence and liberation (moksha) as an ultimate goal of personality development (Dana, 2024).

Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature in psychology of religion by demonstrating that the dialogue between Western scientific rationalism and Eastern psycho-spiritual traditions can deepen our understanding of the human psyche. By placing Freud and the *Bhagavad Gita* in dialogue, this article seeks to construct a nuanced framework for personality development that integrates biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, integrating a textual analysis approach to examine the theory of *Gunas* in the *Bhagavad Gita* alongside the Freudian structural model of the psyche. The research is conducted through an in-depth literature review of primary and secondary sources, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings* (2003), and related theoretical and scholarly works. The study explores key theoretical and philosophical concepts such as the *Trigunas*, the *Panchamahabhutas*, Freud's *Id-Ego-Superego* framework, the Pleasure and Reality Principles, the *Nirvana* and Constancy Principles, psycho-spirituality, determinism, and drive-wish or *kāma* (longings), all of which are integral to the central inquiry.

A content analysis technique is employed to systematically identify and analyze the core themes related to these concepts. Particular emphasis is placed on verses that explicitly discuss drive-wish, psyche, *Atman* (the Individual Soul), *Brahman* or *Paramatman* (the Supreme Soul), and the interrelationship between human consciousness, psyche, and the universe. Additionally, authoritative commentaries by various philosophers and scholars are consulted to enrich the interpretation and provide a broader analytical framework. To ensure validity and reliability, the paper employs a qualitative textual analysis, appropriate for the subject matter, comparing findings from primary texts with relevant academic literature on classical *Sāṅkhya* philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis. By cross-referencing multiple data sources and perspectives, this study aims to minimize subjective biases and strengthen the credibility of its interpretations.

All research stages are conducted systematically to avoid speculative interpretations. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of two seemingly disparate disciplines one rooted in scientific inquiry and the other in spiritual philosophy. The qualitative textual analysis approach is deemed the most appropriate method, as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the underlying philosophical and psychological meanings embedded in the Eastern classical texts and the seminal theoretical works of Western psychology, which contribute to a novel interdisciplinary field of study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Freudian structural model of the psyche

Two of Sigmund Freud's most enduring and significant ideas are: Structural Model of the Psyche and the Topographical Model of the Mind. Introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/2003), Freud's structural model of the psyche expands on the idea that human personality is shaped by the dynamic interplay of three fundamental components: the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*. Later, the further refined and formalised version of this model was developed in his subsequent essay, *The Ego and the Id* (1920/2003). Freud further postulates that "the evolution of psychic process is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle . . . and hence a propensity to avoid unpleasure or the generate pleasure". His subsequent postulate is that "the pleasure principle is arose out of the constancy principle", which he attributes to Fechner, one of the greatest mystical philosophers and the founder of Experimental Psychology. He compares this principle to Barbara Low's *Nirvana Principle*

that constantly endeavours “to reduce inner stimulative tension to maintain it at a steady level, to resolve it completely”. Under this “principle of the tendency to stability”, Freud writes, the psychic process becomes “linked [to] the sensation of pleasure and unpleasure”. And Freud links the *Id*, the primary apparatus of the psyche, to the pleasure principle that always demands immediate gratification of drive-wishes. According to him, these drive-wishes or the primal instinctual needs and urges are primarily biological rather than psychological. And he writes that the “*Id* has been created by biology”, and he continues “by the travails of the human race”. And our human psychological makeup is not inherently strong enough to fully resist these drives. In his view, instincts are deeply embedded in our biological construct, and any attempt to defend against them is ultimately limited.

Freud (2003), after advancing this line of reasoning, postulates that the ego, the most conscious institution of the psyche, driven by the need for self-preservation, functions under the reality principle. According to him, this principle “without abandoning the aim of ultimately achieving pleasure, nonetheless demands and procures the postponement of gratification”. Thus, the Ego that operates on the reality principle acknowledges the “rejection of sundry opportunities for such gratification and the temporary toleration of unpleasure on the long and circuitous road to pleasure”. In the essay, *The Ego and the Id*, Freud submits that “the ego is that part of the *Id* that has been altered by the direct influence of the external world” he continues, “The Ego endeavours to bring the influence exerted by the external world fully to bear on the *id*”. He further writes that “the ego makes every effort to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle that reigns supreme in the *Id*”.

