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Strategies of preventing depressive thoughts: Through reflection from Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract

Depression is classified as a mood disorder. It may be described as feelings of sadness, loss, or anger that interfere with one's everyday activities. The Bhagavad Gita is a counselling session preached in the battle field of Kurukshetra by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, when Arjuna gets mentally depressed on seeing his relatives against him on the battlefield. Thus, Bhagavad Gita elaborates on tactics to achieve the mental equilibrium. This paper focuses on the strategies mentioned and elaborated in Bhagavad Gita to overcome depression. It is a theoretical paper wherein a rigorous review of literature was undertaken to identify the themes derived from Bhagavad Gita that can be applied to promotion of mental health, especially in relation to depression. Themes derived from the review are: Detachment, as way of healthy living (Avoiding desires and expectations); Faith as a path towards empowerment and strength; Pure understanding of self leads to enlightenment; Uniting self with world; Coordinating mind and body for integrated personality; Self control leads to salvation; Altruistic service, the purpose of living and Moderate living for healthier 'YOU'. These themes are important not only to maintain mental health but also to improve mental health for wellbeing. In the present paper, the researcher attempted to explore important thoughts of Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita for Mental Health Education.

Keywords: Depression, Depressive thoughts, Prevention, Strategies, Promotion, Mental health, Bhagavad Gita.

Introduction

Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity or apathy that can affect a person's thoughts, feelings, behavior and sense of well-being. It affects the way one handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. It is a very serious and disabling psychiatric condition that occasionally leads to suicide or premature death due to unattended physical problems. (Miller, Dell'Osso, & Ketter, 2014) [3] Depression is common in all the ages and generations, from childhood, teen to adulthood, old age. An estimated 676 million (one in ten people) are affected by depression. Worldwide. (WHO, 2016) The burden of depression is not limited to the human misery of the depressed person. It extends to the caregiver, the partner, the children, and the whole society in general. The quality of life, which is a measure of subjective well-being in different domains of life, is lower in persons suffering from depression. (Miller *et al.*, 2012) Caregivers of depressed patients are more likely themselves to suffer from more depressive symptoms, poorer general health and more chronic medical conditions. (Miller, Dell'Osso, & Ketter, 2014) [3] Therefore it seems that prevention of depressive thoughts is much better investment than curing it.

Bhagavad-Gita means song of the Spirit, song of the Lord. The Holy Gita has become a secret driving force behind the wisdom of one's life. The timeless teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are deeply embedded in the Hindu psyche and continue to serve as a spiritual guide to the vast majority of Hindus around the globe. This scripture consists of 18 chapters and 701 verses (*shlokas*) authored by Vyasa and dates back to 2500 to 5000 years BC. The Gita represents chapters 25-42 of the Mahabharata, which has 100,000 *shlokas*. The Bhagavad-Gita was delivered by Lord Sri Krishna to boost Arjuna's declining morale, confidence, motivation and to take the Arjuna out of the intra-personal conflict, which was to fight or not to fight the war at Kurukshetra. Arjuna got mentally depressed when he saw his relatives with whom he has to fight. Bhagavad Gita has got all the management tactics to achieve the mental equilibrium and to overcome any crisis situation. The spiritual aspect of this book in

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Hinduism is very well established but, it is also of colossal use for Psychologist and Psychotherapist who deals with the patients of Anxiety, Depression, Fear, Guilt and negative attitude towards life. (Sharma, 2014) [8] There has been a very few studies regarding the Psychotherapeutic use of The Bhagavad Gita in the past. This motivated to study the use of The Bhagavad Gita in Psychology. The present study aims at identify strategies to prevent depressive thoughts, through the lens of Bhagavad gita. This study was also undertaken with a view to find some interventions that are not only effective but are easy to understand and implement.

Review of literature

Easwaran (1997) highlighted there is no significant problem in life which cannot be referred to the Bhagavad Gita for a perfect solution. In recent years, the Gita has been recognized as a perpetual source of wisdom in many fields such as psychiatry, management, administration, leadership etc. thus bringing it acceptability beyond Hindu religion and the Indian shores. Sharma (1999) asserted that with the slow yet increasing popularity of the Bhagavad Gita towards addressing organizational problems in recent years, there has been a growing interest among management researchers in exploring the concept of Karma Yoga. Bhagavad Gita is energy conserving and mind purifying for it urges one to work for a cause higher than one's ego. Further Verma *et al.* (2014) [10] suggested that the understanding of the principles of the Bhagwad Gita and its application in day to day life as an effective tool for management and coping of stress. Bhatia *et al.* (2013) [2] suggested that the gita recommend psychiatrist and mental health practitioners to use spirituality as a part of their therapeutic armamentarium. In line with positive psychology, Ashtankar (2016) [4] suggested that the divine principles in Bhagwad Gita for it's application to mind management & development of human capital.

Methodology

The present study is a qualitative theoretical review. It focuses on gathering and highlighting the strategies to prevent depressive thoughts that are mentioned in gita. It utilizes secondary data from journals of medicines, therapy, disorders and many more, which have attempted to understand and treat depression from the perspective of Bhagavad gita.

