

An Inquiry into the Concept of Personality from the Buddhist Perspective

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Introduction

The main objectives of this article are to discuss on personality from the Buddhist perspective. Personality is derived from the *Latin* word *personalitas*¹ and *persona*, a translation of the Greek *prosopon*. These both terms signify the mask worn by actors on stage. By extension the reference is to the role an individual plays in the drama of life.² And personality plays a prominent role and the entire teaching of the Buddha. Buddha's teachings can be termed as a system of psychoanalysis. In the fundamental analysis of the individual into mind and form (*nāmarūpa*), mind (*nāma*) refers to mind and other mental factors.

One may suppose that the Buddhist teaching of Anatta (*Impermanence*) is connected with denial of personality. It does not deny the existence of a personality or individuality. Buddhism describes personality or individuality, is not an entity, but a process of arising and passing away, a process of nutrition, of combustion, of grasping, but does not correspond to any fixed entity.³ The Buddhist terms such as *Citta*⁴, *Atta*⁵ and *Attabhava*⁶ signifies us various kinds of personalities. Buddhist teachings on the concept of Personality are broadly and completely analyzed in the analysis of the *Five Aggregate*.

Definitions on Personality in the Western Psychology

Term personality was used in support of dramatic mask by ancients. Then it soon became the name for the individual role. *Leibniz* (1646-1716 A. D) distinguished man from animal by calling him a person, or a rational, self-conscious, continuous, incommunicable and unique substance.⁷ For *Immanuel Kant* (1724-1804 A. D), he used this term for the most

¹ Colman, Andrew. M., (2010). *A Dictionary of Psychology*, Oxford University Press, p. 547

² Reese, William. L., (1996). *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, Humanities Press, New Jersey, p. 565

³ Piyadssi, Thera., (1991). *The Spectrum of Buddhism*

⁴ *sattā santāno cittam eva, The Udāna Aṭṭhakathā*

⁵ *attānam damayanti pandito, The Dhammapada*

⁶ *Paññacakkhandha sankhāto attabhāva kāyo, The Theragāthā Aṭṭhakathā*

⁷ *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, The Philosophical Library., (1946). (Ed) Philip Lawrence Harriman. New York, pp. 455-456.

significant ethical sense as designating a rational, free agent who should never be treated as a means only.⁸

The word person and personality have invariably referred to that quality of selfhood which was capable of self-conscious rationality and ideals. The following definitions suggest us the real meaning of personality in the western psychology. For *Morton Prince*, he explains personality as “the sum of total of all biological innate dispositions, impulses, tendencies, appetites, and instincts of the individual, and the acquired dispositions and tendencies acquired by experience.”⁹ *H. C. Warren* and *L. Carmichael* emphasize what personality is. “Personality is the entire mental organization of a human being at any stage of his development. It embraces every phase of human character: intellect, temperament, skill, morality, and every attitude that has been built up in the course of one’s life.”¹⁰ As *M. Schoen* states that if all the members of any one social group acted alike, thought alike, and felt alike, personality would not exist.¹¹ For *R. S. Woodworth*: personality refers not to any particular sort of activity such as talking, remembering, thinking, or loving, but an individual can reveal his personality in the way he does any of these things.¹²

Personality is “*a collection of Emotional, Thought and Behavioral patterns unique to a person that is consistent over time*”.¹³ It is explained as totality of an individual’s behavioral and emotional characteristics. Personality embraces “*a person’s moods, attitudes, opinions, motivations, and style of thinking, perceiving, speaking, and acting. It is part of what makes each individual distinct.*”¹⁴

In the second analysis of personality is based on special internal phenomenon or phenomena which are decided one’s states and traits. Various shapes of personality are through the internal influence. In *Freudian* analysis on personality, he explains it through the concept of *Libido*.

The internal and external behavioral characteristics which are connected with the past, present and future of the person are taken as a total is described in the third definition. Modern psychological schools such as ‘*Anthropological* and *Existentialist*’ are analyzed

⁸ Ibid, p. 456

⁹ Prince, Morton., (1994). *The Unconscious* (2nd ed.), p. 532.

