

# Critical Analysis of Psychological Concepts in the Bhagavad Gita

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The Bhagavad Gita is the best philosophical confluence of *karma*, *bhakti* and *gyan yoga* as Krishna's solution to Arjuna's problem is comprehensive, involving the behavioral (*karma yoga*), the emotional (*bhakti yoga*) and the intellectual (*gyan yoga*). The religious and philosophical importance of the Gita is well known. It is not only a well organized form of Indian life but also is considered a humanistic religion of the world. Its universal importance is established by its translation in all recognized languages of the world. Some scholars consider it as greatest ideal of *dharmashastra*, some of ethics and of philosophy. A depth study of the Gita affirms that it embodies all the above mentioned aspects. Therefore, all these opinions of the scholars are complementary to each other. The philosophical approach does establish its importance but it has another approach that is psychological. Psychological depiction is not confined to any race, time or space. It is perennial source of inspiration for all humans in all times. Gita *darshan* has been stabilized on the ground of psychology. Therefore, it is a unique achievement in the field of psychology.

After entering the war field, Arjuna's hesitation for performing his duties in place of showing enthusiasm for war, is obviously a depiction of psychological situation. All individuals are caught into social and religious bondages. These bondages become part of life as these are inborn and cannot be easily broken. It is easily understood one's feeling of violence towards his elders, teachers and brothers as a momentary excitement but it cannot be given a definite form of violence. The driving force in a human being is not his body and senses but his soul. Similarly, Arjuna could not attain that self confidence with which he can experience emptiness of his aspirations and desires.

The Bhagavad Gita's depiction of how one can control one's impulses emotions, desires and other bodily activities is a pure psychology. Now, we need to focus on the situation how does Arjuna, the great warrior embrace cowardice? Why and how does he adopt renunciation (*tyagavriti*) of *Brahmana-dharma* after deserting *kshatriya swabhava*? The psychological answer to this question is given in 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Udhyoga Parva* of *Mahabharata*. It is a psychological fact the nothing happens without a reason and its background. Sanjay had already prepared the background of Arjuna's cowardice. Before commencement of war, Sanjay, as a messenger of Dhritrastra requests Yudhishtra not to wage war. Arjuna who is present there during the conversation attentively listens to him. Sanjay Says:

vYidky thfora ;Reuq";s] egkL=k;a  
fuR;nq%[ka pya pA

Hkw;'p rn~ ;'klks ukuq[;a] rLekr~  
ikia ik.Mo ek d`/kkLRoe~AA

(Mahabharata, U.P., 27.4)

He says that human life is momentary, full of sorrow and fickleness. Therefore, Yudhishtra should not wage the war; it is not according to his fame. Here, Sanjay tries to dishearten 'Dharmprana' Arjuna making him consider war as sin.

dkek euq";a izl`tUr ,rs] /keZL; ;s  
fo/u ewya ujsUnzA  
iwoZa ujLrku~ efreku~ izkf.k/u&yyksds  
iz'kalk yHkrsuo|ke~AA

(Mahabharata, U.P., 27.5)

It implies that the desires hindering right conduct (*dharmacharna*) draw an individual towards themselves. Therefore, an intelligent person first destroys these desires and thereafter attains fame and admiration.

Here Sanjay clearly points out that desire for kingdom is an obstacle to right conduct (*dharmacharana*). If this desire is deserted, there will be no war. Moreover, Sanjay's next sentence makes Arjuna feel weak and confused.

/keZ d`Rok deZ.kkrkr~] eq[;a  
egkizrki% lforso Hkk;frA  
ghuks fg /kesZ.k egheihaka yC/ok uj%  
lhnfr ikicqf)%AA

(Mahabharata, U.P., 27.6)

It means the one who considers right conduct (*dharma*) as prime ideal among all three ideals- *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama* and leads his life accordingly, he gets fame and shines like sun. But the one who is devoid of *dharma* and whose intellect is associated with sin, he, despite owning the whole earth, suffers continuously. The next sentence of Sanjay again weakens Arjuna's heart as:

rPpsnsosa }s':is.k ikFkkZ% dfj";/oa  
deZ ikia fpjk;A  
fuolHoa o"kZ;wuku~ ous"kw nq[ka okla  
ik.M;k /keZ ,oa~AA

(Mahabharata, U.P., 27.16)

He means that if he involves in the sin of waging war in the form of evil for acquiring kingdom then he will suffer from exile full of misery for years.

