



# Weaving Together the Ancient and the Contemporary: Intersections of the Bhagavad Gita with Modern Psychology

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## Abstract

The Bhagavad Gita is a well-known and deeply respected ancient text from the Indian subcontinent. It is widely regarded as a storehouse of spiritual knowledge. This article explores the different ways in which psychologists have approached the study of the Gita and the extent to which it has been acknowledged as providing concepts that can contribute to the creation of mental well-being in modern times. It is important to understand the status accorded to the Gita within psychology and the contributions it can make to the growth of the psychological sciences. Psychology as we know it today developed largely within the academic institutions of Europe and North America and began its steep rise to recognition and fame largely in the first half of the 20th century. Western ‘scientific’ theories, concepts, and writings were carried to and widely disseminated in countries with diverse cultures. In this process indigenous, cultural and philosophical forms of knowledge that could have been incorporated into the evolving discipline were largely ignored or marginalized. The time has come to begin an exploration of such resources to assess how they can contribute to enhancing psychology’s acceptance in different parts of the world. Given psychology’s wide base of applications, it would be beneficial to explore its links with the message of the Bhagavad Gita. This study presents an analysis of 24 articles on the Bhagavad Gita that are of psychological significance and have been published in the last 10 years (2012–2022). Three themes addressing the ways in which this text has been approached by contemporary psychologists were elicited: (1) comparisons with modern psychotherapy, (2) precludes to modern psychological concepts and (3) potential for building well-being and resilience. In addition to this analysis, the article explores a powerful message contained in the Gita around seeking support for mental health issues, a message that has not been widely recognized to date.

**Keywords** Bhagavad Gita · Psychology · Modern psychotherapy · Mental health

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## The Bhagavad Gita as a Text of Spiritual Knowledge

The Bhagavad Gita, translated as the ‘Song of God,’ is a highly revered ancient text, read not only by Hindus but also by members of other religious communities, including Jains and Sikhs. This 700-verse scripture is part of the Mahabharata, although not all scholars believe that the Gita was originally included in the epic. Notwithstanding this, the Gita has come to be considered one of the most critical and influential parts of the Mahabharata. According to folklore, the Mahabharata was penned by Lord Ganesha as it was told to him by Sage Ved Vyasa, who is regarded by many Hindus as the compiler of several significant scriptures. The Gita itself is in narrative form, written in verse as a dialogue between two individuals who play central roles in the Mahabharata—Lord Krishna, considered to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and the immensely skilled and competent Pandava prince Arjuna.

Their dialogue takes place at the battlefield in Kurukshetra just before the start of the Great War of Mahabharata that pits two groups of cousins—the Pandavas and Kauravas—against each other in a dynastic war of succession. At this point, Arjuna, although considered a tremendous warrior in his own right, is hesitant to proceed with the war. He is reluctant to fight against his family members, considering it to be futile and evil to seek the destruction of one’s own kin. He conveys his doubts to Lord Krishna, who for the purposes of the war is serving as Arjuna’s charioteer on the battlefield. The remaining text of the Gita is devoted to Lord Krishna’s attempts to assuage Arjuna’s doubts and fears. Arjuna eventually agrees to fight and, with Lord Krishna’s guidance, the Pandavas emerge victorious. Although the war lasted only 18 days, it was so large in scale that it is said to have caused the destruction of three generations of men.

The Gita is well known to the people of India, and many are familiar with the content of the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. It is also popular in many other countries and has been often quoted by philosophers, scientists, academicians, poets, freedom fighters and leaders of social movements. Mahatma Gandhi, father of the Indian nation and a stalwart political figure, spoke of and wrote on the Gita (Desai, 2012). He believed that the subject matter of the Gita was the realization of *Brahman* (the ultimate unchanging reality, which is eternal, timeless, infinite and the source of all existence) and the means for doing so. Gandhi considered the text to be neither the description of a battle nor the justification of violence. Rather, he saw the text as containing a message of nonviolence. He understood the Gita as emphasizing the need to attain a state within which the individual remains unaffected by the three *gunas* (qualities or attributes) and is thus incapable of feeling anger. If one felt no anger, one would not wage a war.

Freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak also wrote on the Gita, penning the *Gita Rahasya* (published in 1915) in his mother tongue of Marathi while he was jailed in Burma by the British. Tilak considered the true message of the Gita to be the endorsement of *Nishkama Karma*, or selfless action, without attachment to the fruits of one’s labour. This idea appears to echo the sentiments of the great Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda, who said that the reconciliation of different paths of Dharma and the lesson to act without desire or attachment were the two special characteristics of the Gita (Madhurananda, 2016). Many renowned thinkers from other parts of the world have also appreciated the message of the Gita for its depth and wisdom. Included among these are the English writer Aldous Huxley, American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, German philosopher Hermann Graf Keyserling and German-Swiss poet and novelist Hermann Hesse.

## Applications of the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita has aroused a great deal of interest, even in countries and cultures beyond India. It has been translated into over 75 languages worldwide, with new translations still being published (Venkatesh, 2022). The Gita has influenced the works of several eminent authors, including Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese-American writer, poet and artist and Mikhail Naimy, prominent representative of early 21st-century Arab-American immigrant literature (Kelley, 2008; Azizaliyeva, 2017). Internationally, the text has been used for building models of leadership and enhancing management wisdom as well as business practises (Hee, 2007).

For example, Simpson and Pina e Cunha (2021) from Brunel University London and the New University of Lisbon engaged with the Gita's 700 verses across its 18 chapters to integrate its teachings into the linked leadership model (*linked* refers to the Sanskrit word *yoga*, meaning connection). The four main areas of the model are (1) *self-leadership*, drawing from the insight that victory lies in the integrity of the *process* of attaining goals rather than the goal itself; (2) *servant-leadership* toward others, recognizing that all beings are spiritually equal though playing different roles; (3) *holistic systems* that hold all resources as gifts with their own qualities that can be harmonized or disturbed; and (4) *higher purpose*, emphasizing heartfulness as that which gives higher meaning and purpose to all actions. These four categories have been compared to the four wheels of Arjuna's chariot, operating together to facilitate a leader's journey with their followers in transcending boundedness. The authors state that their model is part of an attempt to reframe the objectives of business management and leadership away from a focus on maximizing profits for shareholders towards creating shared value for all stakeholders. Critical to this reframing is leadership that inspires a higher sense of purpose by living authentically in alignment with principles that transcend time and context.

Some other areas for applying the knowledge offered by the Bhagavad Gita are governance (Satpathy et al., 2013), corporate social responsibility (Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013) and project management (Sudhakar, 2014).

## The Present Study

This article explores the ways in which psychologists have approached the study of the Gita and the extent to which it has been acknowledged as providing concepts that can contribute to the creation of mental well-being in current times. It is important to understand the status accorded to the Gita within this discipline, given the criticisms directed at psychology's trajectory and development in non-Western cultures. Modern psychology developed largely in the universities of Europe and North America around the end of the 19th century. The theories, concepts and writings developed there were carried to other countries, including India, where they were widely disseminated. In this process indigenous, cultural and philosophical forms of knowledge that could have been incorporated into the growing discipline were largely marginalized.

Until recently the Bhagavad Gita, although it speaks deeply of issues related to psychological well-being, was not considered an important source of knowledge by Indian psychologists, a trend largely emanating from the need to remain close to the empirical sciences. Indian psychologists have traditionally worked hard to ensure that the discipline

