

## **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy in Perspective of the Bhagwat Gita**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Bhagwat Gita offers a valuable literature on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. It has a determined focus on removing cognitive distortions from the mind of The Arjuna and re-motivating him to fight the battle by the therapist The Krishna. The Krishna as a therapist transformed Arjuna's distress narrated in Chapter 1 to liberation and renunciation as mentioned in Chapter 18 through a single CBT session of nearly 2-4 hours. CBT addresses negative patterns and distortions in the way we look at the world and ourselves. It involves how negative thoughts or cognitions contribute to anxiety and how you behave in situations that trigger anxiety. The basic premise of CBT is that our thoughts, not external events affects the way we feel. The same event can lead to completely different emotions in different people. It all depends on our individual expectations, attitudes and beliefs. Cognitive restructuring is the essence of its success. But in many cases it had been found that CBT failed to be effective and efficient. The CBT model of The Bhagwat Gita contains elements of mindfulness, transcendental consciousness which is far more result oriented than contemporary CBT of modern times. Study confirms that a mindfulness and acceptance based treatment is effective, compared with waitlist control (DEBORAH COWLET, MP, 28/03/2011). Trust, devotion and complete surrender of patient towards the therapist as done by The Arjuna and emphasis on work with renunciation (Karma Yoga) by The Krishna made CBT more effective and efficient in delivering fair result.*

**KEYWORDS:** *CBT, Bhagwat Gita, Anxiety, Distress, Depression, Mindfulness, Trust, Devotion, Renunciation, Transcendental consciousness.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Cognitive behaviour therapy was primarily developed through an integration of behaviour therapy (the term 'Behaviour modification' appears to have been used first by EDWARD THORNDIKE, 31/08/1874-09/08/1949) with cognitive psychology research, first by DONALD MEICHENBAUM and several others with the label of cognitive-behaviour modifications in 1970's. This tradition thereafter merged with earlier work of a few clinicians, labeled as cognitive therapy, developed by ACON BECK and Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) developed by ALBERT ELLIS. Effectiveness of CBT has been scientifically tested in number of clinical trials for various psychological disorders. CBT is problem-solving oriented, time-limited, focused on the present, identify the distorted thinking, modify believes, and chage the thinking, behaviour and emotional response of the clients. It is based on the cognitive model: the way we perceive situation, influence how we feel and respond emotionally. Thoughts generated by the situation affect emotional feeling.

During distress people often do not think clearly and their thoughts are distorted in some way. CBT help people identify their distressing thoughts and evaluate how realistic the thoughts are and then they learn to change their distorted thinking. At the onset of CBT, The therapist essentially create sound therapeutic relationship with the client, set proper goals, plan treatment and select relevant interventions. Trust building demonstrating accurate empathy, sharing the conceptualization with the client, collaboration and helping patient's response to inaccurate ideas is the key job of therapist. During CBT session individuals learn to identify and evaluate their spontaneously occurring verbal or imaginary cognitions and to correct their thinking so that it more closely resembles reality. This decreases their distress and helps them to behave more functionally especially in the cases of anxiety. They also learn to identify and modify their distorted beliefs; their basic understanding of themselves, their world and other people.

The value of spirituality has leveraging effect on the cognitive behavioural therapy. For instance, DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOURAL THERAY (DBT) is a successful amalgamation of CBT with ZEN principles. The Epic Mahabharata authored by Veda Vyas dated back to 5000 BC consisting of 100,000 verses is based on the conflict between the two groups of cousins, The Kauravas and The Pandavas. The Pandavas and their supporters with the aid of The Krishna defeated The Kauravas in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The Bhagwat Gita represents chapter 25-42 of this epic. This scripture consists of 18 chapters and 701 verses. The very first chapter of the Gita known as 'Arjuna Vishad Yoga' portrays the sorrow and distress of The Arjuna while 'Moksha Sanyas Yoga', 18<sup>th</sup> chapter narrates renunciation, freedom from fear, sorrow and distress after the

successful session of CBT by The Krishna. The Arjuna was unwilling to obliterate his kins and mentors during combat. He was filled with guilt, doubt and attachment to his loved ones, contemplates withdrawing from the battlefield. The Arjuna was the greatest archer of his time, a man of integrity, person with clarity of mind, compassionate, falls into a state of utter dejection. The Krishna guided him to the right course of action to help him fulfill his destiny in the war, a triumph and righteousness over evil. This interaction between The Krishna and The Arjuna encompass Cognitive Behaviour Therapy principles in The Bhagwat Gita.

The Bhagwat Gita is full of advice on the theory of cause and effect, making the doer responsible for the consequences of his deeds. It tackles the issues from the grass root level of human thinking because once the basic thinking of man is improved it will automatically enhance the quality of his action and their results. In The Bhagwat Gita, The Arjuna was the patient and The Krishna was the therapist. The Krishna delivered single session therapy to The Arjuna which lasted for 2-4 hours.

## **II. THE ARJUNA-PATIENT**

This Pandava prince was veteran and great warrior of his time. He was known to be greatest archer who played proactive role in the preparation of Mahabharata war and drove to the battlefield with zeal and for winning. After viewing the warriors on the field he filled with guilt, anxiety, doubt. His attachment towards his loved ones drove him to drop his weapon and quitting the combat.

## **III. THE KRISHNA- THERAPIST**

The Krishna is considered as a 'LORD' in Hindu mythology. He was supposed to have super natural powers and respected in the community even by the elders and Kauravas (enemy of Pandavas). He was the relative, friend and well-wisher of the patient, The Arjuna. He possessed excellent interpersonal skills, negotiation skills and hypnotic skills.