In this way, the war appeared before Arjuna as a form of a sin. His thought like 'a desire for kingdom', 'sacrifice for others' and 'Kaurava must kill me' etc. are symbols of inferiority caused by Sanjay's statements.

Generally, attachment is considered as the greatest enemy of human being but the psychological perspective states that the greatest enemy is that power which induces the feeling of inferiority in the human being. Here we find Sanjay in a role which weakens Pandavas side and strengthens Kaurava side with his politics.

If we look at Arjuna's character, he was not a coward, due to his inferiority complex, he started to feel disheartened. There is a need of a teacher who is superior, restrained and knows yoga to uplift Arjuna and the need was fulfilled by Sri Krishna. He came to know the inferiority of Arjuna after listening to his statements in no time. He tries to convince him as follows:

DySC;a ek Le xe% ikFkZ  
 uSrRro,;qii|rsA  
 {kqzâ;nkScZY;a R;DRoksfRr"B  
 ijUriAA2.3

It is necessary to remind person's bravery, duties etc. in order to erase thoughts of inferiority and steers him to work patiently. He tells Arjuna that his enemies are afraid of him, they tremble with fear, they get disheartened after seeing his bravery, they are almost dead and he is just an instrumental cause. Krishna, also, clarifies the form of soul as eternal entity- to kill or to be killed.

u tk;rs fez;rs ok dnkfpu~ uk;a  
 HkwRok Hkfork ok u Hkw;%A  
 vtks fuR;% 'kkÜorks·;a iqjk.kks u  
 gU;rs gU;ekus 'kjhjsAA2.20

The attachment to body is not right because it is not eternal. The eternal soul never dies. Therefore he would not acquire sin of killing Kauravas and their people. But, if he deserts his *Swadharma* and will not involve in war then he will acquire sin. In chapter second, his preaching about '*Isthitpragyata*' prepared the background to stabilize Arjuna's state of mind. At this Arjuna says:

चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम्।  
 तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम्॥6.34

It is very difficult to subdue mind which is restless, turbulent, and obstinate even more difficult than controlling the wind. But at the same time, Sri Krishna elevates Arjuna's spirit after motivating him. He says:

vla'k;a egkckgks euks nqfuZxxzga pye~A  
 vH;klsu rq dkSUrS; oSjkX;s.k p  
 x`ársAA 6.35

Nothing happens all of a sudden, it happens gradually. It is possible by suitable practice and by detachment. Everyday's little effort opens a way for self realization. For that, it is necessary to renounce attachment, desire and indulgence.

Psychology, as a discipline, aims at control on senses, determination, character, controlled emotions, impulses and multi faceted development. For it, means are required. Patanjali's Yoga philosophy is our Indian psychology. Presenting Arjuna as a means he, with his gradual development is evaluated on the criterion of philosophy in a practical form in the Gita.

The abovementioned discussion indicates that Gita's psychological perspective is more dominant than other perspectives. Psychology steers one on the path of duties after removing inferior feelings like attachment, doubt etc. and renders the resolution that Arjuna also comes up in the end as follows:

u"Vks eksg% Le`fryZC/kk  
 RoRizlknkUe;kP;qra  
 fLFkrks·fLe xrlansg% dfj";s opua roAA  
 18.73

Now let us analyze some psychological concepts in the context of the Bhagavad Gita. The word personality refers to the dynamic organization of those psycho- physical traits which establish unique adjustment with the environment. Personality is a complete whole of traits, personality is not any material of static characteristics but there is flexibility and changeableness in it. Personality becomes dynamic after getting influenced by the situations. Immediate traits of human being determine a personality of a person. Personality plays an important role in making adjustment with environment. Let us have a look at personality of the speaker and listener in the Gita.