meets standardized criteria developed for the natural sciences by emphasizing phenomena such as empiricism, experimentation, replication, the use of large sample sizes and statistical analyses of data. N. N. Sengupta who headed the first department of psychology at the University of Calcutta, received his training under Hugo Munsterberg at Harvard. Several leading psychologists in other Indian universities followed this trend and brought back the positivist orientation they had acquired during their training in the West (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). It has been noted that over the years what developed in India was largely an imitation of the psychology that had existed in the West in the early part of the 20th century (Ramalingaswami, 1980). Indian psychologists sought to adapt Western psychological tests and conducted research in areas such as sensation, perception, and reaction time under the influence of Wilhelm Wundt and Edward B. Titchener. Surveys conducted by the Indian Council of Social Science Research found that adopting the model of the natural sciences in conducting psychological investigations was accorded more importance than making it socially responsive (Mishra & Padalia, 2021). Social psychology in India came to be dominated by two trends (Dalal & Misra, 2002). The first was to understand aspects of Indian social reality through Western concepts and measures, and the other was to replicate Western studies in India. Within such a paradigm, knowledge and concepts from texts such as the Bhagavad Gita were not seen as amenable to the discovery of empirical evidence or experimentation.

Therefore, unsurprisingly, the Gita's acceptance as a tool for learning or knowledge creation among academic disciplines and specifically in the social sciences such as psychology has been limited. As great as its popularity is, the Gita is still largely perceived as a religious and philosophical text. The time to revise this mindset has been long coming, and psychologists in India and other countries are finally willing to broaden their horizons to include alternative discourses that are sensitive to diverse cultural-historical and sociological realities. Older forms of knowledge that were once shunned must be revisited to recognize their potential role in the growth and wider acceptance of social sciences such as psychology within and beyond academic circles. To contribute to this larger endeavour, the present article reviews and summarizes research published in the previous decade that has focused on the psychological aspects of the Gita. Further, a powerful message contained in the Gita around seeking support for mental health issues is explored—a message that has remained largely unrecognized to date.

## Method

A specific set of criteria were developed to select articles for the purpose of the present study. These included articles that (1) focused on both the Gita and psychology as their central themes, (2) were published in peer-reviewed academic journals, (3) were published between 2012 and 2022 and (4) were written in the English language. An extensive search of different search engines, including Google Scholar, was conducted using combinations of specific keywords such as 'Bhagavad Gita', 'Gita', 'psychology', 'mental health', 'well-being', 'counselling' and 'psycho-therapy.' Articles that appeared to fit the inclusion criteria were read in their entirety. The references cited in each article were studied to see if they could lead the researcher to other articles of relevance. During the reading stage, some initially selected articles were excluded as they did not meet the research parameters. At the

end of this process, 24 articles were found to be relevant and were subjected to a theme-wise analysis to identify their areas of focus.

### Locating the Bhagavad Gita in Modern Psychology

An analysis of 24 published articles on the Bhagavad Gita which were found to be of psychological significance indicated that the text has been approached in three main ways. These may be considered the broad themes into which the articles were categorized.

### Comparisons with Modern Psychotherapy

One way in which the Gita has been understood in psychology is through comparing the dialogue that takes place between Lord Krishna and Arjuna with current psychotherapeutic approaches (e.g. Reddy 2012). Bhatia et al. (2013) suggest that the Gita depicts what may be one of the earliest documented sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), in which Lord Krishna is a psychotherapist-like figure and Arjuna is the client. It is proposed that Arjuna exhibits various kinds of negative automatic thoughts along with cognitive distortions, including catastrophization and personalization. Lord Krishna's discourse may be seen as analogous to psycho-education for persons dealing with symptoms of anxiety and as directed towards challenging Arjuna's cognitive distortions.

Sharma (2014) suggests another similarity between CBT and the nature of the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. The author suggests that just as the main focus of CBT is to make affirmative alterations in the thinking of patients and the interpretations they lend to events, Lord Krishna attempts to change not the situation of the war itself but Arjuna's perception of the reasons for the war. Phogat et al. (2020) extend the comparison between the Gita and psychotherapeutic approaches to humanistic-existential therapy. They suggest that just as humanistic and existential approaches focus on the importance of self-awareness and self-understanding to achieve personal growth, the Gita talks about self-knowledge that leads to the attainment of peace.

