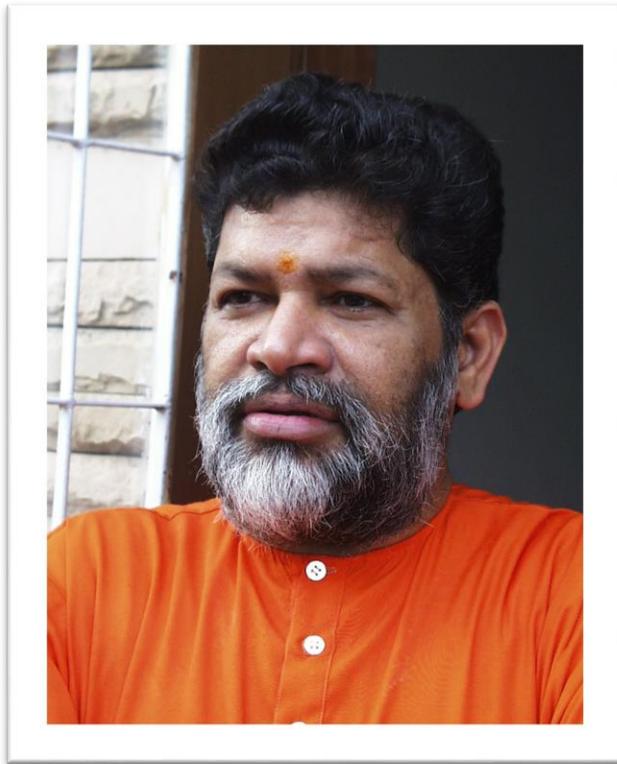


Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita

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If psychology is a value free objective study of mind then the Bhagavad Gita may not be qualified as a psychological treatise. Bhagavad Gita studies mind in the context of the Immutable consciousness/atman-brahman and the objective interpersonal world.

One is an ontological assumption and the other an experiential fact. Bhagavad Gita's interest in the mind, the mediating entity, is because it is the instrument of transcendence/self-knowledge. Mind with senses is the instrument of knowing the world and when detached and reflective it becomes capable of knowing the self/truth/God.

Psychology started with the study of neurosis, the various dysfunctions of the mind. Discovery of the unconscious was a major turning point. The objective was to understand the hidden inner drives and organise them for a well-adjusted life. The stimulus-response model, the will to power model, sexual suppression model, drive to transcendence model, the rational choice maker model -- all these ideas contributed to the understanding of mind and human behaviour. We find all these ideas explored in the Bhagavad Gita in understanding human mind and human motives and action.

Bhagavad Gita begins with a description of the breakdown of a healthy, competent human being in a very stressful and conflicting situation. Stress was due to the stake involved and the immediacy of the crisis and conflict because of lack of acceptable choices. So Bhagavad Gita's focus is a healthy mind in temporary crisis, which if not solved may deteriorate into mental, physical and social illness. Arjuna's problem is not due to sexual suppressions, past traumas, hormonal imbalance or due to brain damage. It is a thinking man's problem - dharma sammoodha cheta.

Bhagavad Gita begins with the exposition of the immortality of the Self and an exhortation not to grieve. Krishna also appeals to Arjuna's pride: "give up this unbecoming, heaven denying, inglorious weakness"; reminds Arjuna of his vocation/duty: "get up and fight this righteous battle"; tickles Arjuna's ambition: "win the battle, gain glory and enjoy the kingdom".

Krishna also tries a pessimistic and materialistic piece of advice: "life is short and uncertain, so as well enjoy it". But the main line that Krishna follows is that of the transcendental. We all are the immortal Self. The purpose of life is to discover that and abide in that. That is bliss. A pure mind is the instrument of knowing the self.

Purity of mind is gained by practicing the twenty (BG-Ch.13)/ twenty-seven (BG-Ch.16) values while engaged in the worldly activities ie. practice of karma yoga. For the self abiding work becomes a means of serving the world - lokasamgraha. Bhagavad Gita gives a picture of the enlightened person - sthitaprajna - which is the ultimate possibility of human life-a mind abiding happily in the happy self while engaged in the world with altruistic intentions, calm and free from emotional fluctuations. Self-ignorance projects desire to possess and indulge leading to frustrations which leads to further desire prompted activities and the cycle repeats endlessly. 'Get off this cycle -- nistraigunyo bhava', is the clarion call of Bhagavad Gita.

