

# Readings of Psychology in the Bhagavadgītā

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## Introduction:

Psychology is the science of psyche. The word “Psyche”, commonly translated, mind, soul or behavior. Herman Ebbinghaus said that “Psychology has a long past, but only a short history”. What this means is that psychology has been a formal discipline for little more than 100 years but that its enduring issues were phrased centuries before by philosophers, theologians, and everyday people.<sup>1</sup> Amongst Indians it always hidden in their philosophical thought.

In the western world by the late nineteenth century many philosophers had turned their attention to question about the human mind – How do we perceive the world around us? Do people have free will or are their actions determined by events outside and inside their bodies? What is the link between mind and body - between the physical world (in which our bodies clearly exist) and our thoughts, feelings and consciousness? After many findings of such question, a new idea emerged, the possibility of a scientific field of psychology. And once this idea took shape, the new field of psychology itself quickly developed.<sup>2</sup>

So we can see here in western world western philosophers have given separate space to the psychological thought. Whereas, in Indian philosophy scholars have been explained philosophy and psychology both parallel. In *Sāṃkhyakārikā* while talking about *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, Kapila Muni elaborates *Mahat*, *Ahaṃkāra*, *Manas*, *Jñānedriya* (sense organs) and *Karmendriya* (work organs) – these psychological terms diffusely. In *Vedāntasāra*, Shri. Sadānandayogi gives philosophical teachings for the *Mumukṣutva* (liberation), along this he also thoroughly explained on *Vijñānanmayakoṣa*, *Manomayakoṣa* and *prāṇamayakoṣa*. Where he quotes *Buddhijñānedriyaḥ sahitā Vijñānanmayakoṣo*.<sup>3</sup> It means *Vijñānanmayakoṣa* is the combination of intellect and sense organs. *Manastu jñānedriyaiḥ sahitam*

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson Christopher, *A primer in positive psychology*, Christopher Peterson, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Baron, Robert A. , *Psychology*, fifth Edn., Pearson Education Asia, Delhi, 2003, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> *Vedāntasāraḥ* 15.

*sanmanomayakoṣo bhavati.*<sup>4</sup> *Manomayakoṣa* is the combination of mind and sense organs. *Prāṇādīpaṅcakam karmendriyaiḥ sahitam satprāṇamayakoṣo bhavti.*<sup>5</sup> Which means the *prāṇamayakoṣa* is the combination of five *Pañca Vāyu and karmendriya* (work organ).

### **Psychology in Indian philosophy:**

Dr. Jadunath Sinha says “There is no empirical psychology in India. Indian psychology is based on metaphysics. The psychological account of some problems of perception, e.g. perception of self, perception of the universal etc., is the unintelligible without consideration of their metaphysical foundations.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, every *Upaniṣada*’s philosophy moves around the *Ātma tattva*. But in *Kenopaniṣad* we can find the difference between *Atman* and *Manas*. Where, the worthy disciple asked to the teacher that, *Keneṣitam patati preṣitam manah. Kena prāṇaḥ prathamah praitiyuktaḥ..*<sup>7</sup> Willed by whom does the directed mind go towards its object? Being directed by whom does the vital force that precedes all, proceed (towards its duty)?<sup>8</sup> But today’s science has not the answers of such questions. To explain this Swāmi Gambhirānanda mentioned that “Brain is not the answer of every question, because who have not brain such animal or insects also feel, think, smell and create sound.”<sup>9</sup> So, mind controls sense organs but who sends message to mind to observe these organs? This is the difficult riddle which is solved by the *Upaniṣads*.

### **Psychology in *Bhagavadgītā*:**

There are so many Indian scriptures who have taught psychology through their philosophical schools. Among them now we will refer to psychology from the *Bhagavadgītā*. The *Bhagavadgītā* is a major Indian text, originally a part of the *Mahābhārata*, and included in the *prasthānatrayi*, the three foundations of classical Indian thought. The *Bhagavadgītā* presents an elaborate analysis of the human mind from the context of foundational philosophy of active living. The *Bhagavadgītā* narrative is not a telltale story of Arjuna’s depression and his predicament. What makes the *Bhagavadgītā* narrative a transpersonal

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<sup>4</sup> *Vedāntasaraḥ* 15

<sup>5</sup> *Vedāntasaraḥ* 16

<sup>6</sup> Sinha Jadunath, *Indian psychology cognition*, Vol. 1, Sinha publishing house, Calcutta, 1958, p. preface - xvi.