Freud, then, proceeds to postulate a “separate level within the ego—a differentiation that has come about inside the ego itself” and he terms it “the *Ego-Ideal* or *Super-Ego*”. And this part of the ego, according to him, is “less firmly and clearly connected to consciousness”. To the people who are shaken to the core of their moral consciousness about the certainty of a “higher presence in man,” Freud mentions in his essay that “this higher presence is the ego-ideal or superego, the representment of our relationship to our parents. As little children we knew, admired and feared these higher presences, and later assimilated them into our own selves”. To Freud, “Religion, morality and a social sense—these chief constituents of man’s higher nature—were originally one and the same”. He also equates conscience with the *Superego* that works as a judgmental entity.

When any psychic conflict arises, it is the role of the ego, “a coherent organization of the psychic processes,” in the words of Freud (1923/2003), to mediate between the two, “rather like a politician”. In his essay *The Ego and the Id* (1923/2003), Freud posits that “when reality wags its finger, it [*Ego*] feigns obedience on the part of the *id*, even when the *id* has in fact remained obdurate and intransigent; it hushes up the *Id*’s conflicts with reality, and also, wherever possible, its conflicts with the *superego*. Positioned as it is between the *Id* and reality, it yields all too often to the temptation to fawn, to lie, to do whatever may be opportune, rather like a politician who knows full well what he ought to do, but wants none the less to preserve his popularity in the eyes of the public”.

This way, Freud compares the role of the *Ego* to that of a shrewd politician. Predicated on this postulation that *Ego* has the authority to issue the ultimatum at times authoritatively and otherwise, it can be stated that, albeit being one of “the dynamics of the psyche”, *Ego* has the supreme role in taking and altering the psychic decision. He further opines that *Ego* “is the arbiter that controls all the psyche’s constituent processes and despite going to sleep at night, still contrives to censor dream”. To simplify his structural model of the psyche or mind, it can be stated that the *Id* is one’s desire that operates according to the Pleasure Principle, the *Ego* is coterminous to intellect, operative on Reality or Rational Principle and the *Super Ego* is the moral conscience that operates on Morality Principle. If the Freudian model of the psyche is compared to the Indian parliamentary system, placing the Prime Minister in the position of the *Id*, it may serve as a comprehensible analogy for newcomers in the field of psychoanalysis, without being entirely unconvincing.

3.2 The Bhagavad-Gita's theory of Tri-Gunas

The *Shreemad Bhagavad Gita* comprises eighteen chapters (*adhyayas*) and is extracted from Chapters 25 to 42 of the *Bhishma Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. It is regarded as the fifth Veda, holding a position of significant reverence (Fitzgerald, 1985). Widely recognized in contemporary discourse as *The Gita*, one of the most revered philosophical texts in the *Sanatan* tradition, is fundamentally "about a decision," as Patton (2008) asserts in the introduction to her *Penguin edition of The Bhagavad Gita*. The narrative centres on Arjuna, the second among the five Pandavas, who stands on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, faced with a profound moral and existential dilemma. As he prepares for war, Arjuna experiences an overwhelming ambivalence, his mind clouded with doubt. This psychologically disturbed state of Arjun is referred to as '*Arjun-Rog*' or the malady of Arjun, where he, like Shakespeare's Hamlet, suffer the fate of indecisiveness. This is a perennial internal conflict within the human mind and psyche with regard to discerning the appropriate path to reach the path of righteousness that is *Dharma*. According to Dr. Abhishek Parui (2022), this state of ambivalence is not something negative in quality, but rather is a unique ability to accommodate multiple perspectives and possibilities in a singular space-time. With a parched mouth and trembling body, he turns to Krishna, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, and declares his unwillingness to fight, for among his opponents stand his own kinsmen, whom he cannot bring himself to slay. He asks the Supreme Lord: "What should we gain . . . and how could we be happy by killing our own kinsmen?" (Prabhupada, 1972). His charioteer, Sri Krishna, then assumes the role of a therapist (Risal, 2024). And it is through their conversation, the Lord of the Universe imparts to Arjun the knowledge about creation and the significance of the three *gunas* (attributes) that are present in all living and non-living things in the universe.