¹⁰ Warren, H. C. and Carmichael, L., (1930). *Elements of Human Psychology*, p. 333

¹¹ Schoen., (1930). *Human nature*, p. 397

¹² Woodworth., (1929). *Psychology*, p. 553

¹³ *Dictionary of Wikipedia*

¹⁴ *Dictionary of Britannica*

personality as the above manner. For *Golden Allport*, he defines that "*Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment*"¹⁵

Personality Diversity in the Buddhist Perspective

Buddhist definition on man is as a psycho-physical entity (*nāma-rūpa*).¹⁶ Buddhism primarily provides well-built concepts to recognize the unit of *the person, man* and *I*. Amongst them, the most important analyses of personality stand for followings:

1. The Nāma-Rūpa Analysis
2. The Khandha Analysis
3. The Dhātu Analysis
 - ✓ Six Kind of Dhātu
 - ✓ Eighteen Dhātu
4. The Āyatana Analysis
5. The Paticca-Samuppāda Analysis

The Five Aggregates

The foremost Buddhist analysis of personality comprises in the Five Aggregates (*Paññakkhandha*). These five groups of processes are extremely grasped by human being as *I, My* and *Mine*. They can, thus, loosely be described as the Personality-Factors.

1. The Aggregate of Matter
2. The Aggregate Feeling
3. The Aggregate of Cognition (*Perception*)
4. The Aggregate of Volitional actions
5. The Aggregate of Consciousness

¹⁵ Allport, G. W., (1937). *Personality (A Psychological Interpretation)*, New York, p. 48

¹⁶ The Samyutta Nikāya -II, *The Nalakaḷāpasutta*, p. 180

Thus, Buddhism has identified the five shapes of the human personality. This is not a final division of personality. These are presented as groups which can be isolatable any more. These groups are explained further through some verbs in *the Khajjanīyasutta*.

❖ Rūpa	—————→	Ruppati
❖ Vedanā	—————→	Vediyati
❖ Saññā	—————→	Sañjānāti
❖ Saṅkhāra	—————→	Abhisāṅkharoti
❖ Viññāṇa	—————→	Vijānāti ¹⁷

In this analysis of the Five Aggregates of describing personality in the Buddhist perspective, it aims at including the non-permanent substantial and no soul within it. The analysis of the Five Aggregates is directly focused on the Buddhist path towards the spiritual progress. Reality of the Five Aggregates is explained in *the Phenapiṇḍūpamasutta* through the following five kinds of parables.

❖ Rūpakkhandha	—————→	Lump of Foam
❖ Vedanākkhandha	—————→	Bubble
❖ Saññākkhandha	—————→	Mirage
❖ Saṅkhārakkhandha	—————→	Plantain Trunk
❖ Viññāṇakkhandha	—————→	Illusion ¹⁸

Therefore, the five Aggregates are impermanent (*anicca*) and subject to ill (*dukkha*) and unsubstantial (*anatta*). The comparison made of the Five Aggregates in *the Samyutta Nikāya* clearly brings out their impermanent and unsubstantial nature.

These shapes of analyzes of Personality in Buddhism can be found in the researches of the modern psychology. According to the opinions of modern psychologist *J. P. Guilford*, his classification of personality is as follows:

1. Physiology
2. Interests

¹⁷ *Ruppatīti rūpaṃ, vedayatīti vedanā, sañjānātīti saññā, abhisāṅkharontīti saṅkhāraṃ, vijānātīti viññāṇaṃ*-The Samyutta Nikaya III, *The Khajjanīyasutta*, p. from 150....

¹⁸ *Pheṇapiṇḍūpamaṃ rūpaṃ, vedanā bubbulūpamaṃ, marīcīūpamaṃ saññā, saṅkhārā kadalūpamaṃ, māyūpamaṃca viññāṇaṃ*.....The Samyutta Nikāya III, *The Phenapiṇḍūpamasutta*, p. 244

3. Needs
4. Temperaments
5. Aptitudes ¹⁹

Three main aspects can commonly be accepted in the modern psychological analysis on personality. Buddhist personality analysis is also discussed these as follows:

1. Cognitive Aspect - Saññā
2. Affective Aspect - Vedanā
3. Conative Aspect - Cetanā ²⁰

Thus, according to the analysis of five aggregates in Buddhism, it can be explicated as a full and perfect clarification of personality.