Bhagavad Gita is more prescriptive than descriptive, normative than narrative. Its focus never deviates from the goal while dealing with the various means to reach the goal. Kama, krodha, lobha, moha, ahamkara, raga, dvesha, phalecha - all broods of ignorance are the root cause of human misery. These are mental impurities.

These impurities can be removed by practicing all the above values while engaged in the worldly duties. According to the Bhagavad Gita mind is a combination of manas, buddhi, and ahamkara. The faculties of five sense organs and five motor organs are also added to the mind. The activity of the mind is determined by prakriti/svabhava. This value can be equated with the unconscious of modern psychology. 'Prakriti tvam niyogshyati' --prakriti will impel you, - 'svabhavastu pravartate' - it is aquired nature that propels, 'sadrisham chestate svasya prakrite jnanavanapi' -- even a wise man functions according to his nature. Prakriti is a carry forward from previous life.

Bhagavad Gita advocates a vocation in tune with ones prakriti. A vocation in tune with ones prakriti is called svadharma. Prakriti is a dynamic of three gunas - SRT - sattva, rajas and tamas . The prakriti of an individual is determined by the predominant guna in his mental makeup.

Accordingly, he is inclined to different pursuits/vocations. His ego, knowledge, work, inclinations, goals, happiness experience all are determined by this guna mix.

In the area of mind and work Bhagavad Gita is deterministic. There is no way a tamasic mind can become rajasic and then satvic as far as choice of vocation is concerned. That is why different disciplines are prescribed for brahmana, kshatriya, vaisya and sudra/ "brahmana kshatriya vaisyam sudranam cha parantapa karmani pravibhaktani svabhava prabhavai gunai". Ones vocation is predetermined, depending on the prakriti which is a carry forward from the past. But this has nothing to do with ones birth in a particular social strata, but purely by inborn guna and the consequent karma.

How to determine ones guna/prakriti/svabhava? The Gita is silent here. In the Mahabharata there are stories where prakriti is determined by the fact of birth in the particular social group. But it has no Bhagavad Gita sanction. Bhagavad Gita doesn't seem to recommend market competition either. May be the individual is the best authority to determine his guna/prakriti. By this deterministic approach Bhagavad Gita skirts the issue of competition, evolution, material progress, conflicts, neurosis, violence, dialogue and decision making.

So what to do is question that is determined for us by our prakriti/"sahajam karma kaunteya sadosamapi ne tyajet". Peace is attained by accepting ones prakriti, and choosing ones vocation accordingly.

Man-woman relationship also is subject to this law of prakriti. Woman has a defined place and she has to accept that. 'What is my dharma' this agonizing question is finally answered by submitting to ones predetermined place and vocation. By putting individuals into these predetermined procrustian boxes Bhagavad Gita ensures social harmony, mental peace and detached reflectivity. All this mutilation of human psyche is done with the objective of obtaining transcendence. Do your work as an offering to Me/bhakti yoga; detach from the fruits of work/karma yoga; meditate on the immortal self/jnana yoga, became the clarion call of Bhagavad Gita.

It is not change of vocation or climbing the social or evolutionary ladder that is advocated. It is alignment with ones prakriti, avoiding inner conflicts of misalignment, and transcending the entire infrastructure of prakriti including the mind. In this process buddhi plays an important role -- "evam budhe param budhva samsthabhyatmanamatmna jahi satrum mahabaho".

Buddhi is the faculty for understanding. Buddhi understands by study. Manas is purified by practice of values. Bhagavad Gita also advocates detachment -- from sense objects by knowing them to be impermanent.

The Bhagavad Gita is for the healthy to become healthier, not for ones like Duryodhana who is a maniac nor Karna who suffers from severe complexes, but for the likes of Arjuna, Dharmaputra and Bhishma. The Bhagavad Gita approach is preventive than curative; its goal is not to fix a broken mind but to inspire a stalled mind to come out of boxes. This approach is very relevant today as more people are suffering not from any diagnosable problems, but from existential crisis of purposelessness, boredom and lack of wholesome interests.

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