According to the Theory of *Gunas* or *Triguna*, the entire universe is composed of three fundamental attributes, namely *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* (Sharma et al., 2021). According to the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, the Supreme Lord Krishna imparted this transcendental knowledge to Arjuna, revealing that all living beings, encompassing both physical and psychological aspects, serve as a microcosm of the universe and are therefore composed of three fundamental attributes. The relationship between *Triguna* and the *Panchamahabhuta*, the five fundamental elements (water, earth, air, fire, and space) is of profound significance, as these elements form the foundation of both the human body and the cosmos.

In chapter VII entitled *Knowledge of Nirguna Brahma and Manifest Divinity*, Supreme Lord imparts to Arjuna: "The whole of this creation is deluded by these objects evolved from the three modes of Prakriti *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*" (*The Bhagavad Gita*, 2023). According to this philosophy, these three *Gunas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* "born of Nature tie down the imperishable soul to the body". Verse 6 of this chapter states that "of these [*Trigunas*], *Sattva* being immaculate, is illuminating and flawless." *Rajas*, the second of the *Triguna*, is "of the nature of passion, as born of desire and attachment. It binds the soul through attachment to actions and their fruit." The third and last of the theory of *Gunas* is *Tamas*, the "deluder of all those who look upon the body as their own self, as born of ignorance. It binds the soul through error, sleep and sloth".

"Overpowering *Rajas* and *Tamas*," Supreme Lord enlightens Arjun "*Sattva* prevails; overpowering *Sattva* and *Tamas*, *Rajas* prevails; even so, overpowering *Sattva* and *Rajas*, *Tamas* prevails" (*The Bhagavadgita*, 2007, p. 158). Accordingly, He also enlightens Arjun that "when light and discernment dawn in this body, as well as in the mind and senses, then one should know that *Sattva* is predominant." With the preponderance of *Rajas*, as the Supreme Lord imparts, one becomes greedy and he undertakes action with an interested motive and impatience like a hedonist who is always pleasure hungry. Thus, the thirst for enjoyment and a life full of pleasure is all they aspire to gain. And with the prevalence of *Tamas*, "obtuseness of the mind and senses, disinterestedness to partake in one's obligatory duties, frivolity and stupor appear" in one's character. Acharya Sushruta, an ancient Indian physician widely regarded as the father of Surgery and the author of the *Sushruta Samhita*, makes "categorical correlation of *Triguna* with *Panchabhoota*" (Sandhya & Vinodkumar,

2021). Verse 17 of the chapter summarizes that “Wisdom follows from Sattva, and green, undoubtedly from Rajas; likewise, obstinate error, stupor and also ignorance follow from Tamas” (*The Bhagavadgita*, 2007).

The *Bhagavad Gita*, regarded as the most sacred scripture of *Sanātana Dharma*, through this philosophical framework, demonstrates how an individual's personality is shaped through the interplay of the *Trigunas*. This esoteric knowledge is imparted by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, culminating in the revelation of the path to transcend these Gunas (aiming to become *Nirguna*) and attain supreme bliss: “Having transcended the aforesaid three Gunas, which have caused the body, and freed from birth, death, old age and all kinds of sorrow, the embodied soul attains supreme bliss” (*The Bhagavadgita*, 2007).

3.3 Comparison

According to V. Mangalvedkar (1919), a study on *The Bhagavad Gita*, with comparative lights from both oriental and occident perspectives will endeavour to bridge the gulf of orthodox opposition. For a more comprehensive understanding, a comparative framework can be established between Freud's psychoanalytic model and the *Triguna* theory that is expounded in *The Geeta*. The exploration of Sigmund Freud's Structural Model of the Psyche alongside the *Triguna* theory presents a compelling framework for understanding human behavior, psyche and the complexities of the mind. Freud's theory conceptualizes the psyche as comprising three distinct yet interdependent components that regulate human behavior, shape interpersonal dynamics, and structure an individual's personality. Similarly, the *Triguna* concept offers insights into the fundamental qualities or *gunas* that shape human nature and ethical conduct. Examining these frameworks reveals profound correlations between Western psychoanalysis and Eastern psycho-spiritual speculation.

