

Psychological Implications of Counseling of Arjuna by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita and its Relevance in the Contemporary Field of Psychology and Education

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Abstract:

The Bhagavad Gita is a multidimensional, multifaceted and a pithy book by Maharishi Vyas. Easwaranvery aptly designate it “a manual to life”. The book is endowed with extremely beneficial knowledge to survive joyfully in all conditions of life. It not only provides a strong and clear perspective towards life but also give insight for an understanding the self eventually leading us to spiritual elevation which is the goal of life. The psychology embedded in the Bhagavad Gita is very thorough and if exploited well it can do wonders in the field of psychology. Rangaswamy rightly said that “The Bhagavad-Gita is the masterpiece of psychotherapy”. Arjuna,the best archer of all the times got confused when he was looked upon as the most skilled one among all on the battlefield. Arjuna is a representation of all men in the state of confusion and becoming fearful when a situation of crisis occurs. An anxious and bewildered Arjuna sought guidance from Krishna, intaking decision, to fight or not to fight. This paper intends to present a psychological analysis of Arjuna’s state of mind on the battlefield, its similarities with the modern psychoanalysis of Freud and the relevance of this analysis in the contemporary field of psychology and Education. The papers also intends to draw special attention to the role of teacher, student and pedagogy in the teaching learning process through the perspective of Bhagavad Gita with a little reference to NEP 2020.

Key Words: Bhagavad Gita, Counseling, psychotherapy, Teacher, Learner, Pedagogy, NEP2020

Introduction

All the psychological theories whatsoever have been originated /postulated by many psychologists aim to understand the human mind and curing the mental ailments that disturbs the mental peace and affect life in many unwanted ways. Life can be lived with contentment when a person understand himself and act as per his tendencies. The Bhagavad Gita gives us a theory of personality types that proves beneficial in understanding one’s personality. This incomparable gift to mankind lays out a comprehensive blueprint for self-improvement and self-actualisation leading toward the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation (Abhijit Basu, 2012 Page 3).

The problem related to mental disturbances can be solved with the cure of mind only. The modern psychology suggests innumerable remedies to deal with the problematic situation. But somehow, they fail to tell us that stability of mind is the prerequisite to attain the actual and everlasting peace in life. "The early yogis were really psychologists," says Cope, a psychotherapist, yoga teacher, and director of the Kripalu Institute for Extraordinary Living in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. "They were interested not in dogma, but in the way things work. How do perception and delusion work? What causes suffering? How can we see clearly? The system they devised is way more sophisticated than anything we have in the West." Who is the best yogi than Krishna? In the Bhagavad Gita he was entitled as 'Mahayogeshwar' (BG 11.9), a supreme yogi.

Counseling and psychotherapy are primarily a method of curing the mental ailments of a patient, largely depends on the talk therapy. The psychological issues viz. stress, anxiety, dilemmas, jealousy, fear etc. can be addressed through counseling and aims towards the exploration of thorough potential of the patient. Unlike other medical treatments the psychological counseling therapies operate chiefly without the induction of medicines and considerate of not only psychic health but with other aspects of living – social, philosophical, and spiritual (Feltham, 2000, p.3)

Philosophy and the scriptures dealt with all the mental issues of Indian society from the inception of the human species. The kings and the people in general took counsel from the sages and the learned Brahmins whenever they encountered any problem. Spiritual leaders have been acting as counselors, counseling people through the philosophical scriptures. A plethora of religious scriptures has always been available and guided people for every query of theirs. Psychology as a branch of mental science has a late emergence and it only deals with a limited area of human personality. On the other hand, philosophy includes psychology in it and can deal with mental problems in a better and thorough way. Therefore, the modern thinkers and psychologists emphasize on the Indian scriptures and are guided by the Vedas, Purans, Upanishads, the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana etc. in counseling to the people in distress.

The Bhagavad Gita is not only considered as a manual to life and encapsulates the higher psychology in it but is revered by many transcendentalists as a guidebook to deal with all the problems of life, primarily the mental issues. The question-answer session conducted by Krishna is a great module of psychological counseling.

