

Finding Order in Chaos: The Applicability of Gita to Contemporary Psychology

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ABSTRACT

The essence of real fulfilment in life goes through a path of self-realization, which has been highlighted by the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. It teaches that the crossing of the ego and the illusion leads to inner peace or liberation. These three ways are Jñāna Yoga, which is wisdom; Bhakti Yoga, which is devotion; and Karma Yoga, which is action. They are instilled with the same philosophies: self-awareness, emotional health, and a functional life, in that order. It is through the cultivation of equanimity that one operates with clarity, fortitude, and a serene mind in difficult situations. In this study, ancient traditional teachings are interfacing with contemporaneous psychological perspectives, enlightening us on different, yet pivotal areas of personal growth and self-actualization.

Keywords: *Self-Realization, Bhagavad Gita, Ego, Moksha, Yoga, Psychology, Mindfulness, Equanimity, Self-Awareness*

Accepting the self-image is important for self-realization and enables us to come to terms with our true nature. (Venkatesh et al., n.d.) Most self-images are socially constructed; quite a number of them are dictated by upbringing and perceived qualities. Some self-images could be negative or positive depending on factors such as ethnic, religious, or economic status. Typically, we possess many self-images, with one being central and defining us the most. Beyond these self-images is our actual self, being that this self is spiritual and indestructible. As the self-image aligns itself with the actual one, self-realization becomes possible and the dream of harmony between thought and reality is achieved. Carl Rogers identified three components of self-concept: self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self. Self-actualization is a lifelong process that involves reshaping one's self-concept based on new experiences and development. However, self-actualization is only possible when the ideal self and self-image overlap. Self-realization and self-actualization have been a part of human mankind's evolution. It pervades philosophy and different religions through history. (Nagar, 2023)

The Bhagavad Gita is a highly spiritual and intellectual literature that offers timeless insight on the nature of the true self and self-realisation. It teaches that ignoring one's true nature and clinging to the material world are the root causes of human sorrow. By realizing the

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eternal nature of the soul, one can attain inner serenity, emotional stability, and liberation (*moksha*). (Sivananda et al., 2000)

The examples offered by psychology, such as humanistic, existential, cognitive, and transpersonal, mostly resonate with the thoughts of the Gita. (Nagar, 2023) Krishna taught Arjuna to know himself above his body and mind; self-realization, ego transcendence, awareness, and resilience are evidence of this. The psychological vastness of the Gita nurtures inner peace and self-awareness, establishing a map to conquer various challenges in life. Often referred to as the "Song of the Spirit," the Bhagavad Gita is a text that ought to be sung throughout life and symbolizes the divine union of truth-realization between man and his Creator. (Sivananda et al., 2000)

By combining historical facts with psychological and spiritual realities, Sage Vyasa expertly wrote the Bhagavad Gita in a language of simile, metaphor, and allegory, painting a vivid picture of the tumultuous internal conflicts that both the material and the spiritual human must contend with. The Bhagavad Gita is a complete exposition of metaphysics and psychology that describes every single experience through which the spiritual pilgrim will have to pass, both the contributive situations the devotee desires and the hindering situations that attempt to violate and distract him from his sacred goal.

Shrimad Bhagavad Gita refers to a treasure of 700 Sanskrit verses and describes the discourse that takes place between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. (ReSanskrit, 2024) The deep spiritual thoughts that comprise this dialogue are interwoven together with thoughts on Yoga, Vedanta, Bhakti, and Karma. This is a series of teachings based on the Upanishads, full of knowledge for everybody and providing solace, freedom, salvation, peace, and perfection. Existential therapy much like Bhagavad Gita, talks about the human search for meaning, freedom and responsibility in the face of despair and ambiguity. Arjuna's hesitancy in the Gita reflects the existential crisis that many people experience today. Existential therapy urges clients to embrace life's ultimate challenges with courage and authenticity. Both use dialogue as a sacred place for awakening.

Krishna leads Arjuna on the road to self-realization by assisting him in comprehending his own form. The main lessons of the Bhagavad Gita centre on learning to identify with the Atman, or immortal self, and to become detached from pleasure and suffering. Action, renunciation, love, worship, wisdom, and knowledge are among the key tenets. Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle stressed the importance of living an ethical life and reaching one's potential, thereby self-actualization and self-realization concepts were around for centuries. Self-actualization, from the perspective of Western psychologists and theorists, is an integral part of personal growth, while self-actualization, from the perspective of Eastern spiritualities, is altogether different. Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism all view self-realization as a higher condition of being. (Nagar, 2023) Although the Bhagavad Gita offers four different paths to self-realization, they all culminate in the ultimate objective of soul liberation.