The term *psychospiritual* refers to the integration of psychological and spiritual dimensions in understanding human development and well-being. It encompasses various approaches that supplement, integrate, or conflate psychology and spirituality, often emphasizing the spiritual aspect as essential to mental health and personal growth (Gleig, 2014). The *Id* operates according to the *pleasure principle*, driven by uncoordinated instinctual desires (Gunalankara, 2021). The *Ego*, governed by the reality principle, mediates between the *Id* and the *Superego* that embodies the morality principle and regulates human behavior based on societal and ethical norms. The *id* aligns with *Tamas*, representing inertia and primal instincts. The *ego* corresponds to *Rajas*, signifying activity and dynamism. And the *superego* parallels *Sattva*, embodying purity, wisdom, and ethical consciousness. Notably, these three fundamental attributes cannot “exist or manifest their effects in isolation.” Kumar Alok (2017) continues that “like a heavy earthen lamp . . . the three *guna* depend on each other to manifest their effects”.

3.3.1 *Id* and *Tamas*

At the base of Freud's model lies the *Id*, representing primal instincts, desires, and drives that seek immediate gratification (Strunk, 1960). Operating on the pleasure principle, the *Id* embodies the unfiltered pursuit of pleasure without consideration for societal rules or consequences. This aligns closely with *Tamas*, one of the three gunas described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Tamas* is characterized by inertia, ignorance, and darkness, often manifesting as confusion and indulgence in base desires. The way an unchecked *id*'s quest for gratification leads to destructive behaviors, a *Tamas*-oriented pursuit similarly results in a lack of awareness and moral disengagement. Both concepts highlight the darker and more primal aspects of human nature that require conscious management and control to achieve a poised state of the psyche.

3.3.2 Ego and Rajas

The ego serves as the mediator between the *Id*'s impulsive desires and the moral constraints imposed by the *superego* (Freud, 1923/2003). Functioning on the *reality principle*, the ego seeks to navigate the complexities of the external world while balancing immediate needs and societal expectations. This is akin to *Rajas*, the guna associated with activity, desire, and ambition. *Rajas* embodies a dynamic, restless energy that drives individuals toward action and achievement. The *Ego*'s negotiation between the *Id* and *Superego* mirrors the qualities of *Rajas*, as it strives to fulfil desires in a socially acceptable manner while maintaining a semblance of order and control. In this regard, both Freud's *Ego* and the *Rajas* guna reflect the mediating nature of human existence, which is driven by intellect yet bound by ethical considerations.

3.3.4 Superego and Sattva

Freud's *Superego* represents the internalized moral values and ethical standards acquired from society and parental figures (Freud, 1923/2003). It serves as the conscience that guides the ego's decisions and regulates the id's impulses. This concept resonates deeply with *Sattva*, the guna associated with purity, knowledge, and harmony. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Sattva* is characterized by qualities such as wisdom, clarity, and a balanced approach to life. The *Superego*'s role in upholding moral standards and encouraging ethical behavior aligns with the ideals of *Sattva*, which promotes righteous living and compassion. Both constructs emphasize the importance of moral integrity and self-regulation in achieving personal and spiritual fulfilment.

3.3.5 Biological, psychic and theological determinism and the concept of free will

Determinism is a philosophical school of thought that posits that all events in the universe, including human decisions and actions, are causally determined and therefore inevitable (Berlin, 1968). The construction of human personality and behavior, as theorized in Freud's structural model of the psyche, is fundamentally biological in nature (Siegfried, 2014). While societal, cultural, and individual factors contribute to shaping the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*, these influences primarily operate at both subconscious and unconscious levels, largely determined by the biological structure of the human brain and perceptual system. Thus, Freud's theory can be interpreted as advocating a form of biological determinism in the development of personality. And, Freud controversially quotes the great Napoleon: "Anatomy is destiny" (Strachey, 1912). Anatomy, as expounded by Freud, influences the structure of the human psyche and, by extension, an individual's character. Ultimately, it shapes one's destiny. This postulation made by Freud seems to be the result of his assumption that "conscious processes were the effects of unconscious ones" (Rycroft, 1995).