Varieties of Personality in the Buddhist Perspective

Ascetic *Gotama*, with the attainment of Emancipation came to be known as the Buddha. At the very inception of his mission, the Buddha surveyed the world out of Compassion to preach the *Dhamma*. *The Ariyapariyesanasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* speaks of how the Buddha saw beings with a range of good and bad traits as follows:

- ❖ With little dust in their eyes
- ❖ With much dust in their eyes
- ❖ With acute faculties
- ❖ With dull faculties
- ❖ Of good dispositions
- ❖ Of bad positions
- ❖ Docile
- ❖ Indocile
- ❖ Few seeing from fear sins and
- ❖ The world beyond ²¹

¹⁹ Henry Mussen, Paul., (1984). *Child Development & Personality*, New York.

²⁰ *Encyclopedia of Buddhism- IV.*, (1971). Ed G. P. Malalasekara, The Government of Ceylon, p. 170

The Buddha reviewed these diversities of the world as diversities in a pond of lotuses. Even as in a pond of blue lotuses or in a pond of red lotuses or in a pond of white lotuses, a few red and blue and white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water, do not rise above the water but thrive while altogether immersed; a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water and reach the surface of the water; a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water, and stand rising out of the water, undefiled by the water; even so did I, monks, surveying the world with the eye of an Awakened One.²²

The Puggalapaññatti of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* draws a clear list of human types under the ten headings based on the numerical order from one to ten.

1. Grouping of Human Types by one
2. Grouping of Human Types by two
3. Grouping of Human Types by three
4. Grouping of Human Types by four
5. Grouping of Human Types by five
6. Grouping of Human Types by six
7. Grouping of Human Types by seven
8. Grouping of Human Types by eight
9. Grouping of Human Types by nine
10. Grouping of Human Types by ten²³
- 11.

One of the well-known post canonical texts, *the Visuddhimagga*, the Path of Purification mentions a great definition on the classification of personality. Here one can see many verities amongst the individuals based on their physical and mental characters in society. Thinking pattern and acting part of the individuals are totally different from each others.

²¹ Apparajakkhe maharajakkhe tikkhindriye mudindriye svākāre dvākāre suviññāpaye duviññāpaye-The Majjhima Nikāya II- *The Ariyapariyesanasutta*, p. 101

²² Ibid, p. 101

²³ The Abhidhammapiṭka, *The Puggalapaññatti*

1. Nānatta kāyā nānatta saññī no
2. Nānatta kāyā ekatta saññī no
3. Ekatta kāyā nānatta saññī no
4. Ekatta kāyā ekatta saññī no ²⁴

Even in the modern psychology, we come across the two theories with reference to one's personality.

1. Type Theories
2. Traits Theories

Block's Personality Types is recognized as one of the modern definitions of personality types. He introduces five types of personality but they were re-edited in the latter studies and categorizes into three types.

1. Over-Controlling
2. Under controlling
3. Well Balanced-Adjusted ²⁵

Buddhism explains personality depending on the situations. *The Lokadhammasutta* of the Aṅguttara Nikāya accentuates that one should not shake when toughed by worldly vicissitudes.

1. Gain - loss,
2. fame - ill-fame,
3. praise - blame,
4. happiness - unhappiness ²⁶

As this *Sutta* emphasizes the wisers are unshakable from these eight. From the Buddhist perspective, the Buddha and the *Arahant-s* never shake from any kind of these vicissitudes.

²⁴ The Path of Purification, *The Paññābhūmi Niddesa*

²⁵ Block, J., (1993). *Lives Through Time*, Berkeley, Bancroft.

²⁶ ābho alābho ayaso yaso ca - nindā pasamsā ca sukham ca dukkham

ete aniccā manujesu dhammā - asassatā viparināma dhammā- The Anguttara Nikāya, *The Lokadhammasutta*

In accordance with the capacity of mindfulness and keeping memory on the *Dhamma* fact, there can be found another personality type.