<sup>7</sup> *Kenopaniṣad* 1.1

<sup>8</sup> *Eight Upaniṣadas*, vol. 1, Tr. Gambhiranand Swami, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1989, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

process and psychology is the continuity given with the intervention of the friend-relative and teacher - the God. <sup>10</sup>

In the first chapter of *Bhagavadgītā*, Arjuna says to charioteer lord Kṛṣṇa to draw his chariot between two armies. When looked around him he realized in his and enemy's armies his own relatives are standing with weapons and they are ready to fight. For some movement, Arjuna became woeful to thinking about the consequence of this war. He may a victor or debacle; anyhow, he will lose his relatives. By worrying about this his body starts to react. He says: *Sīdanti mama Gātrāṇi mukham ca pariśuṣyati* <sup>11</sup> - "I feel the limbs of my body quivering and my mouth drying up. *Vepathuśca śarīre me romahaṛṣaśca jāyate*<sup>12</sup>, my whole body is trembling, my hair is standing on end, and ultimately he says: *Na ca śaknomi avasthātum bhramatīva ca me manaḥ*<sup>13</sup>, due to Arjuna's impatience, Arjuna was unable to stay on the battlefield, and he was forgetting himself an account of this weakness of his mind.

According to general psychology the so-called "expressions" are part of the entire reaction. Darwin's principle of utility explains that many emotional expressions did undoubtedly become fixed as inherited behavior pattern because they aided in survival of the individual.<sup>14</sup> Bodily postures depends so much upon what the individual is going to do about the particular situation that it bears little constant correlation with the emotion one feels. Psychologist Hunt and Landis have caught the entire course of the startle pattern in response to a pistol shot. The entire reaction is over in from .3 to 1.5 seconds. The reactions begin in the head and proceeds downward. So there are many experiments in psychology to show the impact of mind on the body. In the *Gītā*, when Arjuna became confused, he started to create negative and guilty feelings, he says:

*Kiṃ no rājyena govinda kiṃ bhogairjiviteṇa vā.  
Yeṣamarthe kāṅkṣitam no rājyaṃ bhogāḥ sukhāni ca..*<sup>15</sup>

In the second chapter to make him stable lord says to Arjuna

*Kutastvā kaśmalamidaṃ viṣame samupasthitam.  
Anāryajaṣṭama svargyama kīrtikaramarjuna..*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> K. Ramakrishnan Rao, *Indian psychology*, Foundation books, Delhi, p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 1.28

<sup>12</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 1.29

<sup>13</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 1.30

<sup>14</sup> Guilford, J. P. *General psychology*, Affiliated East west press pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1973, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 1.32

Here God asks to Arjuna, how have these impurities come upon you? They are not at all befitting a man who knows the values of life. They lead not to higher planets but to infamy.<sup>17</sup> In the first and second chapter Arjuna affected by the impact of *Viṣāda* makes an attempt to create a protective cocoon around him.

In the third chapter lord says to Arjuna to remind him his post and position. He wanted to tell Aarjuna that he is the king and the leader of his army, if he will give up, so naturally his every soldier will lose their hopes. Hence he says:

*Yadyadācarati śreṣṭhstattadevetaro janaḥ.  
Sa yatpramānaṃ kurute lokastadanuvartate..*<sup>18</sup>

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

The law of Authority is studied by the management psychology. According to it, “We have strong drive to seek out higher sources of opinion, direction and advice. People want to follow authority. People in positions of authority are seen as credible.”<sup>19</sup>

In the thirteenth chapter of *Bhagavadgītā* Arjuna ask to lord that,

*“Prakṛitiṃ puruṣaṃ caiva kṣetraṃ kṣetrajñameva ca.  
Etadveditumiccāmi jñānam jñeyaṃ ca keśava..*<sup>20</sup>

“I wish to know about *Prakṛiti* (nature), *Puruṣa* (the enjoyer) and the field and the knower of the field, and of knowledge and the object of knowledge.

While giving answer lord says him,

*Idam śariraṃ kaunteya kṣetramityabhidhiyate.  
Etadyo vetti taṃ prāhuḥ kṣetrajñya iti tadvidaḥ..*<sup>21</sup>

The *Bhagavadgītā* makes a classification of the known (*kṣetra*), knower (*kṣetrajña*) and that is to be known (*Jñeya*). According to *Bhagavadgītā*, this body is called the field, and one who knows this body is called the self, consciousness or knower of the field.

