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Life: How to live it an approach to mental health through the Lens of the Śrīmadbhagavadgītā

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Abstract---The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is one of the most thoughtful texts in the canon of World literature. An interesting feature of this book is that its ideals are not limited with the jurisdiction of any particular religion, belief, culture or any specific community. But it deals with the subtle mechanism of humanism as a whole, making the content very popular and philanthropic. It altogether is a repository of humanistic elements. The teachings of the book become even more significant than before in today's world of growing consumerism, materialism and rising violence that lead to restlessness, anxiety and confusion in life. Its eternal wisdom is required for developing emotional balance, right judgment and inner strength. The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is abundant with mental health issues that goes to the root of the problem related to mental illness. The mental disorders have a variety of costs that ultimately link with other physical illness and add to this burden is the poor quality of life. Mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in today's world specially in some of the fast growing tech countries. Therefore, it is the increasing need of the hour to build mental health intervention. The aim of this paper is to highlight how the insights of mental health dealt with in the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* would be useful in the modern days. It's a humble endeavor to manualise the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* for day to day practice.

Keywords---Mental health, *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*, Mindfulness, Positive Thought.

Introduction

According to World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is an integral and essential component of health. Mental health includes emotional, psychological and social well-being. It is a state of well-being in which an individual can realize own abilities, can cope up with the normal stresses of life, work productively and

can able to make a healthy contribution to the society as a whole. It affects how one think, how one feel and how one act. Mental wellness is essential for overall health. If the cause of poor mental health is looked upon, then it is found that a number of factors like lack of motivation towards positive attitude for life, degradation in social and moral value, stressful work, gender discrimination, unhealthy lifestyle etc. are involved in experiencing such illness. The mental health problem or mental health illness is related to mental conditions with symptoms like reduced ability to concentrate, deep and ongoing sadness, inability to manage day-to-day stress and problems, withdrawal from others and activities one used to enjoy, extreme tiredness, sleeping problems, strong feeling of fear, worry or guilt etc. There are some mental health disorders like depression, anxiety and panic phobia etc. which are so common among today's fast going generation. The current picture of the world is having a huge amount of mental disorder cases. With this, high suicidal risk is another increasing concern. So, the answer to the query why poor mental health is bothering much is that mental disorders have a variety of costs like mortality, disability with respect to work, social and family life. Moreover, it is linked with other physical illness and the poor quality of life increases this burden. Therefore, it becomes a fundamental concern all over the world in promoting and protecting mental health.

To maintain the mental hygiene one needs positive thought and positive approach towards life. There are many sacred texts in the world that not only deal with particular sects of faith and believe or religious worship but they also contain heap of knowledge for maintaining a balanced living through positive thinking, steady mind and self-awareness. These texts can be used as one of the means to achieve mental wellness in a way or other. One such scripture is *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* which is regarded as a manual on all practical issues related to an individual's day to day life. There is a wrong notion about *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* among many people that this scripture is meant for old and retired people. Some feel that this text is for gaining a little peace of mind. On the other hand, many accept it as a religious book meant for worshipping only. Some also feel that it is not possible to apply the age old or profound teachings in today's context and are difficult to apprehend. It is, however, unfortunate that the central message of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is often overlooked. It is a scripture not limited to a particular religion, belief or boundary or to a group of people but for whole mankind. In the story of this book Arjuna, the recipients of Kṛṣṇa's teachings represents the modern man. Like the modern man, Arjuna is confused by the chaotic situations of life and the fear of failure in a war. With all regressive outcomes the present condition of the society has rightly been compared with the carnage of battlefield. And Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna to face the battle. The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* addresses the modern man's problems like mental illness. This text is full of mental health insights. The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* goes to the root of the problem related to mental health setting right our world-view and the resultant thinking. *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā*'s teachings help a person to change from within as it provides various methods to do it. Therefore, this paper aims at highlight the statements of the *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* which endowed with value to humankind which develop right assessment, emotional balance, strength and recognizing the ultimate purpose of human life i.e. the greater welfare of the society.