Analysis and Application

1. The True Self (*Ātman*) Beyond the Body and Mind Bhagavad Gita's Perspective

The Bhagavad Gita establishes a profound metaphysical distinction between the perishable body and the imperishable self (*Ātman*). Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna that, in reality, his true

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identity is not in a temporary, bodily form, but rather the immortal soul that exists beyond the drum of birth and death.

- **Eternal Nature of the *Ātman*:** Krishna explains in Chapter (*Adhyay*) 2, Verse (*Shloka*) 20:

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadāchin
nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śhāśhvato 'yaṁ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śharīre*

(“The soul is neither born, nor does it ever die; nor having once existed, does it ever cease to be. The soul is without birth, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.”)

This means that the self remains untouched by physical destruction and transcends time. According to Shree Krishna's reincarnation principle, in one lifetime, we alter our bodies from childhood to youth, maturity, and old age, which is helped by cell regeneration. Reincarnation is vital for understanding the world's pain, chaos, and incompleteness.

- **The Temporary Nature of Material Identity:** Krishna explains in Chapter (*Adhyay*) 2, Verse (*Shloka*) 13:

*dehino 'smin yathā dehe kaumāraṁ yauvanaṁ jarā
tathā dehāntara-prāptir dhīras tatra na muhyati*

(“Just as the embodied soul continuously passes from childhood to youth to old age, similarly, at the time of death, the soul passes into another body. The wise are not deluded by this.”)

Shree Krishna explains the principle of transmigration of the soul from one lifetime to another, stating that we change bodies from childhood to old age, with cells and molecules rapidly changing. Despite this, we perceive ourselves as the spiritual soul within, passing through many bodies in one lifetime.

- Our body, emotions, and ego are constantly changing. Krishna states in Chapter (*Adhyay*) 2, Verse (*Shloka*) 22:

*vāsānsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni gṛihṇāti naro 'parāṇi
tathā śharīrāni vihāya jīrṇānya
nyāni sanyāti navāni dehī*

(“As a person sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one.”)

With the internalization of this teaching, a man becomes free from suffering, fears connected with ego, and temporary worldly desires of the moment. A man knows, then, that the essence of existence itself cannot be found within the realm of external conditions.

Psychological Parallels

Modern psychology also explores the idea of a self beyond the ego and material existence. The following theories offer insights that align with the Gita's teachings. Carl Jung's Individuation Process, proposes that humans have a truer self that must be integrated with the ego to achieve wholeness. Thus, in this respect, the Gita's notion of *Ātman* being beyond worldly attachments comes into the picture. Individuation has to do with the acceptance of the unconscious aspects of the psyche, much like spiritual practice is the realization of one's

eternal nature beyond illusion. Individuation requires overcoming the ego's dominance. The ego must acknowledge the unconscious and form a new relationship with itself. Individuation encourages the integration not the suppression, of all aspects of the psyche, even those that generate despair. Self-Actualization, according to Maslow, is the actualization of personhood for purposes set within and, thus, moving beyond a context of mere layers of their expectations about people or ideologies about themselves or ego-driven desires. Transpersonal Psychology explores the basal stages of consciousness that transcend personal identity, uniqueness and proposes the synthesis of spiritual and psychological growth. Peak Experiences, as they are described by Ken Wilber, reconcile experiences of profound unity and ecstatic joy and insight and have an eye, here and there, with spiritual awakening in the yogic and Vedantic traditions.

2. Overcoming the Illusion of Material Existence (*Māyā*) and Ego (*Ahamkāra*) Bhagavad Gita's Perspective

Lord Krishna tells us that suffering comes from attaching oneself to the material and passing world. These attachments are based on *māyā* (illusion) and *ahamkāra* (ego), which distort the human's perception of reality.

A. *Māyā* (Illusion):

- Krishna states in *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter (*Adhyay*) 7, Verse (*Shloka*) 13:

*tribhir guṇa-mayair bhāvair ebhiḥ sarvam idaṃ jagat
mohitam nābhijānāti māmebhyaḥ param avyayam*

(“Deluded by the three modes of Maya, people in this world are unable to know Me, the imperishable and eternal.”)

This suggests that humans are deceived by ignorance, passion, and goodness, which hide God's true nature. Maya lures and confuses those who are not yet God-realised, causing problems and difficulties.

- Krishna explains in Chapter (*Adhyay*) 7, Verse (*Shloka*) 14:

*daivī hyeṣhā guṇa-mayī mama māyā duratyayā
mām eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te*

(“My divine energy Maya, consisting of the three modes of nature, is very difficult to overcome. But those who surrender unto Me cross over it easily.”)

This indicates that the material world, ruled by the three gunas-sattva, rajas, and tamas-keeps men trapped in a cycle of desires, pleasure, and suffering. Only through self-realization, it is believed, can one transcend this illusion.