In an analogous way, a similar deterministic perspective is also articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita* through the esoteric teachings of the Almighty. The *Triguna* theory posits that the three *Gunas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*, are inherent in all aspects of creation, including the five fundamental elements (*Panchamahabhuta*) and, consequently, within the human body and organism which influence and define individual's *chitta* (mind) and *charitrya* (character and behavior) (Sharma et al., 2021). Therefore, it is clear that because of this in-built biological construct their personality and behaviour are pre-determined. For this reason, one of the most complex and intriguing issues in Indian philosophy, particularly in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is the tension between free will and determinism (Kwak & Han, 2013). The interplay and varying dominance of these *Gunas* over one another shape human behavior and personality. In *The Bhagavad Gita*, Verses 59-60 from Chapter XVIII, speak of a form of natural determinism, which can be paraphrased in terms of the saying "character is destiny," though with a nuanced interpretation. In this context, Arjuna's character, understood not merely in the usual moral or psychological sense but as his intrinsic nature

as a warrior, will inevitably compel him to fight, whether he wills it or not. The *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter XVIII, Verses 61 and 62, convey a sense of theological determinism, suggesting that the Supreme Lord, residing in the hearts of all beings, orchestrates the entire activity of the universe according to His divine will. According to this divine revelation, humans are not entirely autonomous but rather instruments carrying out the will of God, much like puppets guided by the divine presence (Sharma et al., 2021).

And most notably, both Freudian psychoanalysis and the *Bhagavad Gita* address the possibility of transcending this biological and theological determinism. Morris N. Eagle (2024) proposes that, from the perspective of ego psychology, "free will lies in the ego's relative autonomy from drives, as well as in the freedom to not will and to relinquish control". In Western psychology, this process is referred to as Individuation, a concept developed by Carl Jung, which entails the integration of various aspects of the psyche to achieve a unified self (Jung, 1981). Furthermore, Charles Rycoft also submits that Freud "did not regard consciousness as a mere epiphenomenon, but a regulator capable of a more stable control and guidance of the flow of mental process" (1995). In the domain of *psychospirituality*, this idea is expressed through self-regulation and asceticism, emphasizing on discipline and refinement of one's inner nature with knowledge and wisdom to attain higher states of consciousness which, in the words of Beyerle and Beyerle (2018), is the "birth of the higher self".

3.3.6 Desire as the root cause of unpleasure and psychic conflict

Desire, substantially because of Jacques Lacan, has become a crucial concept in contemporary thought. In the field of psychoanalysis, it is a standard translation of Freud's 'Wunsch', which James Strachey renders as "wish" in the Standard Edition of Freud's works. However, later it takes the form of 'drive-wish' when Freud relates it to the demand of the *Id*. Psychoanalysis has demonstrated that neuroses and various other mental disorders stem from internal psychic conflicts arising from opposing motives within an individual (French, 1939). In Freud's structural model of the psyche, the *Id* operates according to the pleasure principle, seeking the immediate fulfilment of its instinctual drives (Strunk, 1960). When these drive-needs or wishes remain unmet, the mind inevitably experiences distress. Freud (2003), in addressing the internal conflict within the human psyche caught between need, reason and morality offered a critical and ironic observation that "normal human beings are not only much more immoral than they think, but also much more moral than they realize". However, an individual can fortify the *Ego* through rational reasoning and can strengthen the *Superego* through moral development, wisdom, and learning, thereby gaining greater control over the *Id* and its compulsions.

Similarly, the *Bhagavad Gita* presents a parallel perspective from a psycho-spiritual framework, emphasizing that human beings must recognize their true nature as *Atman* (the individual self or soul) that is considered similar to "*Paramatman*" (Supreme Self or God), rather than identifying solely with their physical body (*Manavi Sharir*). Desire, according to this view, arises from the bodily constitution, which is composed of the *Panchamahabhutas* (the five fundamental elements) and influenced by the three *Gunas* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*). In the words of Lord Krishna, the Supreme Being: "Having transcended the aforesaid three *Gunas*, which have caused the body, and freed from birth, death, old age, and all kinds of sorrow, the embodied soul attains supreme bliss." (*The Bhagavadgita*, 2007, p. 160) This comparative analysis highlights how these two distinct schools of thought converge on the idea that desire, referred to in psychospiritual discourse as *kama* and in psychoanalytic theory as drive-wish, serves to be the epicentre of unpleasure and suffering. The following is a comparative table of Freud's Structural Model and the *Triguna* of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Tabel 1. Freud's structural model vs. *Triguna* of the *Bhagavad Gita*