Śrīmadbhagavadgītā: An overview

The *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* is regarded as one of the most important work of Indian thought and wisdom. It's a great manual for human life. It is a roadmap for personal as well as professional life management. This book is popularly known as *Bhagavadgītā* or *Gītā*. It belongs to the great epic *Mahābhārata* written by Vedavyāsa in Sanskrit language. It has eighteen (18) chapters and seven hundred (700) verses. This is a poetical work in the form of dialogues primarily between Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra and between Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Sañjaya secondarily. The intricacy of *Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* (*Bhagavadgītā*) is that here the composer has adjusted two sets of speaker and listener in a very interesting manner. In the first stage the speaker Sañjaya narrates the happenings of the battlefield and the listener Dhṛtarāṣṭra, being unable to see due to his blindness, hears from Sañjaya word by word. In a similar manner in the second stage, the speaker is Kṛṣṇa who speaks about the Ultimate Truth of human life and Arjuna, the listener listens to the words of his friend, philosopher and guide. In that battlefield, there are two groups belonging to the same race i.e. Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas for acquiring the empire of India. But when Arjuna, the third of the five Pāṇḍavas saw his relatives and friends on the other side, he was overpowered with melancholy and laid down his bows. Here started *Bhagavadgītā*, the song of the Lord Kṛṣṇa to boost up Arjuna which Kṛṣṇa spoke to him with the great lessons towards the spirit of life. Through the conversation, the *Bhagavadgītā* has revealed the inner philosophy of thought and wisdom. It focuses not only on the philosophical doctrines, but it focuses on the issues of Epistemology, metaphysics and of ethics as a whole. Swami Vivekananda also mentioned that Lord understands the need of the man and what has gone through in the minds and feelings of people and that is why He manifests himself in the form of man to do good for the society and for the sake of humanity (Swami Vivekananda, 2009:Vol III: 55). Thus, the *Bhagavadgītā* contains a heap of knowledge which directs people towards greater wisdom and maturity. It leads to the path of human personality and life and its ultimate purpose and hence, this book is more relevant in current life itself which is contemporary also. Through the *Bhagavadgītā* the goals of human existence can be fulfilled. Arjuna suddenly develops anxiety and Kṛṣṇa counsels until he gains enough mental strength and power to come back to the war. Arjuna needs some kind of psycho-therapy at that time and Kṛṣṇa pulls him out from that deep mourn. The sense of *Bhagavadgītā* is the essence of life for all of us irrespective of our faith, creed, and beliefs. The *Bhagavadgītā* has an answer to every life problem-physical, emotional, intellectual, philosophical and spiritual. There are various readings in the *Bhagavadgītā* which speak about cognition. This is the tallest paradigm in quick cognitive behavior therapy because when Arjuna has lost before the war, Kṛṣṇa turned him inside. This book has been regarded as a hand manual of this therapy by health practitioners. This book starts with *Viśādayoga* where the term itself means depression. The last chapter named *Mokṣayoga* means liberation or bliss. So this book takes one from depression to bliss. The *Bhagavadgītā* describes the journey of mind from a depressed or low level of state to liberation or higher level of state.

In the battlefield, seeing his opponents Arjuna faces two kinds of crisis i.e. ethical crisis and strategic crisis. Ethical crisis comes when he saw his teacher Droṇa

from whom who learnt the war skill and it's not possible for him to kill his teacher anyway. On the other hand, strategic crisis strikes him when he saw Bhīṣma. Bhīṣma was endowed with mystic boon that he would die at his own will only. So, it's impossible for Arjuna to get victory over Bhīṣma. Therefore, before getting into the battle Arjuna faces mental crisis and his mind become unstable. If one is not mentally stable or positive then he goes to grief and as result he cannot bring any thought or imagination. Arjuna faces same situation. He cannot decide what he should do and what he should not do. Nothing is happening in his favor. Arjuna then just asks Kṛṣṇa to guide him, to mentor him. Then Kṛṣṇa advises him not to behave in that way and starts counseling and motivating him for the war. Everyone has the power to discriminate things, but that power sometime get hide due to some unfavorable conditions or situations. The mentor explore the skill, give vision to problems and when one follow the vision one can get the solution. This is counseling what the psychologist or psychiatrist do in mental health practice. It is a surprising fact that Arjuna, the most intelligent speaker of truth in his time withdraws his bows and arrows in the war who has already won earlier great battles. Arjuna cannot take any decision as he becomes cripple from inside in this juncture. In such moment, the counseling of Kṛṣṇa eradicates the unsteadiness of Arjuna's mind in such a way that it brought clarity in thought in Arjuna's mind. Finally Arjuna fought with full energy and ultimately got victory over the Kauravas.

