

**BHAGAVAD GITA AND INDIAN ETHICS PREACHING OF  
GREAT PHILOSOPHER ADI SANKARA**

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**58. Spirituality and Corporate Ethics: Insights from Indian Philosophy**

Prof. Dr. Yogesh Kumar Gupta \_\_\_\_\_ 321 – 327

**59. Spirituality and Corporate Ethics: Insights from Indian Philosophy**

<sup>1</sup>Dr.G.Ilakkia, <sup>2</sup>Mr.Siachin.M \_\_\_\_\_ 328 – 331

**60. Moral Leadership in Public Life: Teachings from the Gita**

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. S. Shajitha Banu, <sup>2</sup>Dr. A. Ramya \_\_\_\_\_ 332 – 335

**61. The Bhagavad Gita and the Moral Psychology of Human Actions**

Mr. R. Suresh<sup>1\*</sup>, Ms. R.P. Harshini<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 336 – 339

**62. Emotional Intelligence In The Light Of the Bhagavad Gita: A Journey from Emotional Competence to Spiritual Wisdom**

<sup>1</sup>S.Vasanthan, <sup>2</sup>Dr.J.Manimegalai \_\_\_\_\_ 340 – 344

**63. Ethics, Emotion, and Action: A Moral Psychological Perspective on the Bhagavad Gita**

Dr. S.Poongodi \_\_\_\_\_ 345 – 348

**64. Ethical Leadership and Indian Spiritual Thought: A Corporate Perspective**

Dr. P.Jayanthi \_\_\_\_\_ 349 – 352

**65. Integrating Bhagavad Gita and Advaita Philosophy in Modern Education: A Pathway to Holistic Enlightenment**

Dr. P. Nirmaladevi \_\_\_\_\_ 353 – 355

**66. Indulging the Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Bhagavad Gita in Human Actions – Philosophical Thoughts on Bhagavad Gita's Dharma, Karma and Yogas**

Dr. T. Vijaya Chithra \_\_\_\_\_ 356 – 360

**67. The Gita for Navigating Life Challenges**

Dr.P.Gomathi Devi \_\_\_\_\_ 361 – 364

**68. Bhagavad Gita and Gandhian Ethics: A Comparative Study**

<sup>1</sup>Dr. R. Senthil Kumar, <sup>2</sup>U. Krithya Ist M. Com CS \_\_\_\_\_ 365 – 369

**69. Ethical Foundation in the Bhagavad Gita**

<sup>1</sup>Ms.P.Anitha, <sup>2</sup>Ms.D.Saranya \_\_\_\_\_ 370 – 374

**70. The Bhagavad Gita: A Sacred Synthesis of Indian Religious Thought**

Nithyadevi R \_\_\_\_\_ 375 – 379

**71. Ethics in public life: lessons from Gita**

Dr.P.Archanaa \_\_\_\_\_ 380 – 383

**72. Generational Wisdom: The Bhagavad Gita's Enduring Legacy for Learning.**

**Authors**

<sup>1</sup>Dr. S. Mohanraj, <sup>2</sup>Ms. K. Anu, <sup>3</sup>Ms. A. Krishna Shruthi \_\_\_\_\_ 384 – 387

### **63. Ethics, Emotion, and Action: A Moral Psychological Perspective on the Bhagavad Gita**

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#### **Abstract**

The Bhagavad Gita, a timeless spiritual text, addresses the fundamental questions of duty, morality, and the motivations underlying human action. Beyond its religious and philosophical depth, it offers a psychological framework for understanding moral dilemmas and internal conflicts. This article explores the moral psychology embedded in the Gita's teachings, particularly focusing on Arjuna's crisis and Lord Krishna's counsel. The dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna reflects the cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions of human decision-making, providing insights into how individuals reconcile personal values with social responsibilities.

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita-Arjuna-Krishna- Psychology- Human Action, Dharma, Motivation

#### **Introduction**

Moral psychology is a domain that investigates how individuals make decisions about right and wrong, how emotions influence moral behavior, and how character and identity shape ethical choices. The Bhagavad Gita—composed over two millennia ago—engages deeply with these questions through the battlefield dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna. In this setting, the Gita transforms into a treatise not just on dharma (duty), but also on the psychological conditions that lead to moral clarity and action.

#### **Review of Literature**

**Paranjpe (1998)** interprets Indian texts like the Gita as frameworks of indigenous psychology, emphasizing the role of inner transformation in ethical behavior. **Sharma (2012)** examines the Gita as a resource for ethical decision-making in leadership. **Narayanan (2020)** discusses the psychological relevance of dharma and karma in contemporary therapy models. Western psychologists like **Kohlberg and Bandura** offer models of moral development and agency, which are revisited in the light of Gita's teachings on duty and detachment.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

While numerous studies discuss the Bhagavad Gita's philosophical depth, fewer address its psychological relevance, especially in understanding how individuals make moral decisions under conflict. There is a need to explore how the text deals with internal struggles, action under duty, and the regulation of desire and emotion. Key questions include:

How does the Gita conceptualize moral motivation and action?