Dimension	Freud: Structural Model (Id-Ego-Superego)	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> : Triguna Model (Sattva-Rajas-Tamas)
Ontological Basis	The psyche is conceived as an intrapsychic structure composed of three interacting agencies.	Consciousness is shaped by three cosmic qualities (<i>gunas</i>) that permeate all beings and phenomena.
Constituent Elements	Id (instinctual drives, pleasure principle); Ego (mediator of reality); Superego (moral conscience, internalized norms).	<i>Sattva</i> (purity, balance, wisdom); <i>Rajas</i> (activity, desire, ambition); <i>Tamas</i> (inertia, ignorance, darkness).
Psychic Dynamics	Mental life is driven by conflict between instinctual demands (Id), moral imperatives (Superego), and realistic mediation (Ego).	Mental states are determined by the predominance of one <i>guna</i> over the others; psychological harmony emerges through the cultivation of <i>Sattva</i> .
Source of Motivation	Biopsychic drives: libido (Eros) and death instinct (Thanatos).	Interplay of the three <i>gunas</i> , each shaping cognition, volition, and behavior.
Ethical Orientation	Morality derives from the Superego, representing the internalized authority of society and parental figures.	Morality arises naturally from <i>Sattva</i> , embodying clarity, compassion, and alignment with <i>dharma</i> .
Path of Transformation	Psychoanalysis: uncovering unconscious material, resolving intrapsychic conflicts, and strengthening the Ego.	Yogic-spiritual disciplines (e.g., bhakti, meditation, detachment) aimed at transcending the <i>gunas</i> and realizing the Self.
Ultimate Goal	A well-adapted Ego capable of mediating between drives, reality, and moral demands.	Liberation (<i>moksha</i>): transcending all three <i>gunas</i> to realize the unity of <i>Atman</i> with <i>Brahman</i> .
Epistemological Grounding	Rooted in modern science, clinical observation, and empirical analysis.	Rooted in scriptural revelation (<i>śruti</i>) and contemplative experience; metaphysical and transpersonal in orientation.
Limitations	Tends toward reductionism, focusing narrowly on intrapsychic conflict and neglecting transcendence.	Offers profound spiritual insights, but lacks clinical specificity for diagnosing and treating psychological disorders.

The notion of desire lies at the very heart of both psychoanalytic theory and Indian psycho-spiritual traditions, functioning as a key to understanding the origins of psychic suffering and the pathways toward liberation. In psychoanalysis, particularly in the Freudian tradition, desire is not merely an occasional impulse but the constitutive force that structures human subjectivity. For Freud, the Wunsch (wish) represents the primitive and persistent striving of the psyche, grounded in instinctual drives and seeking discharge through the pleasure principle (Strachey, 2001). Yet, as elaborated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the relentless pursuit of gratification often clashes with the external demands of reality, resulting in unpleasure, repression, and ultimately neurosis. The structural conflict between Id, Ego, and Superego, therefore, revolves around the management of desire, its expression, inhibition, or transformation (Freud, 2003).

Contemporary affective neuroscience and neuro-psychoanalysis refine this framework by locating desire not only in symbolic mediation, but also in the primary motivational systems of the brain. Jaak Panksepp (1998) identified the Seeking system as a fundamental neural network that drives exploration, anticipation, and yearning, an affective engine that

underlies Freud's conception of desire. Unlike Lacan's view of desire as perpetually deferred through the symbolic Other, this model situates desire in the neurobiological circuitry of dopaminergic pathways, linking affect, cognition, and action (Panksepp & Biven, 2012). Mark Solms (2021) extends this perspective by arguing that consciousness itself emerges from affective homeostasis, with desire functioning as the felt tension between deficit and restoration, absence and fulfilment.