In this paper an effort has been made to showcase the Bhagavad Gita as a treatise to counseling to Arjuna and along with it can serve as a guide to the problems of the present generation man. The psychological counseling is a very modern concept in west, but the east always had philosophers and religious guides for counseling.

Methodology

The Bhagavad Gita is written in Sanskrit; which is one of the oldest languages in the history of all languages. This paper is written in view of the qualitative research methodology called hermeneutics. The Bhagavad Gita is an Indian classical scripture which is interpreted in the psychological perspective. The intention of the writer is to analyse the text in the light of Freud's psychoanalysis and relate it to Arjuna's depressed state of mind.

Further, an effort has been made to show the relevance of the psychological counselling of Arjuna by Krishna in the contemporary times. The author has strived to show the aptness of the text in the field of psychology and how this book can be a benchmark in the field of psychological counselling and curing of mental illness irrespective of caste, country and religion.

The Psychological Component in the Bhagavad Gita and Psychoanalysis of Freud

The Freud's theory of psychoanalysis revolutionized the field of psychology and finds a prominent place in the field of understanding a human mind in the modern times. His theory rests on the pillars of Id, ego and superego and he gives significant importance to the 'unconscious'. In the essay *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud offers his structural model of the personality, primarily based on: the Id, the ego, and the superego. The Id is the most primordial psychic component that forms the base of the human personality. It serves as a pool of elementary instinctive drives, chiefly the physical and sexual (libidinal) ones, and is based on pleasure principle. The ego is an alteration of the Id and remains a level above the Id, keeping the worldly and social constraints in mind. Ego works on the principle of reality and fulfills the demand of Id in a balanced way. "It is the center of reason, reality testing, and commonsense, and has at its command, a range of defensive stratagems that can deflect, repress, or transform the expression of unrealistic or forbidden drive energies" (Daniel K. Lapsley and Paul C. Stey, 2012, 393-399). While the Id seeks pleasure, and the ego is administered by the reality principle, the superego proposes the psychic energy to follow idealistic goals and strive for perfection. It is the source of moral censorship and conscience.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna talks about the three gunas (elements): Sattva, Rajas and Tamas that forms the foundation of the personality. These three elements are always present in the human personality and one of them always predominates over the other two. The person's behavior depends on the predominance of that particular guna at a particular point of time. He explains the characteristics and the impact of these three gunas on the personality of a human being. He says, the tamas gives rise to laziness, excessive sleep, delusion, intoxication, and other vices. The rajas produces endless desires and ambitions and from the sattva positivity and illumination arise. Further, he says that if all three gunas come into a state of equilibrium then only a person can remain balanced and self-satisfied

*"prakāśham cha pravṛtīm cha mohameva cha
pāṇḍava...guṇāvartantaityevānyo'vatīṣṭhatineṅgate"* (BG 14.22-23).

The Id, Ego and Superego are like tamas, rajas, and sattva, but with a difference that they can be active in any particular moment in a human, irrespective of the strict time frame unlike Freud's. The Bhagavad Gita speaks about the Sankhya Philosophy that believes in the principle of duality and rests on the theory of 'Purush' and Prakriti' where "Purusha is inactive consciousness, whereas prakriti is blind activity" (Swami Krishnananda). One has to understand the difference between Purush and Prakriti to understand the functioning of the mind. Freud's theory largely depends on the 'unconscious' and he (Rosenbaum, 2003), refers that most of mental activities are performed unconsciously. Freud says that if one wants to overcome anxiety and fear one has to make the unconscious conscious (1915). The Bhagavad Gita talks in a different way about the 'unconscious' and takes it little back in the previous births, calling it 'vāsānās' or 'saṃskāras' (the memory of the past lives actions), which the soul carries as a baggage directs the present life to a great extent resulting into joy or suffering. Krishna suggested a number of ways through many shlokas to deal with the past lives baggage and come to peaceful terms with it.