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<sup>16</sup> *Bhgavadgita* 2.2

<sup>17</sup> Swami Prabhupada, *Bhagavadgita* as it is, The bhaktivedant book trust, Mumbai, 1986, p. 68.

<sup>18</sup> *Bhgavadgita* 3.21

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.managementpsychology.com/articles/the-laws-of-influence/>

<sup>20</sup> *Bhgavadgita* 13.1

<sup>21</sup> *Bhgavadgita* 13.2

## Consciousness in *Bhagavadgītā*:

In psychology, consciousness often is defined as our moment to moment awareness of ourselves and our environment. Consciousness is intimately connected with the process of selective attention. William James noted that, “the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the selection of some and the suppression of the rest by the agency of attention”.<sup>22</sup> A century ago Sigmund Freud (1900/1953) proposed that the human mind consists of three levels of awareness. The conscious mind contains thoughts, perceptions, and other mental events of which we are currently aware. Preconscious mental events are outside current awareness, but can easily be recalled under certain conditions. For instance, you may not have thought about a childhood friend for years, but when someone mentions your friend’s name, you become aware of pleasant memories. Unconscious events cannot be brought into conscious awareness under ordinary circumstances. Some unconscious content—such as unacceptable urges and desires stemming from instinctive sexual and aggressive drives, traumatic memories, and threatening emotional conflict - is kept out of conscious awareness because it would arouse anxiety, guilt, or other negative emotions.<sup>23</sup> G. Stanley Hall said that the human mind is like an ice-berg, nine-tenths below water and one-tenth above. The part above corresponds to the conscious part and the part below to the unconscious part.<sup>24</sup>

According to *Bhagavadgītā* the nature of the self is pure consciousness. The self is essentially eternal as illustrated in the verse :

*“ Dehino asminyatha dehe kaumāram yauvanam jarā.  
Tathā dehantara prāptirdhirastatra na muhyati..”<sup>25</sup>*

“Just as in this body the embodied (self) passes into childhood and youth and old age, so does He pass into another body”. Childhood, youth and old age are the inevitable and different stages of the *Dehi* – one who owns a body. But this does not mean that death occurs to the self, that is pure consciousness, at the end of one physical stage and that it is born when next stage comes into being. Birth and death never occur to consciousness. The self is unborn, eternal, unchangeable and primeval; it is not slain when the body is slain.

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<sup>22</sup> Begley Sheron, *State of consciousness*, p. 191

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*; p. 192

<sup>24</sup> *General psychology*, op.cit., p. 143.

<sup>25</sup> *Bhagavadgita* 3.21

In psychology, the concept of consciousness is more related with mind but in *Bhagavadgītā* consciousness is not only mind but it is *Ātman* which is not restricted to one physical body and its psychological functions. But as mentioned above when soul leave one's body then can enter in new womb and can be develop own self.

### **Personality traits in *Bhagavadgītā*:**

The types of personalities, proposed by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, namely are introverts and extroverts. The introverts are people whose interests are turned inward upon themselves and their own thoughts whereas the extroverts are those who interests are turned outward up on the environment.<sup>26</sup> In America, a strong social flavor has been added to the terms. Accordingly, the introvert shuns social contacts and is inclined to be reclusive, whereas the extrovert seeks social contacts and enjoys them. An emotional responsiveness that is obvious to the outside observer has also been attributed to the extrovert, whereas the introvert is supposed to be not very expressive.

The *Bhagavadgītā* has classified persons into three types according as a quality of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* is predominant in them. the first type being characterized by the radiance (*prakāśa*) of pure consciousness, the second by the urge to crave and act (*pravṛtti*), and the third type by inertia (*apravṛtti*) and error-prone negligence (*pramāda*). The *Bhagavadgītā* recommends the way of knowledge to the intellectual introvert, the way of action to the extrovert and the way of devotion to the emotional introvert.

In the second chapter's last section verse 54 to 72 is devoted to the subject which is that state of absolute stability, strength and infinite compassion. Something great has taken place in the human being. All that is petty and small has been washed away, what is that state? We have to know. So Arjuna is asking that question on behalf of all of us :

*Stitaprjñyasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava.*

*Sthitadhiḥ kim prabhāṣeta kimāsīta vrajet kim..<sup>27</sup>*

Swami Ranganathananda says “When a wise person and foolish person work together, there is similarity at the bodily level, but dissimilarity in their intellect level. It is there we read the character of a person. We must be able to go beyond the appearance and see what is inside. And so, how does one of steady wisdom *sthita prajña*, *sthita* means steady, *prajña* means

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<sup>26</sup> General psychology, op.cit., p. 539.