Recent predictive processing models in neuroscience further deepen this account. Desire can be understood as a form of "prediction error minimization," where the brain continuously generates expectations about need-fulfilment and adjusts behavior to reduce the gap between predicted and actual states (Friston, 2010; Seth, 2021). In this framework, psychic suffering emerges when prediction errors persist, when the organism cannot reconcile its anticipations with lived reality, leading to frustration, compulsions, and maladaptive cycles. At the same time, desire serves as the condition for creativity and meaning-making, providing the dynamic disequilibrium that fuels subjective life (Schoore, 2019). Thus, rather than being a purely linguistic construct, desire today can be seen as an affective-cognitive engine: liberating in its generativity, yet oppressive in its perpetual dissatisfaction.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, by contrast, situates desire (*kama*) within a broader metaphysical and ethical framework. Rather than reducing it to instinctual drives or unconscious yearnings, it interprets desire as arising from the entanglement of the self (*Atman*) with the material body and the three *Gunas*. In Chapter 14, Krishna asserts that transcendence of the *Gunas* is the pathway to liberation: "Having transcended the aforesaid three *Gunas* ... the embodied soul attains supreme bliss" (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2007, p. 160). Within this perspective, desire originates in attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dvesha*), both of which bind the soul to the cycle of birth and death. Thus, in the *Gita*, desire is not merely a psychological tension but a cosmic bondage. Its resolution, therefore, requires spiritual discipline (*yoga*), self-regulation, and ultimately, the realization of the Self beyond the *Gunas*.

Both frameworks, despite their divergent ontologies, converge on a fundamental insight: desire is the central source of psychic conflict and suffering. Freud interprets unpleasure as the consequence of frustrated wishes or the excessive demands of the Superego, while the *Gita* interprets suffering (*dukkha*) as the result of desire's binding power upon the embodied self. The common thread is that unchecked desire leads to disintegration of harmony whether within the psyche (intra-psychic conflict) or within the soul's relationship to its true nature (spiritual ignorance).

An interpretive synthesis suggests that Freud's concept of drive-wish and the *Gita*'s *kama* are two lenses on the same existential predicament. Both recognize that desire operates as a force beyond rational control, shaping human thought, emotion, and behavior in profound ways. The difference lies in their proposed remedies. Psychoanalysis recommends strengthening the Ego and Superego, through reason, learning, and moral development to manage the Id's compulsions (Freud, 2003). The *Gita*, however, prescribes a spiritual path: detachment (*vairagya*), disciplined practice (*abhyasa*), devotion (*bhakti*), and wisdom (*jnana*), all oriented toward transcending the *Gunas* and realizing unity with the *Paramatman* (Dana, 2024).

From a comparative perspective, one can argue that both systems endorse a form of self-regulation. In psychoanalysis, this occurs through the intrapsychic balance between Id, Ego, and Superego, where repression and sublimation serve as mechanisms to manage desires. In the *Gita*, regulation emerges through the cultivation of equanimity (*samatvam*), where desires are neither indulged nor repressed but transcended through awareness of the Self. Modern psychology has begun to validate such insights, with research linking self-regulation, mindfulness, and spiritual practices to improved mental health and resilience (Koenig, 2012; Mayseless & Kizel, 2022).

This interpretive dialogue also carries implications for education and character development. As contemporary scholars argue, desire often fuels consumerist and competitive cultures that exacerbate adolescent anxiety and social conflict (Mayseless &

Kizel, 2022). Both Freud and the Gita remind us that without conscious engagement, desire becomes destructive. Education that incorporates psychoanalytic awareness of unconscious drives alongside spiritual practices rooted in traditions such as the Gita may foster resilience, emotional balance, and ethical responsibility.

In conclusion, desire occupies a paradoxical role in human life: it is both the source of psychic energy and the root of suffering. Freud interprets it as an endless striving bound by repression and symbolic mediation, while the *Bhagavad Gita* interprets it as attachment that binds the soul to material existence. Despite their different vocabularies, both converge on the idea that liberation whether psychological or spiritual, requires transcending the tyranny of desire through discipline, awareness, and transformation. This dialogue between Western psychoanalysis and Eastern psycho-spirituality thus enriches our understanding of human suffering and offers a multidimensional approach to well-being, integrating rational, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the self.