Counselling of a distressed Arjuna by Lord Krishna

The distress of Arjuna on the battlefield, when he saw that he has to fight with his relatives, became the basis of reciting the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna. In chapter one, Arjuna tries to find out excuses to save himself from the duty of the battle. The pressure of fighting with his relatives swayed him into depression and anxiety and he got disillusioned when he sees his brothers and relatives as his opponents. He declares his deteriorated mental and physical condition to Krishna,

vepathuśh cha śharīre me roma-harṣhaśh cha jāyate...na cha śhreyo 'nupaśhyāmi hatvāsva-janam āhave (BG 1.29-31)

“My whole body shudders; my hair is standing on end. My bow, the Gāṇḍīva, is slipping from my hand, and my skin is burning all over. My mind is in quandary and whirling in confusion; I am unable to hold myself steady any longer. O Krishna, killer of the Keshi demon, I only see omens of misfortune. I do not foresee how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen in this battle” (Swami Mukundananda).

Arjuna stood despondent and bemused in the decisive times. Out of attachment to his kinsmen, Arjuna also forgets his purpose of life and duty as a warrior. He got engulfed into self-pity, and fear and the signs of depression were thoroughly evident. If we could see in the light of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, we can say that the symptoms were of a neurotic patient who has lost his sense of judgment between right and wrong and seeks counselling to get back to a normal state of mind.

The Bhagavad-Gita is a magnificent compilation of 700 verses out of which, Krishna articulated 574 and Arjuna- 84, the rest are of Sanjaya and Dhritrashtra. The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna evidently looks like a psychological counselling session where Krishna answers every question posed by Arjuna. He surrendered himself to Krishna: “śhiṣhyaste 'haṁ śhādhimāntvām prapannam”, “I am your disciple and am surrendered to you” (BG 2.7). From here Krishna took the responsibility to guide Arjuna. Krishna counseled him by imparting him the knowledge of the fragile nature of the body and immortality of the soul. He further made him realise his duties as a Kshatriya (warrior) and a prince. He, like a counselor, made him realise his true worth and guided Arjuna to come out of his baseless fears. He said that he should not behave like a common man and must not waver as “there is no better engagement than fighting for upholding of righteousness” (Swami Mukundananda).

To counter his fear Krishna suggested him to rise above the level of physical attachment and advise him to carry out his duties without the expectations of results. Krishna, emphasizing on the righteousness, says “O Parth, happy are the warriors to whom such opportunities to defend righteousness come unsought, opening for them the stairway to the celestial abodes.” BG 2.32. He further warns Arjuna that “If, however, you refuse to fight this righteous war, abandoning your social duty and reputation, you will certainly incur sin” (BG 2.33). The sense of duty is above everything all in the Bhagavad Gita.

The practice of ‘nonattachment’ (with all the objects of senses) is absolutely necessary to save oneself from mental and physical suffering. The emotion of attachment is very subjective and clouds the mind for appropriate action. Krishna in verses 2.61-63 tells Arjuna that how one sense attachment leads to another and finally when the desires (arise from the senses), are not fulfilled, how they destroy a human being.

Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita recites to Arjuna the importance of a state of 'sthithprajna' (the stable mind) for a fulfilled and joyous life. Krishna says that to take the right decisions in life one has to have a state of mental equipoise and that can be attained only through the regular practice of certain practices viz. the Karma yog (action without attachment to the outcome), Jnanyog (true knowledge), or meditation or the devotion towards the God as per one's suitability and choice. He adds that to follow one of the mentioned practices, one has to follow a sattvic diet and a sattvic lifestyle too. All these paths lead to peaceful living and are necessary to maintain a mental equilibrium, a compulsory element for a stress-free life.