<sup>27</sup> Bhagavadgītā 2.54

wisdom, how does he or she appear.<sup>28</sup>

Every one of these verses is so full of meaning. They contain the science of human depth dimension yet unknown to modern physical science. In no part of the world will you find this penetrating study of the human mind up to the very depths and then wisdom, not only knowledge, coming out of that investigation. Depth study of the mind started only in the beginning of this century in the west through Freud's analysis of subconscious levels of mind. That study revealed man in the worst light. And the west today trying to get rid of that obsession, what we call Freudianism. Śrī Bhagavan answered –

*Prajahāti yadā kāmānsarvānpārtha manogatān.  
Ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate..<sup>29</sup>*

The person is a *sthitaprajña* in that condition, what is that condition? When he or she has overcome all the desires of the heart, 'I want this, I want that'. When the mind and the heart cease to hanker after this and that a stage will come in life when a person realizes that these petty desires are nothing compared to his or her true nature as the infinite and ever free *Ātman*.

*BhagavadBh.g.* is also talks about the various personalities specially we can found in sixteenth chapter *Daivi Sampat* (Divine Estate) and *Asura Sampat* (Devil Estate) which gives the clarification on what are the good qualities and what are the bad activities and their consequences.

*Bhagavadgītā* is very clearly talks on the action and their reactions, so we get the clarity between good act and bad act, truth and illusion, reality and fantasy, etc. in the sixteenth chapter God says that :

*“Daivi Sampadvimoksaya nibandhayasuri mata”<sup>30</sup>*

Devine estate is for liberation and devilish estates are to create bondage. So aware of us what is good and bad and help us to keep our mental balance.

In this way, various personality traits are explained in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

### **Conclusion:**

While concluding it may say that *Bhagavadgītā* can be studied from various perspectives. As *Bhagavadgītā* is consider as central gem of the crown in all the scriptures because it is

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<sup>28</sup> Swami Ranganathananda, Universal message of the Bhagavadgita, vol. 1, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2002, p.213

<sup>29</sup> Bhagavadgītā 2.55

<sup>30</sup> Bhagavadgītā 16.4

directly uttered by Almighty authority through which one can achieve liberation and liberation in life (*Gati* and *Sadgati*).

While understanding *Bhagavadgītā* I felt so proud about our Indian treasure which is hidden in our scripture. Truly western psychologists have done excellent work that they have given a new dimension of thought to the world through psychology. I observed that psychologist reached the mind and its processes like thinking, feeling and creating emotions. But the *Adhiṣṭhāta* or controller of mind that is *Ātman* is explained by Indian scriptures. While discussing about the concept of *Ātman*, *Bhagavadgītā* gives details about rebirth, for which the western psychologists are, maintain complete silence. The knowledge of rebirth is such a wonderful theory through which we can get answers of many secret puzzles. The knowledge of rebirth is also important as it gives the clarity of the *karmic* philosophy. Our scriptures talks about *Samcita Karma*, which also affects our present life.

Many people are unnecessarily feeling pain, anxiety and some are facing many challenges in their life which is physical, mental, and financial or is in the form of various obstacles in their life. Many times they question that they haven't harmed or cheated anyone in their life, so why are they suffering from so many problems? Vice versa we can see many kids are highly intelligent since their birth or childhood just as Śaṅkarācārya achieved the *brahmjñyāna* at the age of eleven and gave such a logical scripture *Brahmasutra - śāṅkarbhāṣya* to the world. In the present times we can find many examples like this - a five years old child in our school chants verses of *Bhagavadgītā*. The Entire *Bhagavadgītā* has been learnt by her and it is surprising that her parents had never taught her *Bhagavadgītā*. Another recent example is the six years old boy Kautilya from north was in limelight through many news channels due to his excellence in general knowledge.

So at the end I would like to say that psychology which is taught by western world makes us able to understand thoughts, feelings and through counselling it can be helpful to balance emotions. But these are only temporary solutions. Whereas, *Bhagavadgītā* gives the ultimate solution i.e., the knowledge of the identity of the creator of thoughts through mind i.e. *Ātman*, and difference between *kṣarākṣar*, *daivi-asurasampad* and also the importance of value based life for the emancipation of soul.



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