Bhatia et al. (2013) identify elements within the Gita which may be similar to interpersonal therapy (IPT), such as the emphasis on reestablishing interests and relationships that can help patients cope with grief. The emphases on role transitions and on building self-esteem are other similarities that have been identified between IPT and the approach that Lord Krishna uses with Arjuna. Concomitantly, some researchers have considered the Gita to represent the first documented session of rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT). It has been proposed that both REBT, which was first introduced into psychology by Albert Ellis (1957), and the Gita encourage individuals to pursue happiness and assume that while humans have limitations, they do have the potential to grow. Both also believe that people are self-determining and create their own mental well-being (Bhosale, 2015).

While researchers have compared the Gita to different therapeutic traditions and no final decision can be offered on which therapy the text resonates with the most, it is apparent that there is a great deal in Lord Krishna's approach that aligns with the modern psychotherapeutic process.

## Prelude to Modern Psychological Concepts

The Gita has been seen as providing precedence for several concepts found in the theories of modern psychology. Gayathri and Meenakshi (2013) suggest that there are striking similarities between Lord Krishna's conception of an emotionally stable person (Sthithapragnya) and Mayer and Salovey's notion of an emotionally intelligent person. Mayer and Salovey's ability model (Mayer et al., 2000) identifies four stages through which a person becomes emotionally intelligent. These are emotional perception, emotional assimilation, emotional understanding and emotional management. The authors maintain that the Gita places special emphasis on the fourth component of emotional management. In the text, Lord Krishna identifies desire, anger and attachment as the causes of misery. These mental states produce emotional instability in a person's life. Lord Krishna moves on to explaining the nature of a 'Sthithapragnya' as one who demonstrates equanimity irrespective of the surrounding circumstances, keeps their emotions in check and withdraws their feelings away from the object of pleasure or pain. The authors consider this ability to be similar to the fourth branch of Mayer and Salovey's ability model.

In a similar vein, Phogat et al. (2020) suggest that the Gita puts forth the idea of a self-realized person which is akin to the modern-day idea of a 'self actualized person' as described by Abraham Maslow. They also draw comparisons between Freud's psychoanalytical theory and concepts in the Gita by drawing on the psychoanalytic presumption that the three conflicting forces of personality—id, ego and superego—are managed through the use of ego defense mechanisms. They propose that in the Gita, Lord Krishna provides a successful resolution to the conflicts faced by Arjuna between three internal forces or *gunas* of human nature, i.e. *sattva* (luminosity), *rajas* (passion and activity) and *tamas* (darkness and ignorance), which align with the id, ego and superego, respectively. Further, it has been suggested that the Gita includes several references to what psychologists now view as mindfulness, such as the need to keep the mind tranquil like the ocean, which is unaffected by the rivers that flow into it (Bhatia et al., 2013).

## Potential for Building Well-Being and Resilience

Some psychologists have been exploring the potential of the ideas presented in the Gita for fostering well-being and resilience among individuals. For instance, Keshavan (2020) writes about three paths that the Bhagavad Gita presented for building resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first is the Jnana yoga (the path of knowledge), which provides insights into the true nature of Self and can help to shift our thoughts from an "I" to a "we" mode, much needed in pandemic times. There is also the path of Karma yoga (the path of action), which teaches us to act in a way that is selfless and free from attachment. The third path offered by the Gita is Raja yoga (the path of meditation). Just as a raja (king) maintains control over his kingdom, one must maintain control over the vast territory of one's mind. This encourages discipline and a healthy way of life that can protect one from the virus.

Menon, Narayan and Bhade (2021) explore how the the four Ds elaborated upon in the Gita—detachment, duty, doer-ship and *dhyana* (meditation)—may be useful aids to health care workers faced with moral and psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. In one study, 300 students who had completed a course on the text provided feedback on the impacts they had experienced. A large number mentioned experiencing overall positive

effects: better perception of life, clarity of thought, positive attitude, inner peace and the ability to better deal with stress, a calm and content disposition and the development of leadership and problem-solving abilities (Lolla, 2020). Little research, however, has been done to scientifically test the Gita's knowledge for its efficacy in improving mental health, attitudes and behaviours.

