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Bhagavad Gītā and Psychological Insights for Modern Life

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Abstract -- The Bhagavad Gītā, a philosophical dialogue embedded within the Mahābhārata, offers profound psychological insights into human behaviour, emotional regulation, motivation, and mental well-being. Though composed in an ancient context, its teachings address timeless psychological concerns such as anxiety, stress, moral conflict, identity crisis, and the search for meaning. This paper examines the psychological dimensions of the Bhagavad Gītā and explores their relevance for modern life. By analysing concepts such as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jñāna Yoga, Self-Control, Emotional Balance (Sthita-Prajñā), and the management of desires and fears. This paper demonstrates how the Gītā provides a holistic framework for mental health and personal growth. The study argues that the Bhagavad Gītā can be meaningfully integrated with contemporary psychological thought to promote resilience, ethical living, and inner peace in today's fast-paced and stress-driven society.

Keywords-- Bhagavad Gītā, Psychology, Mental Health, Stress Management, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Realization

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern life is characterized by rapid technological advancement, intense competition, emotional stress, and ethical dilemmas. Anxiety, depression, burnout, and a sense of alienation have become common psychological challenges. While contemporary psychology offers various therapeutic models to address these issues, ancient philosophical texts like the Bhagavad Gītā provide deep insights into the human mind and behavior that remain highly relevant today.

The Bhagavad Gītā presents a dialogue between Bhagavan Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where Arjuna experiences a psychological breakdown marked by fear, confusion, guilt, and despair. Krishna's counsel can be interpreted as a form of psychological guidance aimed at restoring mental clarity, emotional balance, and purposeful action. This paper explores the psychological wisdom of the Gītā and its applicability to modern life.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The psychological dimensions of the *Bhagavad Gītā* have attracted considerable scholarly interest across disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, spirituality, and education. Early Western and Indian scholars recognized the *Gītā* not only as a philosophical text but as a source of psychological insight and guidance.

2.1 Classical Interpretations and Philosophical Foundations

Radhakrishnan (1948) highlights the *Bhagavad Gītā* as an ethical and existential guide that addresses the conflicts inherent in human life, particularly the struggle between duty and desire. He emphasizes the text's support for selfless action (*karma yoga*) and mental equilibrium as central to human fulfilment. His work laid the groundwork for understanding the *Gītā* as a text with deep psychological relevance (Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad Gītā*).

Haridas Chaudhuri (1962) interprets the *Gītā* through an integral philosophy, integrating mind, soul, and behaviour. He views the *Gītā* as a comprehensive framework for consciousness studies, blending ethical action with inner transformation.

2.2 Psychological Perspectives on the Gītā

In later decades, scholars began to analyse the *Gītā* through explicit psychological paradigms:

Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (1951) commentary explores how the *Gītā* addresses inner conflict, fear, and anxiety, suggesting therapeutic parallels with modern psychology.

Kapleau (1973) compares *Gītā*'s teachings on detachment with Eastern mindfulness practices, identifying early antecedents of cognitive restructuring and awareness training.

Singh (1998) approaches the *Gītā* from a modern psychology perspective, arguing that its methods support emotional regulation, stress reduction, and self-discipline. Singh highlights that the *Gītā*'s emphasis on control of desires and disciplined action parallels techniques in Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Rao (2008) provides a detailed comparison of Indian psychological concepts with Western models. He identifies parallels between *Sthita-Prajñā* (steady wisdom) and concepts such as emotional regulation and resilience in positive psychology. He also explores *karma yoga* as a precursor to modern theories of motivation and self-determination.

2.3 Clinical and Therapeutic Applications

Several researchers have linked *Gītā* teachings to mental health applications:

Deshpande (2012) examines how *Gītā* concepts relate to stress management, suggesting that detachment from outcomes enhances emotional resilience.

Bhattacharya and Rajagopal (2015) study the significance of *Gītā*-based cognitive reframing in reducing anxiety and building purposeful living. Their findings suggest that applying *Gītā*-inspired reflection exercises yields measurable improvements in emotional balance and decision-making.

Sharma (2017) integrates *Gītā*-based practices with Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), finding similarities in techniques focused on awareness, acceptance, and non-attachment.

2.4 Educational and Developmental Perspectives

In the educational context, the *Bhagavad Gītā* has been used to develop value-based curricula.

Narayan (2019) explores the integration of *Gītā* principles into personality development programs, demonstrating its relevance in enhancing emotional intelligence, leadership skills, and ethical reasoning among students.

Kumar and Singh (2021) advocate for a curriculum that combines *Gītā*-based introspection with psychological skill-building, suggesting that this combination promotes holistic well-being among adolescents.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS OF ARJUNA: A CASE STUDY

Arjuna's condition at the beginning of the *Gītā* resembles a classic psychological crisis. He exhibits symptoms such as emotional overwhelm, loss of motivation, anxiety, moral confusion, and physical distress. His inability to act, reflects an inner conflict between duty and emotion.

From a psychological perspective, Arjuna's crisis represents:

- Cognitive dissonance
- Emotional paralysis
- Moral and identity conflict
- Stress-induced withdrawal

Krishna does not suppress Arjuna's emotions, but helps him understand their roots and guides him toward clarity and balance. This approach aligns closely with modern therapeutic practices that emphasize awareness, cognitive reframing, and purposeful action.