Difference Between the Modern Counseling and Krishna's Counseling

According to Ranchan (1987) Krishna acts more like a 'transpersonal psychologist' who not only cures his present depression of Arjuna but conveyed to him the purpose of human existence. Krishna says the soul is the ultimate reality of human existence and eternal. "The soul is unbreakable and incombustible; it can neither be dampened nor dried. It is everlasting, in all places, unalterable, immutable, and primordial." BG 2.24. He counsels Arjuna to be dutiful, fearless, detached from all the social bonding as these relations change with time and are perishable. What makes the Bhagavad-Gita a great narrative of transpersonal psychology is Krishna's shift from a friend to counselor and then a guide to Arjuna to make him achieve the highest goal of life. He scolded, chided, teased Arjuna for his mental weakness, questions him on his duties as a warrior, consoled him for the pain inflicted on him. Even threatening him for the negligence of his duties becomes smooth in Krishna's counseling. His interpolations become transpersonal when he counsels Arjuna beyond the physicality and sermons him on the great philosophy of dharma and devotion for liberation.

A remarkable difference could be seen in the traditional eastern ways and modern western ways. Sukhabodhananda (2007), tries to carve out the difference between the modern counseling and Krishna's counseling of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita. He says that there are lots of differences between modern psychological therapies and the Bhagavad Gita way of curing mental ailments. In therapy, if there is a problem the problem is addressed. But what Krishna does is different. His method of solving the problem is not dealing with the problem, but dealing with the person who has the problem; the shift of being is what Lord Krishna is working on, from Jivatma to Brahmatma. In therapy, the therapist works on problems; how to solve problems, how to deal with problems, whereas, Krishna is talking not only of the problems but of how to shift the being of the person to sthithaprajna, (stable) irrespective of what kind of life he is living. "Whether you are a sanyasi (monk) or gruhasta (householder) it doesn't matter you will reach that state of being. That state of being is what Lord Krishna presents in the Bhagavad-Gita" (Sukhabodhananda, 2007, p. 31).

Swami Rama also found difference between both of them. He says,

"there are major differences in the way Krishna treats Arjuna and approaches used by psychotherapists today. Modern psychotherapists attempt to help the client modify his conscious attitudes and unconscious processes and behaviors, but their analyses lack the depth and profundity found in the Bhagavad-Gita. Most modern psychologists do not go to the root of the problem but analyze it without understanding the fundamental causes. They deal with specific problems and symptoms, and untouched causes then express its agony in different ways" (Rama, 1985 p.4, 5, 6).

Relevance of the Psychological Implications of the Bhagavad Gita in the Contemporary Field of Psychology

The Bhagavad Gita reveals thorough psychology and offers a complete solution to all mental issues and serves as a guide for a better living. This book is considered as the epitome of psychological epithets and in modern psychology, it can be referred to as the guidebook to curing various mental ailments.

The philosophy of 'svadharama' spoken by Krishna in numerous places should be emphasized in modern counselling. Dharma and Svadharma have different implications in the Bhagavad Gita. Gita focuses on 'Svadharmā' in context with one's personal duty and it should be followed diligently without the emotional attachment to the results. It says that performing one's duty, even faultily, is always better than doing someone else's job with perfection

*śhreyānsva-dharmoviguṇaḥ para-dharmātsv-anuṣṭhitāt
swa-dharmenidhanamśhreyah para-dharmobhayāvahaḥ* (Bhagavad Gita 3.35)

A person should be provided a counselling session where he should be made aware of his potential and interest because those who are aware of their potentialities and choose the work accordingly can be saved from many mental pressures and their vocation can become their vacation and can save them from mental stress and confident.

'Sanasara' (the worldly desires) is the origin of the misery ([Shankaracharya.pdf](#), pg 38) is caused by the pain that arises from the unfilled desires of the senses. In verse 2.63 of BG Krishna clearly defines how the desires lead to destruction of man. So, it is advised that one should be aware of the desires and practice a state of 'sthithiprajana' by constant practice and penance.

Arjuna accepts that because of 'karpanyadosh'(self-pity) BG 2.7, he is getting confused and seeks guidance from Krishna. Krishna suggested him numerous ways to come out of this negative emotion which is absolutely essential to remove or it may lead to self-destruction.