In one such study, Dabas and Singh (2018) implemented a pre-post three-group quasi-experimental design with 13- to 16-year-old students with the aim to address discipline issues and diminishing moral values among the youth. Group 1 (the control group) received the regular course of study followed by schools in the area where the study was conducted. Group 2 was provided an intervention that incorporated concepts and ideas from the Bhagavad Gita along with other Indian texts. Group 3 was given an intervention based on Western positive psychology. The results showed the intervention provided to Group 2 was the most successful. The authors attributed the outcomes to the profundity inherent in the Gita's ideas and the ease with which practises such as focusing on mantras can be incorporated into daily life.

In another study, Pandya (2022) reported the impact of a Bhagavad Gita text-based counselling program for long-term immigrant diaspora Hindu adults in the United States and United Kingdom. The results indicated that when compared to journal-writing sessions, participants who received the Gita lessons reported lower stress and better quality of life. Six subgroups of participants were found to be most likely to gain from the Gita-based program: older adult females, diaspora Hindu older adults with postgraduate/professional qualifications, widowed older adults, those living alone or with other kith-kin and those with above-threshold program compliance.

### **Bhagavad Gita's Message for Seeking Mental Health Support**

One aspect of the Gita that may be very relevant for psychologists is the message it contains on support seeking for emotional and psychological issues. The background of the Gita is the immobilizing emotional turmoil that Arjuna feels right before the beginning of the war. He is desolate and sorrowful and has no desire for victory or the kingdom if these are to be obtained at the cost of killing his own kin. Arjuna believes at this stage that fighting would amount to no less than a sin, and his distress is manifested in bodily symptoms such as frail limbs and dryness of the mouth. As is the case with intense emotions, Arjuna is pushed into a state of non-action. Arjuna's decision to confide his feelings to Lord Krishna at this juncture is extremely significant. This action may be seen as a direct attempt on Arjuna's part to seek social support during an immensely challenging moment in his life. This is an important act given the strong stigma around help seeking, particularly for mental or psychological issues, in India and several countries.

In this sense, the character of Arjuna can be a useful role model for individuals who find themselves in similar predicaments. Other options were available to Arjuna, including suppressing his self-doubts and emotions, but he chose to speak up about his vulnerabilities. Arjuna's choice to candidly express his emotions as opposed to burying them is clearly an example of a healthy choice with respect to his mental health. Psychologists have established that freely expressing emotions can be beneficial, whereas suppressing them can create negative outcomes (Low et al., 2017), including greater susceptibility to heart disease (Gross & Levenson, 1993). Individuals who bottle up their emotions have been found to

face a more than 30% greater chance of premature death from all causes, while their risk of cancer increases by 70% (Chapman et al., 2013). In contrast, free emotional processing and expression has been found to enhance self-perceived health status and vitality while lowering adjustment periods and medical visits among cancer patients (Stanton et al., 2000).

A culturally acceptable example of a person who expresses emotions and actively seeks guidance for mental stress is likely to serve a particularly positive role for young men, who are often conditioned to believe that asking for help or showing one's vulnerability, especially to another man, is an insult to one's manhood. Arjuna is described as a man of great masculinity, virility and valour, a supreme warrior. Such a man asking for support and guidance conveys that seeking help does not negate masculinity in any way. Unfortunately, seeking help for emotional issues has been historically stigmatized for males. Being of the male gender is inversely related to the willingness to find mental health support (Gonzalez et al., 2011), and men have more negative attitudes towards using mental health services than women do (Yousaf et al., 2015). This results in lower use of mental health services by men than by women. For example, women in the United States are 1.6 times more likely to receive any form of mental health treatment compared to men over a 12-month period (Wang et al., 2005).

These trends have their roots in early life experiences. Children quickly learn that emotional expressions are gendered and that girls are expected to display greater levels of most emotions, particularly positive emotions (such as happiness), and to internalize negative emotions, including sadness, fear, anxiety, shame and guilt (Brody & Hall, 2008). Boys are expected to show less of the 'tender' emotions, such as sadness and anxiety, and they are allowed to express externalizing emotions such as anger, contempt and disgust. Anger and contempt function to promote the goal of overcoming obstacles, which can involve the pushing outward rather than the internalizing of distress (Brody & Hall, 2008). Thus, externalizing emotional expressions is consistent with societal gender roles that require males to be assertive, individualistic, independent and even aggressive, in line with their traditional roles of protecting their families and overcoming dangers that interfere with their ability to provide for their families (Brody, 1999; Eagly & Steffen, 1984).