4. Conclusions

Both Freud's psychoanalytic theory and the Triguna theory assert that personality and behavior are governed by intrinsic forces, thereby highlighting their biological underpinnings. Freud's deterministic perspective aligns with Krishna's assertion in the *Bhagavad Gita* that an individual's personality is shaped by inherent *gunas*. However, while Freud emphasizes the enduring influence of these internal drives, the Gita presents a means of transcending them through spiritual discipline. Both theories underscore the necessity of a balanced integration of these elements for well-being, rejecting the dominance of any single aspect over the others. The *Bhagavad Gita* and various *Upanishads* emphasize the cultivation of inner equilibrium through the regulation of the mind, intellect, heart, body, and soul. This is achieved through virtues such as knowledge, patience, love, devotion, and justice, which collectively facilitate psychic liberation (*Moksha*), a Freudian equivalent for mental equilibrium, the Constancy Principle in Fechner's framework and the Nirvana Principle as articulated by Barbara Low. Thus, in a similar tone, Freud's theoretical framework addresses the regulation of primal desires, moral imperatives, and conscious reasoning through the dynamic interaction of the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*.

By examining the convergence between Freud's psychic structures and the *Triguna* framework, individuals may develop a deeper understanding of their own psychological processes and the motivations underlying their behaviors. This comparative analysis not only elucidates the psychological foundations of human behavior but also underscores its ethical dimensions, highlighting the importance of self-awareness and personal responsibility in the pursuit of a balanced and fulfilling life. Exploring the intricate relationships between Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and the Sanatan ethos articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita* reveals a remarkable convergence of ideas concerning human nature, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of inner peace. Freud's constructs of the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego* resonate with the three *gunas*—*Tamas*, *Rajas*, and *Sattva*—found in Sanatan philosophy, revealing a shared understanding of the complexities of human behavior and the inherent struggles between instinctual drives, ethical considerations, and the quest for self-regulation.

Both Freud and the *Bhagavad Gita* articulate a journey toward equilibrium and compassion, underscoring the necessity of taming the baser instincts through conscious effort and ethical living. The *Gita's* emphasis on virtues such as knowledge, patience, love, devotion, and justice resonates with Freud's view that psychological well-being depends on mastering one's impulses through the *Ego's* rational regulation, guided by the moral framework of the *Superego*. Moreover, this comparative analysis demonstrates that, despite their cultural and philosophical distinctions, Freud's Structural Model of the Psyche and the *Triguna* Model of the *Bhagavad Gita* converge in their explanations of the human psyche. While Freud emphasizes biological determinism, he also acknowledges consciousness as a regulator that, by means of the *Ego* and *Superego*, exercises greater control over mental processes, potentially facilitating the emergence of free will. In parallel, the *Bhagavad Gita*

presents a spiritual framework for transcending one's inherent nature, integrating determinism with the possibility of free will.

The study, undertaken from a psycho-spiritual standpoint, delineates the interdisciplinary resonance between Freudian psychoanalysis and the *Bhagavad Gita's* Triguna framework. By engaging Western and Eastern paradigms in a comparative dialogue, it foregrounds their complementary potential to offer a more integrative and multidimensional understanding of the human psyche. The synthesis of this comparative analysis reframes biological determinism and spiritual transcendence as dynamically interrelated constructs and proposes an integrative ontology of human experience. This comparative paradigm provides scholars with an interdisciplinary pedagogical resource, unlocking new avenues for exploring the nuanced intersections of psychology, cultural hermeneutics, and moral philosophy. It also foregrounds self-reflexivity, ethical discernment, and affective self-regulation as essential competencies within holistic models of psychological development. The study ultimately calls for a pluralistic, dialogical paradigm in psychological inquiry that acknowledges the epistemic plurality of human selfhood. By harmonizing empirical rigor with hermeneutic sensitivity to spiritual traditions, it contributes to a transformative scholarly approach that transcends disciplinary and cultural solipsism, positioning integrative inquiry as vital for addressing the complex exigencies of human existence.

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Author Contribution

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