B. *Ahamkāra* (Ego): Krishna teaches that identifying with the ego—the false sense of "I" and "mine"—leads to attachment, pride, and suffering. In *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter (*Adhyay*) 2, Verse (*Shloka*) 71, he says:

*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumānśh charati niḥsprihaḥ
nirmamo nirahankāraḥ sa śhāntim adhigachchhati*

(“That person, who gives up all material desires and lives free from a sense of greed, proprietorship, and egoism, attains perfect peace.”)

Krishna advises that one must cultivate detachment (*vairāgya*) and self-knowledge (*jñāna*) to break free from *māyā* and *ahamkāra*, leading to spiritual liberation (*moksha*).

Psychological Parallel

Modern psychology explores similar themes of illusion and ego-driven suffering through various therapeutic approaches. There are two approaches to mental health: existential therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Cognitive distortions are distressing corrupt ideas and illogical thoughts that people can identify with the aid of cognitive behavioural therapy. It breaks away from self-imposed misery by substituting logical, objective reasoning for negative mental patterns. Drawing upon insights from Viktor Frankl and Jean-Paul Sartre, existential therapy invites individuals to reflect on their fictitious selves and engage authentically with life. And similar to the teaching of the Gita on *ahamkāra*, this therapy helps the person step beyond mere identification with roles, achievements, or social identities, and affirms an inner connection to deeper meaning and purpose. Just as embodied in Krishna's teaching on surrender, people can embrace a higher sense of meaning and purpose through the release of their ego-driven attachments.

3. Paths to Self-Realization: *Jñāna*, *Bhakti*, and *Karma Yoga*

The Bhagavad Gita identifies three main types of paths to self-realization, addressing different temperaments and predispositions leading to spiritual development: ***Jñāna Yoga***, the Path of Knowledge, for those that lean toward wisdom and intellectual inquiry; ***Bhakti Yoga***, the Path of Devotion, for those who desire love and surrender into the Divine; ***Karma Yoga***, the Path of Selfless Action, for those who see purpose in work and service. Each of these paths helps to bring one to liberation (*moksha*) since the paths will lead an individual beyond the levels of ego, illusion, and attachment.

A. *Jñāna Yoga* (Path of Knowledge and Self-Inquiry)

Self-reflection, knowledge (*jñāna*), and intellectual discernment (*viveka*) are the main focuses of *Jñāna* yoga. It seeks to bring about inner tranquillity by dispelling ignorance and revealing the eternal self (*Ātman*).

Bhagavad Gita's Perspective

- Bhagavad Gita Chapter (*Adhyay*) 4, Verse (*Shloka*) 39 states:
śhraddhāvānlabhate jñānam tat-parah sanyatendriyah
jñānam labdhvā parām śhāntim achirenādhigachchhati

(“Those whose faith is deep and who have practiced controlling their mind and senses attain divine knowledge. Through such transcendental knowledge, they quickly attain everlasting supreme peace.”)

Faith, self-discipline, and mastery over the senses are said to be the essential characteristics if one should gain wisdom. Knowledge is regarded not in respect of intellect but in terms of direct experience—the realization of one's divine nature behind all that is visible to the body and mind.

Psychological Parallels

In therapy, Socratic dialogue challenges some false beliefs and assumptions, much like how *Jñāna Yoga*'s liberating properties consist in its dismantling of ignorance. While logotherapy reveals a higher purpose and meaning for life as espoused by Viktor Frankl, the Gita deals in arguments to lessen suffering. Cultivating discrimination (*viveka*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) takes one away from seeing yourself as an ego, in a careening manner, toward ultimate truth: *Brahman*.

B. Bhakti Yoga (Path of Devotion and Surrendering the Ego)

In order to achieve self-transcendence and a divine connection, Bhakti Yoga places a strong emphasis on love, devotion (bhakti), and surrender to a higher force.

Bhagavad Gita's Perspective

- Bhagavad Gita Chapter (*Adhyay*) 9, Verse (*Shloka*) 22 says:
ananyāśh chintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate
teṣhām nityābhīyuktānām yoga-kṣhemam vahāmyaham
(“There are those who always think of Me and engage in exclusive devotion to Me. To them, whose minds are always absorbed in Me, I provide what they lack and preserve what they already possess.”)

This verse points out that surrender (*śaranāgati*) means showing up on the world stage without any egoistic designs of controlling anything and having trusts in the divine. Lord Krishna has reassured that only true devotion can guide the followers to divine protection and inner peace. Bhakti Yoga teaches that love, gratitude, and surrender dissolve the ego, opening the heart to spiritual joy.