Interestingly, Arjuna demonstrated the tender emotions discussed above. One study examined how the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology, conformity to masculine norms and help-seeking style were related to the avoidance of academic help seeking by college men. It was found that the endorsement of aspects of traditional masculinity ideology was associated with the avoidance of help seeking. Two main aspects of masculinity most strongly associated with the avoidance of help seeking when struggling academically were self-reliance and dominance (Wimer & Levant, 2011). Research has also shown that men are less likely to see doctors for minor symptoms and tend to avoid making medical visits until their conditions have become more serious (Sayer & Britt, 1996).

### **Lord Krishna's Attempts to Guide Arjuna**

Lord Krishna's interaction with Arjuna contains a powerful message on responding to the mental health needs of an individual in stress. Lord Krishna guides Arjuna unconditionally and whole-heartedly and brings him to a mental state wherein he is able to carry out his designated *karma*. The manner in which Lord Krishna supports Arjuna through his emotional



turmoil embodies certain lessons for the counselling process, although there are several differences as well.

Firstly, despite the deep reverence that Arjuna has for Lord Krishna, Lord Krishna has to attempt many strategies before Arjuna finally feels ready to take action. Lord Krishna's first response to Arjuna is rather different from what a modern counsellor would attempt. Lord Krishna almost scolds Arjuna for the way he is feeling by saying that Arjuna's reactions do not befit a person of noble mind and deeds. He tells Arjuna to shake off the weakness he feels and get ready for battle. However Arjuna's feelings are extremely intense and do not subside. He continues to raise doubts about killing his kin and remains unwilling to wage war. Lord Krishna now responds in a more nuanced manner to the depth of Arjuna's feelings. He speaks to Arjuna about the indestructibility of the spirit, about the duties (*dharma*) of a warrior, the importance of engaging in karma yoga (selfless service) and the meaning of a self-realised person who is able to control his mind.

Although it may not always be appropriate to compare the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna to a modern therapeutic situation, many aspects of the conversation reflect the appropriate manner to assist someone in need. Arjuna and Lord Krishna have an open dialogue within which several questions are raised by Arjuna. These are systemically answered by Lord Krishna without any attempt to limit what Arjuna may want to ask and express. The interaction fulfils all six conditions of helping identified in Rogerian psychotherapy (Rogers, 1957). These are psychological contact, incongruence in the client, congruence in the client, empathy from the counsellor, unconditional positive regard towards the client, perception of this acceptance and unconditional positive regard on behalf of the client.

Just as in any helping situation, Lord Krishna's and Arjuna's willingness to contribute their respective efforts matters significantly. Lord Krishna is genuinely motivated to break the impasse that Arjuna has reached. Arjuna is equally receptive to the guidance provided by Lord Krishna. Without this mutuality and reciprocity, it is difficult to bring about positive change. Past literature has identified the therapeutic alliance as a critical component of successful therapy outcomes. Gellhaus Thomas et al. (2005) define therapeutic alliance as "the extent to which a client and therapist work collaboratively and purposefully and connect emotionally, and is conceptualized as a common, or generic factor in that it is believed to cut across various treatment approaches" (p. 1). In fact, over 80% of the positive outcomes of therapy may be attributed to the therapeutic relationship, which includes the ways in which the therapist exhibits warmth, empathy and respect for the client (Sharpley et al., 2006). The trust that is shared by Lord Krishna and Arjuna is presumably the foundation for the resolution they achieved, as is true of any helping relationship.

## Future Research

A close analysis of the Bhagavad Gita indicates its ability to augment several concepts that have now come to the forefront of psychology. One subfield that is of particular interest in relation to the Gita is positive psychology and the themes subsumed under it, such as forgiveness, happiness, character strengths and flow. For example, the Gita gives importance to the ability to forgive and sees it as a divine quality. One should forgive if the other person sincerely asks for forgiveness, if it is the first offense, if the offense was not intentional and if the offender has been helpful in the past. The text further discusses the need to control

one's anger towards the transgressor, with anger management now being widely recognized in psychology as a component of emotional intelligence.