Knowledge of the self, duty and maintaining a balance in performance of the duties are the key factors to remove all negative emotions. Gita concentrates on the Karma theory with a detachment to the results of work. The theory says that one should do the prescribed duty without fail and accept the results with objectivity. But to attain such state of equanimity of mind Gita suggests the path of true knowledge of the self, as "he who knows not the Self is subject to illusion"(Shankaracharya, pdf. Pg 45). When one is unaware of the truth (the real Self) he is always disillusioned and such a man is a slave of negative emotions.

The path of 'Yog', not yoga as a physical exercise as popular in the west, but as it is suggested by Patanjali in 'Yog Sutras', must be followed to have a healthy mind and body. All the chapters of the Bhagavad Gita are also nominated as Yog by almost all the commentators of Gita. Krishna says "samatvaṁ yoga uchyate" (BG 2.48) "equanimity is called Yog" (Prabhupad, 1986pg. 95). The equanimity enables us to accept all circumstances with serenity and help us in facing the challenges of life. Krishna suggests numerous yogic ways to attain the mental equilibrium. Chanting Aum is one of them and he says that it is the only sound "omityekākṣharam brahma" (BG 8.13). 'Aum' is a cosmic and primordial sound that when chanted "generates frequencies and the vibration pattern thus created influences autonomic nerves and the two hemispheres of the cerebral cortex"(World Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences 2321-3086). Krishna talks about many yogas viz. Karma Yog, Janna Yog,

DhyanYog, Bhakti Yog, as per the comfort of an individual being or his nature, in Bhagavad Gita and through Arjuna he says that one should select any of the ways of Yog to attain liberation from the clutches of negative emotions. If the theory of Karma Yog (doing the work with high spirits and not bothering about the result or surrendering the result to the discretion of nature or God) is well understood by a person, he can remain free from any anxiety and maintain a balanced mind. JananYog gives an understanding of the self in all aspects.

Understanding the Prakriti of a person based on three 'gunas' in nature, is also a valuable and essential feature of the Bhagavad Gita. If modern psychology incorporates this feature, it can handle mental ailments more efficiently and permanently. Krishna suggests many ways to balance them for the stability of mind and a healthy body.

Relevance of the Psychological Implications of the Bhagavad Gita in the Contemporary Field of Education

Discussing the field of education, Bhagavad Gita does not just answer the questions but gives valuable reasons depending on which the child makes the informed decision of his own as Arjuna did when the divine teacher Lord Krishna imparted his wisdom to his student, not as mere dictation like others. The Bhagavad Gita answers the 'why' of such education. When a child takes birth, he inherits certain tendencies, instincts, propensities of character, mental temperaments, etc. from his past life. This might explain individual differences among children. The Bhagavad Gita reconciles metaphysics and physics, hereditary and environment of human beings, and postulates the principles of education indicating that education is a spiritual-social necessity. It is a value and its structure cannot be built on sand.

The Bhagavad Gita suggests that the teacher must teach subjects with great competence and experience but he should let the students free as Arjun to decide on his own, whether to take a decision of fight/taking action or not. The teacher according to the Gita is the one who is most balanced and a true teacher not only teaches truth but also demonstrates it in his teachings, behavior and actions. The Bhagavad Gita recommends the teacher to be watchful enough to keep the soul and body of his student as well as his own together.

The Bhagavad Gita not only defines teacher but the student as well. According to the Gita, the child is not a disciple but a learner. A student should be aware of his ignorance on the subject and should be ready to seek knowledge with trust on his teacher like Arjuna. Singh S. (2016) in his article concluded that "analyzing the various layers of the personality of the learner and addressing each aspect of the developing personality of the learner at the appropriate juncture, this approach based on the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita inspires the learner to see the reality for himself/ herself and makes him/ her capable of carving out his/ her own path to righteousness (Swadharma) according to the innate nature or Swabhava, thus leading to a journey in excellence for each movement of life as an offering to the presiding deity or the revealed divinity within each individual". Genuineness, humanity, obedience, and faith in his teacher should be the foremost characteristics of a good learner. A student must also hold a passionate urge to know without which he will not be able to digest what the teacher offers. Humility, obedience, faith, etc. towards the teacher imply that the student is sincere and virtuous in his pursuit of knowledge and proves himself a suitable candidate to get the knowledge. The student, according to Gita, must shun three great vices- Kama (lust), Krodh (anger), and Lobha (greed) in his personality. Obedience means respect for the teacher; however, it does not imply that a student should foolishly accept everything offered by the teacher. The eager intellect of the student must be satisfied. The Gita motivates a student to reach a state of "Sthitaprajna" (balance), from where the path