***Śrīmadbhagavadgītā* and its insights in Mental Health**

The positive mental health frequently speaks about affective motivation. There are two ways of motivation. One moves people towards something and one move away from something. People move towards something which is new, thrilling and pleasurable even if it can lead to a negative outcome. Further, people also want to go away from something which has unpleasant outcomes such as punishment, hurt, negative emotions etc. Both these tendencies if it becomes too high or if dysfunctional then it is associated with various types of mental health disorders from anxiety, depression to addiction etc. Some people might be high on one of these e.g. some people may always look for approaching new things, interesting things or thrilling things. On the other hand, some other may always want to avoid some unpleasant outcomes. They really want to experience the positive one avoiding the negative. Looking into the *Bhagavadgītā*, in the first chapter itself Arjuna wants to avoid the fight because it is very unpleasant and he has to fight with his family members whom he admires and respects. He would prefer to run away from the war field and leave. Simultaneously, it is seen that Kṛṣṇa is telling him to keep moving keep fighting. So, people whether they are driven by experiencing whatever is pleasant to them or driven by a need to avoid something they consider unpleasant. In both these cases, what one chooses it affects on their mental health.

Again, this is also connected with the concept of *triguṇa* in *Bhagavadgītā*. This idea of *triguṇa* has been utilized to explain the concept of personality in modern era. *Triguṇa* literally means three qualities viz., *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* means stability, *rajas* means activation and *tamas* means inertia. Every human being has these three qualities more or less and on the basis of predominance of one of these three promote the personality of a person. When *sattva* dominants, a

person become strong mentally whose mind and sense are constant having a calm understanding and self-control. The *Bhagavadgītā* speaks that one can work towards increasing *sāttvikaguṇa* or choose *sāttvik* goals because the reason for choosing or pursuing a goal, or the manner in which it is pursued influences whether it is reached and how people felt afterwards. The *Bhagavadgītā* says that *sāttvikaguṇa* leads to the happiness and joy throughout the journey towards the goal.

*tatra sattvaṁ nirmalatvāt prakāśakamanāmayam/
sukhasaṅgena badhnāti jñānasaṅgena cānagha// XIV.6*

In day-to-day life whether working, personal or social life, one often get negative emotions. Some find difficult to manage their emotions and some find not easy to tolerate unpleasant emotions. They are often guided or driven by unpleasant emotions. Here, the *Bhagavadgītā* emphasizes on another aspect of positive mental health through emotional balance. When someone links achieving their goals to their happiness, even if they achieve more they have been found to have lower well-being. On the other hand, there are people who don't link achieving their goals to their happiness. They pursue only. If they achieve what they want they feel happy and even if they don't achieve, then also they don't feel bad for not getting the goal. So through the idea of *svadharma* i.e., doing one's duty only and *niṣkāmakarma* means performing own duty without hankering after the result, the teachings of *Bhagavadgītā* can be used for Cognitive therapy also. The *Bhagavadgītā* says one should perform his action or duty only and should not focus on its result alone *karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana* (II.47). If one does his duty without attachment to its goal, he attains the highest bliss or goal.

*tasmādasaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara/
asakto hyācāraṁ karma paramāpnoti puruṣaḥ// III.19*

Thus, *Bhagavadgītā* emphasizes various kinds of shifts in oneself while selecting a goal and doing one's work. It is related to another idea of non-attachment i.e., psychological flexibility which has been given some importance in the field and some has found its influence on multiple mental health issues. Another factor which has been given importance is the capacity to have healthy separation and an ability to let go of things. So a lot of pain and suffering happen in people's life because of being attached and stuck with something, when one is not able to let go. It is repeatedly said in the book that one should develop the capacity to balance in sorrow and happiness *duḥkheṣvanudvignamanḥ sukheṣu vigatasprṛhaḥ* (II.56). Life is really fair to one who can accept it or go ease with it and move further. In this context, it is to be noted that *Bhagavadgītā* offers multiple techniques which help managing emotions, developing a sense of non-attachment and to be stable-minded like meditation, contemplation, surrender or offering to the higher power or universe, shifting one's attitude, developing a larger perspective about oneself and universe or the divine. And being a witness to one's body and mind commonly known as mindfulness in today's world is all what *Bhagavadgītā* is taught about.