**Personality of Sri Krishna**

Sri Krishna, the speaker of the Gita has the most wonderful personality. He is *narayana* in the garb of human being and the foundations of all the traits. He is the supreme ideal of both- *grahastha* and *sanyasa*. He cannot be understood without studying the Gita. He himself is an example of the preaching given by him. Everyone, who comes in his contact, gets lost in his personality and experiences oneness with him. Veda Vyasa who has collected these verses establishes oneness with Sri Krishna. Arjuna establishes harmony with Sri Krishna and he becomes like Krishna. In this way, Arjuna lives up to the expectations of Sri Krishna:

eUeuk Hko en~Hkâks e|kth eka ueLdq#A  
 ekesoS";fl lR;a rs izfrtkus fiz;ks·fl  
 esAA 18.65

He asks Arjuna that he must fix his mind in Him because His devotees worship Him and bow his head before Him. Then he will merge into Me, I vow this because he is His most favorite person.

In Srimad Bhagavad-Gita, chapter 10, Lord Krishna declares again:

vgekRek xqMkds'k loZHkwrk'k;fLFkr%A  
 vgekfnÜp e;/a p HkwrkukeUr ,o pAA 10.20

He is the super soul seated in the hearts of all living entities. He is the beginning, the middle and the end of all beings.

o`".khuka oklqnsoks·fle ik.Mokuka  
 /ku¥~t;%A  
 equhekeI;ga O;kl% dohuqe'kuk dfo%AA  
 10.37

Of the descendants of Vrsni He is Vasudeva, and of the Pandavas He is Arjuna. Of the sages He is Vyasa, and among great thinkers He is Usana.

n.Mks ne;rkefle uhfrjfle ftxh"krke~A  
 ekSua pSokfle xqákuka Kkua  
 Kkuorkege~AA 10.38

Among all means of suppressing lawlessness He is punishment, and of those who seek victory He is morality. Of secret things He is silence, and of the wise He is the wisdom.

**Personality of Arjuna**

Arjuna has withdrawn himself from the war. He has got into the deep sea of sorrow attachment, and doubt, still he is left with politeness. That's why he urges Sri Krishna and conveys him his state of mind as follows:

dkiZ.;nks"ksigrLoHkko% i`PNkfe Roka  
 /keZlEew<psrk%A  
 ;PN^s;% L;kfUufPJra czwfg rUes  
 f'k";Lrs·ga 'kkf/k eka Roka  
 iziUue~AA2.7

Arjuna, gripped with of cowardliness and fascinated towards learning Dharma, asks Him to guide him towards what is in his welfare, educate him taking him in His shelter.

Here, Sri Krishna motivates the depressed Arjuna with his authorized words ( *aapta vachana*) like a real psychologist. Arjuna is chastiser of enemies, the master of curbing ignorance valiant Warrior and always ready to face war. After listening to His words, after getting free from the confusion of *Dharma- adharma*, virtue- vice (*punya-papa*) he gets up, wakes up and accepts:

u"Vks eksg% Le`fryZC/kk  
 RoRizlknkUe;kP;qra  
 fLFkrks·fle xrlansg% dfj";s opua roAA  
 18.73

He says that his illusion is now gone. He has regained his memory by his Mercy. He is now firm and free from doubt and prepared to act according to his instructions.

Sanjay blessed with Divya Drishti affirms their qualities as follows:

;= ;ksxÜoj% d`.kks ;= ikFkksZ  
 /kuq/kZj%A  
 r= JhfoZt;ks Hkwfr/kzqZok  
 uhfreZfreZeAA 18.78

In his opinion where Krishna and Arjuna are present, there will be all good fortune.

**Buddhiyoga**

*Buddhi yoga* (purpose of the *Gita*) is another worthy concept to look into. *Buddhi* (intellect) is an ability to learn. A person has three abilities namely adjustment, learning and abstract thinking which are complementary to each other. In the *Gita* Sri Krishna identifies himself with his intellect and he has defined an ideal person as '*Isthirbuddhi*'. If it is necessary to have trained and enlightened reason for spirituality, the loss of reason and logic causes downfall and the loss of reason lead to destruction of the person. Sri Krishna imparts *Buddhiyoga* to Arjuna enlightening him with the light of his knowledge. Arjuna gets illumined and accepts humbly that his illusion has now gone and he has regained memory.

u"Vks eksg% Le`fryZC/kk  
 RoRizlknkUe;kP;qra  
 fLFkrks·fle xrlansg% dfj";s opua  
 roAA18.73

He is now firm and free from doubt and is prepared to act according to His instructions.