Psychological Parallels

Because Bhakti Yoga includes techniques for positive thinking and gratitude, it engages mindfulness and emotional moods of well-being. With gratitude, happiness increases; stress decreases; and contentment is nurtured. In much the same way Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) help cultivate inner peace by accepting the fact that control over many issues is beyond reach, surrender will help reduce anxiety, fear, and stress. Consequently, it provides joy, humility, and divine love, which allow the individual to go beyond ego-oriented suffering to establish identity with the Divine.

C. Karma Yoga (Path of Selfless Action)

Karma Yoga is the path of action without attachment to results, leading to inner peace, selflessness, and spiritual growth.

Bhagavad Gita's Perspective

- 2Bhagavad Gita Chapter (*Adhyay*) 2, Verse (*Shloka*) 47:
karmaṇy-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi
(“You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction.”)

Krishna teaches that attachment to outcomes leads to suffering, while selfless action leads to freedom and fulfilment. By performing one's duty (*dharma*) without selfish motives, one purifies the mind and attains inner liberation (*moksha*).

Psychological Parallels

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi described flow state related to total immersion in an activity, giving rise to happy feelings occurring with focus and without effort. Interestingly, Karma Yoga dovetails beautifully into this principle: if an individual works without any attachment toward results, he/she will feel more fulfilled. Mindfulness and non-attachment reduce stress, anxiety, and burnout, while the process itself is an enhancement to well-being. Karma

Yoga, essentially, asks for action aimed at some purpose and adds service, mindfulness, really detachment; in other words, harmony and fulfilment in life.

4. Attaining Equanimity (*Sthitaprajña* State) and Inner Stability

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the quality of equanimity refers to a stable state of wisdom, in which the person remains undisturbed by any external changes and is released from the bonds of desire, fear, and emotional disturbance.

Bhagavad Gita's Perspective

Krishna defines a *sthita-prajña* (person of steady wisdom) as one who remains balanced in both pleasure and pain, detached from desires, and unaffected by external disturbances.

- Bhagavad Gita Chapter (*Adhyay*) 2, Verse (*Shloka*) 56:

*duḥkheṣhv-anudvigna-manāḥ sukheṣhu vigata-sprīhaḥ
vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhaḥ sthita-dhīr munir uchyate*

(“One whose mind remains undisturbed amidst misery, who does not crave for pleasure, and who is free from attachment, fear, and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom.”)

Key traits of a *sthita-prajña* -- a person of steady wisdom: One who is not swayed by pleasure or pain; who, in both success and failure, feels no elation in victory nor disappointment in defeat. Fearful, angry, or desirous people do not move them; they maintain a clarity of mind. Whereas peace in these individuals comes from within rather than from the outside. Self-awareness, self-control, and some kind of spiritual understanding allow this condition—which helps someone handle both ups and downs in life—with tranquillity and clarity.

Psychological Parallels

The *sthita-prajña* state, a concept in Hinduism, is closely related to modern psychology, particularly emotional intelligence and mindfulness-based therapy. Emotional intelligence, according to Daniel Goleman, refers to conforming senses involved in understanding, controlling and reacting to emotions in an even arrangement. It stresses on resilience, self-regulation, and self-awareness. The *Sthita prajña* is quite similar to Krishna, who taught emotional regulation and detachment to preserve emotional equilibrium. There is caution suggested by Jon Kabat-Zinn with his work in mindfulness-based stress reduction wherein he proposes self-observation to lower stress and anxiety concerning inner ability to calm emotions, lessen emotional reactivity and allow for being aware of feelings without necessarily being taken over by them. Both systems reveal such an accent of internal stasis and separation from pain.

CONCLUSION

In the Gita, teachings on the spiritual or psychological unfolding speak much of the eternal self against the temporary material from any transcendental philosophical angle. Attachment to *ahamkāra*, the ego, and living in *māyā*, the illusory world, leads to suffering, whereas wisdom, devotion, and selfless action give one the key to liberation. There is a special aspect stressed by Krishna for this kind of singularity to work in full bloom: equanimity (*sthita-prajña*), which means remaining unperturbed by everything going on around him.

Such teachings mirror modern psychological principles of self-actualization, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence; all of them are a combination leading to inner peace and fulfilment. By marrying timeless spiritual wisdom with insight from modern psychology, the Gita offers a truly intervention-based approach to the solution of

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existential agony and self-mastery. It calls for detachment from temporary identities and transient emotions, self-awareness, and emotional endurance. Regardless of whether the individual is ultimately working toward knowledge, devotion, or selfless action, the whole effort is viewed as liberation from suffering and realization of one's true divine. The teaching laid down by the Gita is still so relevant in our times, as it provides guidance to the seeker toward a balanced, purpose-driven, enlightened life.

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Conflict of Interest

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