## **IV. PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF THE ARJUNA**

The Arjuna was much anxious and depressed in the middle of the field viewing all his kins, mentors and relatives at the commencement of the Mahabharata war. Verses 29, 30, 32, 44 and 45 of chapter 1 narrated the psychopathology of The Arjuna as he mentioned it to The Krishna. The symptoms of anxiety explained in verses 29 and 30 as 'weakness of the limbs', 'dryness of the mouth', 'shivering of the body', 'goose skin', 'trembling', 'burning sensation throughout the body', 'dizziness' etc while symptoms of depression were recited in the verses 32, 44 and 45 as 'his preference of death to war', 'guilt of killing kins, relatives, mentors and friends', 'unwillingness to fight', 'gloominess', 'negative thinking process', 'desire to quit kingdom and pleasure'.

## **V. THE COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY**

The Arjuna's dilemma is outlined in the first chapter of the Bhagwat Gita, which narrates his situation as the armies were about to commence the war. Whether to perform his duty and fight for his right or quit the war in order to save blood flow of his relatives, kinsmen and mentors during the war was the dilemma of The Arjuna as recited in verse 3 of chapter 2. The Arjuna dropped his bow and turned to the Krishna for guidance. The Krishna responded to The Arjuna's dilemma only when he surrendered and become receptive to his guidance. The Arjuna's dilemma is a fable of our lives in which we deal with positive and negative thoughts all around in our mind. The teachings of The Bhagwat Gita delivered by The Krishna lead us to the right course of action. CBT therapist while addressing anxiety and conflicts of the patient helps them with symptomatic resolution and pave path for his long-term recovery is in many ways similar to the resolution of conflict by The Krishna in The Gita. We tried to study parallel between the GITA and CBT in this text and addition of principles of The Gita to the contemporary CBT model to make it more effective and efficient.

Verse 40 of chapter 1 of The Gita associated the feeling of guilt, anxiety and depression due to the visualization of death of kinsmen and relatives to the Arjuna. Initial approach of The Krishna was to motivate The Arjuna by explaining the triumph and associated splendor and humiliation associated with quitting fighting, but this approach failed. Altering his strategy, The Krishna, helped The Arjuna to identify his distorted thinking, modify and change his thinking, belief and emotional response to his current situation. The cause and elimination of suffering, the level of mind, the procedure of experiencing transcendental consciousness, the development of higher states of consciousness, in which life is lived at the highest level of bliss, effectiveness and universality are addressed in The Gita. So, we can say that The Gita depicts first documented session of CBT in the world.

Patient's perception and blaming themselves for events beyond their control appeared to be a recurring theme of depression as theorized by SELIGMAN. The Arjuna iniquitously holds himself accountable for the destructions; this explains his depressed state of mind. The Krishna stated in verse 44 of chapter 2 of the Bhagwat Gita to him that all events occur due to a natural course and association of oneself to it is mere illusion. Introduction of soul (Atman) being immortal (verse 22, chapter 2) and that The Arjuna will not obliterate his enemies by mere destroying their perishable bodies, relieved arjun's anxiety grown due to the visualization of demise of his relatives.

Further, the most imperative concept of The Gita was addressed by The Krishna to The Arjuna, the concept of 'Karma Yoga' as mentioned in verse 47 of chapter 2. This concept is inimitable whereby one performs his deeds in the service of the Lord without affection towards rewards and consequences. Discouragement of an individual with the result and encouragement of right action helps assuage possible distress or guilt associated with the action. The focus on deeds by an individual is accentuated in various verses of The Bhagwat Gita and could be handy in addressing avoidance as a defense. Mere renunciation and inaction done by an individual is a false following of the path, The Gita states perfection can be attained only by Action. Dwelling on imaginary outcomes (future telling, a cognitive distortion as in CBT) was daunted by The Krishna. The principle of reciprocal inhibition is often applied by modern therapist of CBT and prescribes relaxation through breathing techniques (Pranayam as mentioned in The Gita) and meditation to aid calming anxiety and synchronizing the mind. These are the several similarities between The Gita and CBT which can be used to promote insight into one's own distorted thinking and motivate behavioural changes in oneself.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The intensity of the effect of feelings is inversely proportional to the strength of mind and the outcome of surroundings and circumstances upon the mind depends upon its strength as taught in The Bhagwat Gita. State of indecision of mind of The Arjun at the beginning transformed him in full power of confidence and concrete decision making after the CBT session taken by The Krishna, although the circumstances remained same before and after.

The Bhagwat Gita states in verses 35-36 of chapter 6 where The Krishna narrates, "It is true that the mind is restless and difficult to control. But, it can be conquered, Arjuna, through regular practice and detachment. Those who lack self control will find it difficult to progress in meditation; but those who are self controlled, striving earnestly through the right means, will attain the goal".

The Bhagwat Gita points out that all forms of problems and suffering are due to the lack of full integration of life. The Bhagwat Gita demonstrates the development of the mind from a pathetic state of anxiety and depression to the matured thinking. The interaction between The Krishna and The Arjuna exemplify knowledge of illumination, conception of acumen in Arjuna and experience of the knowledge as the skills of therapist and receptiveness, trust, devotion and complete surrender by The Arjun to The Krishna are characteristics of the patient required to deliver prompt results after CBT sessions.

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