to the right knowledge begins, and to inculcate this in student teacher should have the competency, knowledge, motivation, commitment, and zest for learning is mandatory. Costa et.al (2015) shows that students are more influenced by the competencies of the teacher resulting in student interaction and learning performance positively and significantly which further influence students' decision-making skills.

Apart from teacher and learner, the Bhagavad Gita has great potential to address some of the crucial aspects of NEP-2020 especially the methods of teaching, which is the most crucial deciding factor in the successful implementation of the NEP-2020. NEP-2020 will depend on many factors including the methods of teaching to be used by teachers who have to actually implement the policy at the ground level. The NEP 2020 can be successfully implemented by drawing learning with respect to pedagogy from the ancient treatise Bhagavad Gita, which still stands ahead of time. It suggests applying the method of Maharaj, et. al. (2021) discussion-based teaching, delivering value-based education, developing multidisciplinary thinkers, creativity, discovery-oriented teaching, and developing decision making.

Conclusion

Satyananda offers that in the Bhagavad-Gita Lord Krishna through his theory of wisdom relieves Arjuna from guilt, uplifts his energy dimensions, and finally made him ready to take action. This process of counselling has come up with desired results and the depressed Arjuna, who wanted to commit suicide than indulging into action, is ultimately ready for the battle and feels relieved from the negativity. He declares that now he has attained a level of balance and is ready for action. The purpose of the counselling has been achieved.

In modern psychology, the mechanics of therapy focus on solving the obvious problems. There is nothing to lead one beyond the conscious and unconscious mind so that he does not fall repeatedly into the trapping tides of the unconscious mind and become overwhelmed by his emotions thoughts moods and reactions (Swami Rama, 1985, p 52)

The Bhagavad Gita states three modes of destruction: passion, ignorance, and attachment. The therapy applied by Krishna on Arjuna encapsulates the understanding of the self, one's own true nature, organizing the emotions through various methods viz. chanting of Aum, practicing penance, donations, and Yajnas, developing a sattvic personality, and performing the prescribed duties without getting into the mire of repercussions. If these words of wisdom are followed by contemporary human beings we can flourish as happy and contented beings on the earth. The psychology of the Bhagavad Gita speaks through philosophy and has all the suggestions, remedies and theories that can resolve all mental and physical issues of a modern man and the psychic counsellors and therapists can incorporate the ideas suggested by Krishna to Arjuna in their own counselling and have better results.

The Bhagavad Gita has enormous potential to shape the future of mankind through its teaching with respect to education in the context of teacher, learner, and methods of teaching. The Bhagavad Gita has many verses where Krishna as a teacher aims to clarify doubts of his learner Arjuna and plays the best role of a teacher. Krishna as a teacher not only addresses the current doubts but even possible future doubts likely to come to the mind of his student Arjuna. Krishna as a teacher appreciates the importance of putting his pupil Arjuna in the center of his teaching and then clears away his doubts and gives the student an opportunity to think over and then act to make wise and informed decisions on his own.

NEP2020 creates the need for training of teachers on pedagogical aspects which can be drawn from the basis of perspectives from the Bhagavad Gita. Vippu et al. (2019) conducted similar research when they emphasized the need for pedagogical training of teachers to ensure quality education. This implies that in order to achieve the objectives of the new education system as laid down by NEP-2020, it is important to pay special attention to the pedagogical aspect of teaching, from which we can draw a perspective from the Bhagavad Gita.

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