What psychological strategies does it propose for handling ethical dilemmas?

Can Gita's teachings be mapped onto contemporary moral psychology?

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To explore the moral psychology of human action as depicted in the Bhagavad Gita.
- To analyze the role of duty, intention, and self-regulation in ethical decision-making.
- To compare Gita's psychological constructs with contemporary psychological theories.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology. Selected verses from the Bhagavad Gita are thematically analyzed to extract key psychological constructs. The study also performs a comparative analysis with modern psychological frameworks including self-determination theory, cognitive dissonance, and moral development stages. Interpretative textual analysis is employed to highlight the moral psychological themes underlying Krishna's counsel to Arjuna.

### **Findings**

#### **1. Arjuna's Moral Crisis: A Psychological Prelude**

At the onset of the Gita (Chapter 1), Arjuna, the warrior prince, is overwhelmed with grief and moral confusion. His dilemma is not merely about war but about violating deeply held values: kinship, compassion, and righteousness. Arjuna's refusal to fight reflects a state of cognitive dissonance—a clash between his duty as a warrior (kshatriya dharma) and his emotional reluctance to harm relatives and teachers. Psychologically, this moment represents a moral paralysis—a common human experience when principles conflict. Arjuna experiences symptoms of stress: trembling, dry mouth, and faintness. These physical symptoms parallel contemporary understandings of occupational stress, particularly in professions involving moral complexity, such as law enforcement or the military.

#### **2. Krishna's Counsel: Restoring Moral Agency**

Lord Krishna's response unfolds as a comprehensive model of moral psychology. Krishna addresses three key dimensions:

##### **Cognitive Clarity (Jnana Yoga)**

Krishna clarifies that the soul (atman) is eternal and that the physical body is transient. By reframing Arjuna's perception, Krishna alleviates the fear of death and loss. This promotes detached reasoning—a crucial factor in moral judgment.

##### **Emotional Regulation (Bhakti Yoga)**

Through devotion and surrender to the divine, Krishna teaches Arjuna to act without attachment. Bhakti becomes a method of aligning personal emotions with a greater purpose, enabling emotional integration in moral decision-making.

### **Intentional Action (Karma Yoga)**

Krishna advocates for action without attachment to results. This concept closely mirrors the modern psychological principle of intrinsic motivation, where actions are driven by values rather than external rewards or consequences.

### **3. Gita's Moral Psychology and Modern Contexts**

The Gita's insights are profoundly relevant in today's world, especially in professions burdened with occupational and moral stress, such as police work. For instance, a recent study of women police in Coimbatore district (as reflected in the journal Asiatic Society of Mumbai) found that stress stemmed from role conflict, lack of recognition, and balancing family with duty. In the Gita, Krishna's teachings help individuals transcend such stress by: Clarifying roles and responsibilities (svadharma), Encouraging emotional detachment from outcomes, promoting inner stability through discipline and meditation (dhyana yoga). This framework suggests that moral strength arises not from avoidance of conflict, but from a well-integrated self capable of ethical action despite inner turmoil.

### **4. Variables associated with Moral Action**

The Bhagavad Gita associates moral action with the following psychological variables:

Variable	Gita Perspective	Psychological Parallel
Intention (Bhava)	Emphasis on pure intent over result	Moral Intent in Ethical Theories
Detachment (Vairagya)	Action without craving results	Self-regulation, Flow
Duty (Dharma)	Contextual responsibility	Role Ethics
Knowledge (Jnana)	Insight into self and reality	Self-awareness, Metacognition
Emotional Equanimity	Controlling raga-dvesha (likes/dislikes)	Emotional Intelligence
Faith (Shraddha)	Confidence in righteous path	Internal locus of control

### **Suggestions**

- ❖ Integrate Gita-based moral reasoning models in ethics education.
- ❖ Use Gita's framework for developing emotional resilience in youth.
- ❖ Explore therapeutic applications of Gita's principles in counseling psychology.
- ❖ Cross-cultural studies could evaluate the universality of Gita's moral psychology.

### **Conclusion**

The Bhagavad Gita is not merely a scripture—it is a profound study in moral psychology. By guiding Arjuna from confusion to clarity, Krishna illustrates a timeless pathway from emotional

paralysis to purposeful action. This transformation parallels the journey many modern individuals face when confronted with ethical dilemmas. In synthesizing knowledge, emotion, and action, the Gita offers a holistic framework for understanding and cultivating moral behavior—one that remains as relevant today as it was on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

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