Rkn~cq);LrnkRekuLrf™k"BkLrijk;.kk%A  
 xPNUR;iqujko`fRra Kkufu/kwZrdYe"kk%AA  
 5.17

It means the faculty that is helpful in determination is called intellect. A person first should determine that the supreme soul is the complete entity everywhere. Such an intelligent person treats alike all creatures of world. The same idea is expressed in the following verse-

fo|kfou;lEiés czká.ks xfo gfLrfuA  
 pSo Üoikds p if.Mrk% lenf'kZu%AA5.18

It means a truly wise person is one whose intellect treats equally a *brahmana*, an outcaste, a cow, an elephant, a dog and he considers others as his equal.

The concept of '*Isthitpragya*' is reflected upon in a unique manner that is not found in the discussion of 'intelligence' of modern psychologists.

deZta cqf);qäk fg Qya R;DRok  
 euhf"k.k%A  
 tUecU/kfofueqZäk% ina  
 xPNUR;uke;e~AA2.51

It means those who free themselves from the result of work in the material world are called intellectuals.

;L; losZ lekjEHkk% dkeladYioftZrkA  
 KkukfXunX/kdekZ.ka rekgq% if.Mra  
 cq/kk%AA4.19

It means a person who has burned up the reactions of his work by the fire of perfect knowledge. He is actually learned who has attained to such perfection of knowledge.

**Motivation**

Educational psychology focuses specifically on motivation for learning. Our behavior is governed by certain intrinsic stimulations and that invisible power is called motivation. In the Gita, the way that Arjuna is motivated to attain goal not only motivates persons in the present times but also disappointed persons for ages in the future and direct them to involve in action. We also get into the same state of mind as Arjuna had gone through before the war. In the face of such circumstances, we surrender and after getting into deep sea of disappointment we take extremist step like suicide. This immortal voice of Sri Krishna imparts life to every person passing through such mental weakness:

DySC;a ek Le xe% ikFkZ  
 uSrRro,;qii|rsA  
 {kqnza ân;nkScZY;a R;DRoksfRr"B  
 ijUriAA2.3

Giving various arguments Sri Krishna asks Arjuna not to yield to degrading impotence. He must give up petty weakness of heart and arise. Thus, Sri Krishna motivates Arjuna to take up his duties and he regains his mental balance. In the same way, one can get motivated by *karmayoga* and attain his goal.

Lord Sri Krishna has inspired human beings to involve in 'nishkama karma'. Propounding need of the war in order to fulfill his *ksatriya dharma* He has motivated Arjuna to discharge his proper duty as follows:

,oeqDRoktqZu% la[;s jFkksilFk  
 mikfo'kr~A  
 fol`T;; l'kja pkia  
 'kksdlafoUxekul%AA1.46

Observing the situation of his enemy, Arjuna stands up on the chariot, but he is so afflicted with the darkness of lamentation and disappointment that he sits down again, keeping aside his bow and arrows. The way Sri Krishna motivates Arjuna undergoing such state of mind is in reality exemplary.

**Impulses (samveg)**

In the Gita, there is an elaborate discussion on impulses. Impulses are very important. Various impulses like fear, anger, hatred, love, co-operation, goodwill, comic, pathetic, odious, serene, horrible etc. are experienced by everyone. Impulses affect our work and behavior. That is why impulses must be controlled as said in the Gita:

;ksxLFk% dq# dekZf.k l³~xe~ R;DRok  
 /ku¥~t;A  
 fl);fl);ks% leks HkwRok leRoA ;ksx  
 mP;rsAA2.48

Sri Krishna says that Arjuna is mourning for what is not worthy of grief. A wise person laments neither for the living nor for the dead i.e. to be happy in favorable conditions or distressed in unfavorable conditions is foolishness. Therefore, impulses must be restrained.