In relation to the emphasis on forgiveness, it may be hypothesized that seeking forgiveness and forgiving someone become easier if one adopts an attitude of nonattachment, a value strongly endorsed by Lord Krishna in his dialogue with Arjuna. However, psychologists have yet to rigorously explore the impact of nonattachment as a cognitive framework in mental health. The highly limited research on nonattachment in the context of Buddhism shows the potential it has for enhancing mental well-being. Whitehead, Bates and Elphinstone (2020) investigated nonattachment in relation to wisdom, self-actualization and self-transcendence. The results of the study conducted on university students supported the prediction that nonattachment would be positively related to the three variables. Further, nonattachment was found to act as a partial mediator of mindfulness for all three variables.

An important concept emphasized by the Gita that is worthy of further investigation is *dharma*, which is understood to mean a person's duty to the divine and playing one's role in making the world run as it should. Hung and Wa (2021) found dharma therapy embedded within a teaching-based therapeutic intervention (which utilized the Buddhist model of ending suffering) to be effective in helping clients tackle all aspects of anxiety. Once again, there is a need to explore how a person's understanding of the Gita's philosophy on dharma impacts their mental health.

Another branch of psychology likely to benefit from the wisdom of the Gita is transpersonal psychology, which focusses on consciousness and its altered states, mythology, meditation, yoga, mysticism, ethics, psychological well-being and transpersonal emotions such as love and compassion (Walsh & Vaughn, 1993). While certain exceptional human experiences are considered unacceptable for scientific study within mainstream psychology, transpersonal psychology considers such experiences to be extensions of normal creativity. Though Lord Krishna has been referred to as a transpersonal psychologist (Burger, 1998), little research has been conducted on how concepts from the Gita may be fused into this approach. Transpersonal psychologists have formulated practices and exercises into coherent programs aimed at facilitating development by focussing on personal growth (e.g. van Dierendonck et al., 2005). The role of the Gita must be explored further within such programs.

## Conclusion

While many similarities have been identified in the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna and the modern therapeutic approach, the differences that exist must be not be ignored. In all comparisons of the Gita with person-centred therapy, it must be remembered that Lord Krishna was directive in his approach; he clearly indicated the action that Arjuna ought to take. However, person-centred therapy is nondirective in nature. The interaction of Lord Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield was relatively brief in nature and yet profound enough for Arjuna to find the answers to his questions. In addition, brief or one-time interactions are usually inadequate for changes to occur, especially for complex emotional issues. Even with intense training on the part of the counsellor and receptivity on the part of the client, it may take several sessions of counselling over a period of months for positive out-

comes to occur. The brevity of the interaction between Lord Krishna and Arjuna should not be taken to mean that deep-seated changes can always occur swiftly.

Moreover, through the course of his dialogue Lord Krishna makes references to many intangible entities, including Karma, rebirth and the Soul, that modern scientifically oriented psychologists may still be unwilling to incorporate within their therapeutic repertoire. To the extent that the Gita is seen as a religious text, the acceptance of its teachings may be based on the therapist's and client's own faith systems.

While psychologists are now recognizing the wealth of ideas within the Gita, there is no single cohesive therapeutic approach based on the Gita that has been empirically tested for effectiveness. Given the emphasis on empirically proven efficacy, it may be important to conduct such studies before the essence of the Bhagavad Gita can find greater acceptance as a text in psychology. Nevertheless, it appears beneficial for psychologists to continue to explore the ways in which the Gita can contribute to mental wellness by offering a culturally sanctioned, time-tested way of approaching life's dilemmas.

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**Hazards and Human or Animal Subjects** N.A. Statements of compliance are required if the work involves chemicals, procedures, or equipment that have any unusual hazards inherent in their use, or if it involves the use of animal or human subjects.

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