1. Avakujjapañño puggalo
2. Uccangapañño puggalo
3. Puthupañño puggalo²⁷

The intensity of intelligence of the individual are quite unusual with others. *The Neiyypuggalasutta* classifies the fourfold personalities with regards to various levels of understanding of something.

1. Uggāṭitañña puggalo (one who understands immediately)
2. Vipāṭitañña puggalo (an individual who has not the capability of attaining)
3. Neyya puggalo (an individual who has not the capability)
4. Padaparama puggalo (one who cannot attain the Paths and the Fruits for life time.)²⁸

It is said that knowledge is power. Those who engage in their activities actively would succeed their goals effortlessly. Accordingly one's skillfulness, there are fourfold of personality types.

1. Yutta paṭibhāno na mutta paṭibhāno
2. Mutta paṭibhāno na yutta paṭibhāno
3. Yutta paṭibhāno ca mutta paṭibhāno ca
4. Ne va yutta paṭibhāno ca neva mutta paṭibhāno²⁹

Taking into consideration the ethical standards of a person, the four types of personality are recognized.

²⁷ The Aṅguttara Nikāya , p. 241

²⁸ The Aṅguttara Nikāya II, *The Neiyypuggalasutta*, p. 260

²⁹ The Aṅguttara Nikāya II, *The Paṭibhānapuggalasutta*, p. 260

1. Tamo tamaparayano (From darkness to darkness)
2. Tamo jotiparayano (From darkness to light)
3. Joti tamaparayano (From light to darkness)
4. Joti joti parayano (From light to light) ³⁰

This category consists of three types of personality based on worldly and spiritual progress.

1. The Blind person
2. The One eyed person
3. The Two eyed person ³¹

The following classification shows us the two types of people as wise (good) and foolish (bad) in the world.

Foolish Features

1. Bodily wrong doings
2. Verbal wrong doings
3. Mental wrong thinking

Wise Characteristics

1. Bodily good doings
2. Verbal good doings
3. Mental good thinking ³²

In the Five Powers (*faith, mindfulness, endeavour, concentration, wisdom*), in the development stages of these five powers, the following types of personality can be seen.

1. Kāya Sakkhi (*Persons who are strong with Concentration*)
2. Saddhā Sakkhi (*Persons who are strong with Faith*)
3. Diṭṭhappatta (*Person who are strong with Wisdom*) ³³

³⁰ The Aṅguttara Nikāya II, *The Tamotamparayanāsutta*, p. 260

³¹ *Andhañca eka cakkhuñca ārakā parivajjaye-dvi cakkhu pana sevetha seṭṭho purisa puggalo*-The Aṅguttara Nikāya I, *The Andhasutta*, p. 238

³² The Aṅguttara Nikāya II, *The Bālapandita Sutta*, p. 202

³³ The Aṅguttara Nikāya I, p. 222

According to the experiences of the external world and facing for troubles in life, there are three fold types of personality.

1. Arukūpama citto puggalo (*Person who has old-wound in where mind full with lust, anger...*)
2. Vijjūpama citto puggalo (*Person who sees the dark through the light sees the Four Noble Truths*)
3. Vajirūpama citto puggalo (*Person who tries to destruct all the defilements like breaking a stone through the diamond*)³⁴

When the anger arises in human mind and how to response it, taking this nature of mind the three fold divisions of personality can be seen.

1. Pāsāna lekhūpamo puggalao (*Always get angry and long wrath*)
2. Paṭhavi lekhūpamo puggalo (*Always get angry but no long wrath*)
3. Udaka lekhūpamo puggalo (*Not get angry at unpleasant, rough moments and anger looses immediately*)³⁵

As mentioned in *the Visuddhimagga*, the commentary for the Three Basket in the Theravada tradition, the human personality is drawn six intricate facets, each of which has a bad, good or negative, positive. These six types have been summarized into three distinct pairs of personality type. The negative characteristics are called unwholesome, while the positive traits are known as the wholesome.