Another aspect of positive mental health is the awe feeling. It becomes a unique pathway to create positive emotions which has not been given lot of attention in

the past. From last some years it has been studying that while dealing with some major mental health issues like depression, awe could be considered as a key therapeutic asset. Awe is an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, inspiration, gratitude, hope, wonder etc. It happens when one sees, find or feel or get absorbed in something grand, sublime or something extremely powerful. It can be like stars at the night sky, the rising sun, the powerful waterfall or something majestic or mystic in Divinity, Nature, art or in music. The awe sense has multiple benefits like making one feel connected to other people and humanity, decreasing materialism, making people more generous and cooperative. It has enhanced the sense of time. People feel like they have enough time to do. The awe feeling gives meaning in life and also increases creative power. And finally it can bring the sense of humility. The *Bhagavadgītā* in its 10th and 11th chapter tells about the awe not only when Kṛṣṇa shows his *viśvarūpa* i.e. the universal form to Arjuna but also when the divine glories and manifestations of Lord Kṛṣṇa have been described.

*anekavaktranayanamanekādbhutadarśanam/
anekadivyaḥbharanam divyānekodyatāyudham//* XI.10

In that universal form, there are countless bellies, mouths and eyes of Lord. Arjuna is overcome with wonder to see that marvelous cosmic form. It can actually trigger the similar awe feeling to the reader that is something good, surprising or deeper in sense. This awe is related to *Bhaktiyoga* of *Bhagavadgītā* also, because when one is devoted to something higher or mighty it can make an individual feel awe with reverence and bliss. Through *Bhaktiyoga*, a person could feel the abundance that surrounds him which ultimately brings a total new and holistic perspective towards life. Moreover, the *Bhagavadgītā* from time immemorial has been regarded as the guidebook for overcoming depression at various stages of human life. People often get depressed with life the way it brings undesired circumstances or time resulting negative emotions. The teachings of *Bhagavadgītā* can re-structure individual's mental frames and also expanse this frame so deeply that it helps to maintain the mental hygiene by providing meaning and purpose to life with the sense of acceptance and hope. The sermon of the *Bhagavadgītā* can also improve mood, sense of satisfaction, the cognitive and critical thinking ability. The *Bhagavadgītā* emphasizes on the core message of self-management through the concept of *sthitaprajña* i.e., stable-minded person.

*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān/
ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate//* II.55

It says that if a person can control over desires and have control over the mind, then the person always in the feeling of self-satisfaction. If one remains same in both misery and happiness, then that person is stable-minded. Such person does not feel negative or low-esteem in suffering, pain or adverse situations. When conditions are in favorable then also stable-minded person does not feel over excited. In the same way, one becomes pleased if praised and feels dejected if criticized. People have no power to decide who can praise them or who can criticize them; but what they have is the power to become same or unattached in both praise and criticism. It will also lead to get rid from expectation or deeper attachment that brings fear. When a person has expectation and if it won't go

according to the want then the person becomes angry. So, for keeping a balanced mental wellness one must be free from such feelings of fear, angry, attachment etc. For right mental health the vision should be clear. Everyone should have the ability to accept own reality and the reality of the surroundings as well which evoke more acceptance, mental peace, pure bliss and serene wisdom.

Conclusion

Bhagavadgītā is a treasure house of innumerable psychological insights. It may enhance mental health through many pathways like cultivation of positive emotion and cultivation of positive qualities as well. It can enhance inter-personal quality through equal mindedness. It can also lead to tolerance of intensely unpleasant things of life which everybody wants to avoid or run away from. Many chapters in the *Bhagavadgītā* are devoted to positive qualities that are worth cultivating like friendliness, compassion, forgiveness, equanimity and truthfulness etc. which are social and inter-personal emotions and attitudes. Time has come to increasingly build mental health intervention based on these insights with current language. The *Bhagavadgītā* is not bound by time and culture. It is timeless and goes beyond for expanded sense of humanity which help people wherever they are. The sermons of the *Bhagavadgītā* bear holistic approach of living through health, happiness and harmony. Therefore, an individual should be concern for overall development of mental health to live a happy, meaningful and peaceful life and in this context, the *Bhagavadgītā* can be regarded as useful handbook for protecting and promoting mental health.

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