IV. CONCEPT OF MIND AND SELF IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

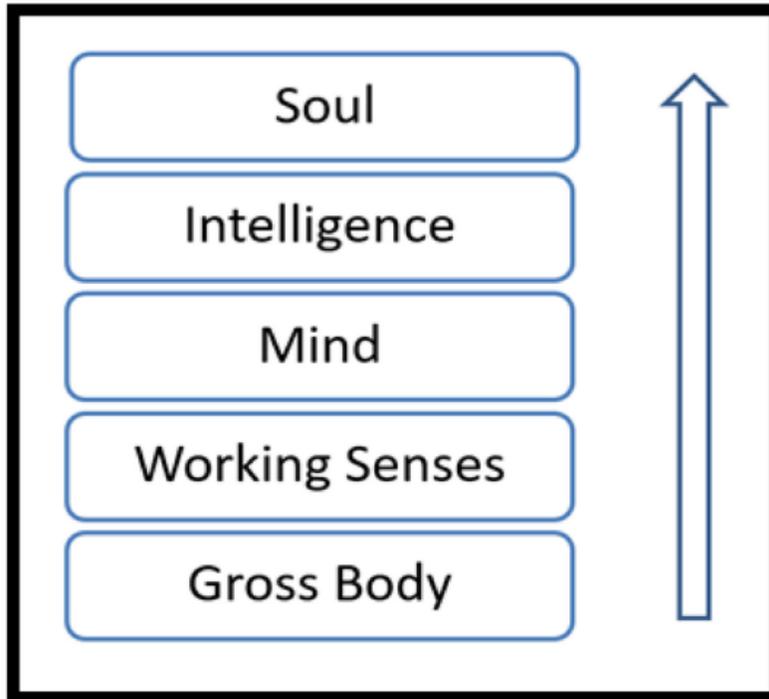
The *Gītā* presents a sophisticated understanding of the Mind (*Manas*), Intellect (*Buddhi*), Ego (*Ahaṁkāra*), and Self (*Ātman*). According to the text, mental suffering arises from excessive identification with desires, fears, and outcomes.

Krishna emphasizes self-awareness and detachment as keys to mental well-being. The distinction between the temporary body-mind complex and the enduring self helps individuals overcome fear, anxiety, and grief. This insight resonates with modern psychological approaches that encourage mindfulness and self-observation.

V. EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND THE IDEAL OF STHITA-PRAJÑĀ

One of the most significant psychological concepts in the *Bhagavad Gītā* is the idea of *Sthita-Prajñā*—a person of steady wisdom. Such an individual remains emotionally balanced amid success and failure, pleasure and pain.

The *Gītā* teaches that uncontrolled desires and attachments lead to anger, confusion, and mental disturbance. Through self-discipline, moderation, and inner awareness, emotional stability can be achieved. These teachings align with contemporary ideas of emotional intelligence and self-regulation.



Picture: Soul to Gross Body

VI. KARMA YOGA AND MENTAL HEALTH

Karma yoga, the path of selfless action, offers a powerful psychological tool for reducing stress and anxiety. The *Gītā* advises performing one's duty without attachment to results. This detachment does not imply indifference, but encourages focused effort without excessive worry about outcomes.

In modern terms, *Karma Yoga* helps:

- Reduce performance anxiety
- Prevent burnout
- Encourage intrinsic motivation
- Promote work-life balance

By shifting attention from results to responsible action, individuals can maintain mental peace even in high-pressure environments.

VII. ROLE OF BHAKTI AND MEANING IN LIFE

The *Gītā* highlights devotion (*bhakti*) as a means of emotional fulfilment and psychological security.

Trust in a higher principle or purpose provides emotional resilience during times of uncertainty and loss.

From a psychological viewpoint, *bhakti* fosters hope, acceptance, and emotional support. Modern psychology also recognizes the importance of meaning, purpose, and faith in promoting mental well-being and coping with stress.

VIII. DESIRE, ATTACHMENT, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING

The *Bhagavad Gītā* identifies excessive desire and attachment as major sources of mental suffering. Unchecked desires lead to frustration, jealousy, and anger, which disturb mental equilibrium.

By cultivating moderation, contentment, and self-awareness, individuals can achieve psychological balance. This approach is consistent with modern therapeutic methods that emphasize desire regulation, cognitive control, and mindful living.

IX. RELEVANCE OF THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ FOR MODERN LIFE

The psychological insights of the *Gītā* are particularly relevant in today's world, where individuals struggle with stress, identity issues, and ethical dilemmas. Its teachings offer practical guidance for:

- Stress management
- Emotional resilience
- Ethical decision-making
- Personal growth and self-realization

The *Gītā* promotes holistic mental health by integrating cognition, emotion, action, and spirituality.



X. CONCLUSION

The *Bhagavad Gītā* provides a profound psychological framework for understanding the human mind and managing emotional challenges. Through concepts such as self-awareness, emotional balance, detached action, and purposeful living, it addresses many of the psychological issues faced by modern individuals. Rather than offering escapism, the *Gītā* encourages active engagement with life guided by wisdom and inner stability.

Integrating its insights with contemporary psychological practices can contribute significantly to mental well-being, ethical living, and inner peace in modern society.

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