Different Characters of people

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1.Rāga-carita | - Greedy Temperament |
| 2.Dosa-carita | - Hating Temperament |
| 3.Moha-carita | - Deluded Temperament |
| 4.Saddhā-carita | - Faithful Temperament |
| 5.Buddhi-carita | - Intelligent Temperament |
| 6.Vittakka-carita | - Speculative Temperament ³⁶ |

³⁴ The Aṅguttara Nikāya I, p. 230

³⁵ The Aṅguttara Nikāya I, p. 511

Three Unwholesome Roots or Motivations

1. Greed Temperament
2. Hatred Temperament
3. Ignorance Temperament

Three Wholesome Roots or Motivations

1. Non-Greed Temperament
2. Non-Hatred Temperament
3. Non-Ignorance Temperament

Behavioral Patterns

1. Sāvajjā
2. Vajjabahulā
3. Appavajjā
4. anavajjā³⁷

Endeavour of the Person

1. uttāhāna phalūpajīvi na kammaphalūpajīvi
2. kammaphalūpajīvi na uttāhānaphalūpajīvi
3. uttāhānaphalūpajīvi ca kammaphalūpajīvi
4. nevuttāhānaphalūpajīvi nevakammaphalūpajīvi³⁸

Amongst the various classifications of personality in the Buddhist sources, the following classification of personality is directly connected with *Nibbāna, the Summum Bonum* of Buddhism.

³⁶ The Path of Purification, (*Visuddhimagga*), Chapter III, Description of Concentration-Taking A Meditation Subject (*Kammaṭṭhāna-gahaṇa-niddesa*)- Bhikkhu Ñānamoli., (1956). Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre, No. 11, Neo Pee Teck Lane, Singapore, Reprinted By the corporate body of the Buddha educational foundation, 11th Floor, 55, Hang Chow..., Taipei, Taiwan, 1997, p. 102

³⁷ Cattāro me bhikkhave puggalāsanto sanvijjamāno lokasmim katame cattāro, sāvajjo, vajjabahulo, appavajjo, anavajjo- The Aṅguttara Nikāya II, *The Vajjapuggalasutta*, p. 262

³⁸ The Aṅguttara Nikāya II-*The Phalūpajīvipuggalasutta*, p. 262

1. Sekkha
2. Asekha

Development Stages of Personality

In the modern psychology, there are three stages of the development of personality. They are:

1. Child Age (0-10)
2. Teen Age (11-20)
3. Old Age (20 +)

Taking into account the above three stages, the Buddha advises how to lead a good life. One who has not led the holy life nor riches won while young, he or she suffers from many ways.³⁹ This type of personality is not agreeable with the Buddhist teachings. One should manage his/her life in proper way and develop personality at the adequate ages. It is considered as one of the greatest characteristics of personality.

In the Buddhist analysis of development of personality is meant by not the natural physical development. One should have the knowledge of choosing what good and bad is. Buddhist personality goes beyond the modern psychological personality development. It covers both physical and spiritual progress of the person and society. The Buddha and the *Arahant-s* are the persons who considered as the fully functioning individuals in the world from the Buddhist point of view.

³⁹ Acaritvā brahmacariyaṃ aladdhā yobbane dhaṇaṃ..., *The Dhammapada*, The Jara Vaggao, verses-155-156

Conclusion

Buddhism classifies the person by means of their physical and spiritual progressive level, knowledge and comprehension, capacity of memory, responsibility, social activities and so on. Varieties of personality can be revealed from the Buddhist texts. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*⁴⁰ speaks these: Need for self-actualization, Esteem needs, Belongingness and Love needs, Safety needs, Physiological needs are categorized types of personality in accordance with the Buddhist teachings. His theory is mostly parallel with the Buddhist teachings. Buddhist personality development is straightly connected with the path of the Stream-Enterer, Once Returner, Non-Returner and the *Arahant* as well. Thus, we can understand the uniqueness of personality varieties in Buddhism.

Bibliography

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⁴⁰ Hall.S. C, Lindzey-G, Campbell. B. J (1997). *Theories of Personality*, 4th Edition, John Willey & Sons, p. 444