Sri Krishna asks Arjuna that he should act in yoga. To act in equanimity without attachment and to be even-minded both in the success and the failure is real yoga. This implies that to control impulses is yoga or skillfulness.

nq%[ks"ouqf}axeuk% lq[ks"kq  
 foxrLi`g%A  
 ohrjkkxHk;Øks/k%  
 fLFkr/kheqZfu#P;rsAA2.56

This sloka unveils a truth about a person who is not disturbed in mind even amidst three miseries- attachment, fear and anger or elated when here is happiness, is called a person with steady mind. Such a person remains indifferent to good or bad situations as he has controlled his impulses.

Both the slokas discuss downfall of a person due to uncontrolled impulses. A person is subjected to material desires while contemplating the objects of the senses and from such attachment lust develops, and from his inability to fulfill lust, anger arises.

;/k;rks fo"k;kUiqal%  
 laxaLrs"kwitk;rsA  
 l³~xkRl¥~tk;rs dke%  
 dkekRØks/kks·fHktk;rsAA2.62  
 Øks/kköofr lEeksg%  
 lEeksgkRLe`frfoHkze%A  
 Le`frHkza'kkn~ cqf)uk'kks  
 cqf)uk'kRiz.k';frAA2.63

From anger, complete delusion arises and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost and when intelligence is lost one falls down.

When intense material desire converts into lust, when lust is unfulfilled, anger arises. This anger has gripped almost



every human being in the present time and it compels a person to lose his peace of mind.

dke , "k Øks/k , "k jtkxsq.kleqn~Hko%A  
 egk'kuks egkikIek fo)îsufeg  
 oSfj.ke~AA3.37

Then, how can we control our impulses? This question is dealt in the following slokas:

Js;kULo/keksZ foxq.k%  
 ij/kekZRLouqf"Brkr~A  
 Lo/kesZ fu/kua Js;% ij/keksZ  
 Hk;kog%AA 2-35  
 vokP;oknkaÛp cgqUofn";fUr rokfgrk%A  
 fuUnUrLro lkeF;Za rrks nq%[krja uq  
 fde~AA 2.36

It is undoubtedly very difficult to control mind and impulses but by suitable practice and detachment it can be controlled. It is declared in 36<sup>th</sup> sloka that one who does not accept the proper treatment to detach the mind from material engagement and control of impulses can hardly achieve success.

#### Adjustment (*samajojana*)

If we go by the definitions given by modern psychologists-Boring, Langfield and Weld-adjustment is a process through which humans and animals balance their needs and the situations affecting fulfillment of these needs, this implies that when a person is not able to fulfill his natural needs then gradually compromises with these unpleasant situations. This compromise is known as adjustment in the language of psychology.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the word 'adjustment' refers to art of living. The state of equanimity is adjustment as conveyed in the following sloka:

bgSo rSftZr% lxksZ ;s" kka lke;s  
 fLFkra eu%A  
 funksZ"ka fg lea czá rLekn~ czáf.k rs  
 fLFkrk%AA5.19

Those whose minds are established in sameness and equanimity have already conquered the conditions of birth and death. Here, equanimity means to win all favorable or unfavorable conditions of the world. The one who is satisfied in all circumstances is truly adjusted being in the world.

The following sloka too reflects on the art of adjustment as follows:

;a yC/ok pkija ykHka eU;rs ukf/kda  
 rr%A  
 ;fLefULFkrks u nq%[ksu xq#.kkfi  
 fopkY;rsAA6.22

Once a person gets adjusted, he never departs from it and upon gaining this he thinks that there is no greater gain. Being situated in such a position, one is never shaken, even in the midst of greatest difficulties. If one is unable to adjust with his real conditions, he always remains agitated and is eager to get into an imaginary state. Therefore adjustment with real situations leads to happiness.

rLeknlä lrra dk;Za deZ lekpjA  
 vläks ákpjUdeZ ijekIuksfr iw#"k%AA3.19

Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, a learned person gets adjusted in all circumstances whether they are favorable or unfavorable. In this way, we come across a lot of discussion about various psychological concepts on a broad level which is more than sufficient to guide human conduct in the face of problems when we get confused and unable to make decisions. As Mahatma Gandhi also writes "When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the Gita will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day."

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