Results

The following themes are derived through the lens of bhagavad gita on strategies to preventing/overcoming depressive thoughts/depression:

1. Detachment, as way of healthy living: Expectations and desires generates bonded living: Perform duties without attachments and insistence on particular results. Accept the results gracefully and gratefully. Only those who have given up desires for external objects can rejoice and be satisfied in the self. The root of bondage is our material desires, "This should happen; that should not happen." Sri Krishna explains a little further ahead in this chapter (in verse III.37) that desire is the cause of all sins, consequently, it must be renounced. Sloka (II.62,63) says 'Thinking of objects of pleasure of the senses one develops desire to have them and not getting it gives rise to anger. Anger leads to delusion and

delusion to loss of memory. Loss of memory leads to destruction of intellect which leads to his own destruction.'

Dhyaayato vishayaan pumsah sangas teshupajaayate; Sangaat sanjaayate kaamah kaamaat krodho' bhijaayate. (II.62) *Krodhaad bhavati sammohah sammohaat smriti vibhramah; Smritibhramshaad buddhinaasho buddhinaashaat pranashyati* (II.63)

Sloka (II.64, 65) gives us the advantage of having no desire. 'When one has no desire he has no attachment and is free to be with his own self. And being established in self even when acting with senses his happiness increases. With increasing happiness all sorrows disappear and you become a man of steady intellect.' (Haran, 2017)

Raagadweshha viyuktaistu vishayaanindriyaishcharan; Aatmavashyair vidheyaatmaa prasaadamadhigacchati (II.64) *Prasaade sarvaduḥkhaanaam haanir asyopajaayate; Prasannachetaso hyaashu buddhish paryavattishthate* (II.65)

2. Faith as a path towards empowerment and strength:

Faith is vital for the discharge of devotional service. It is the easiest way to reach the Divine. With faith, one gets in touch with the inner strength and can easily tackle any tough situation. In Bhagavad-gita (IX.3) Krishna says, "Those who are not faithful in this devotional service cannot attain Me, O conqueror of enemies. Therefore they return to the path of birth and death in this material world." Faith in the Higher Reality is a great source of strength. A man is what his faith is. As the faith so will be our desires, thoughts and action.

3. Uniting self with supreme:

"When the soul separated itself from God, the material energy covered it in an illusion. By virtue of that illusion, it began thinking of itself as the body, and ever since, in forgetfulness of the self, it has been experiencing immense misery." Those who are illumined realize that the self is not material in nature, but divine, and hence imperishable. The perishable objects of the world can never fulfill the thirst of the imperishable soul, and therefore it is a folly to hanker after those sense-objects. Thus, self-illumined souls learn to unite their consciousness with God and experience his infinite bliss within them.

jiba jiba te hari te bilagāno taba te deha geha nija mānyo, māyā basa swarūp bisarāyo tehi brama te dāruṇa duḥkh pāyo. [v.13]

With the soul united to spirit by the Yoga, with a vision of equality for all things, the Yogi beholds his self (spirit-united) in all creatures, and all creatures in the spirit. (VI:29)

4. Pure understanding of self leads to enlightenment:

Humans forget that neither the materialistic world is permanent nor this mortal body. They develops false ego to satisfy their temporary feelings. This binds them with temporary illusion of pleasure and when they face reality things changes according to the situation contrary to their expectations. They feel uneasy/uncomfortable and hence are under stress. The thinking of 'I- as the Supreme/ the authority/ the one/ the only' is itself wrong and leads to the path of sorrow and destruction. Understanding the roles we are playing are temporary & relative. The Reality in me is the Truth, is absolute.

“dehi nityam avadhyo yam dehe sarvasya bhārata
Tasmāt sarvāni bhūtāni nā tvam sōcītum arhasi” (II.30)

O Arjuna, this eternal soul within the body of every living entity is immortal, therefore you should not lament for any being. This knowledge makes humans aware that it is the same soul which resides in everyone. This consciousness makes us tolerant, sensible, empathetic and enable us to control our negative and harmful emotions. We all are part of the same supreme entity, God (the unending reality). If we feel jealous to other person and think negatively about him then it is reciprocate in the same manner to us creating negative environment which gives stress.

5. Self control leads to salvation: Undoubtedly the mind is fickle and unruly; but by Yoga practice and by dispassion, the mind may nevertheless be controlled. (VI:35) An uncontrolled mind is very weak and unstable; as a result even a small obstacle coming in its way may make it lose initiative. Sri Krishna also mentioned that - “One who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends, but for one who has failed to control their mind, the mind will be the greatest enemy”. (VI.6) Develop Purity in feeling and overcome the impulsiveness of negative emotions like anger, lust, etc. (Ashtankar, 2016) ^[4] ‘The man of self-control, roaming among material objects with subjugated senses and devoid of attraction and repulsion, attains an unshakable inner calmness.’ (II:64) In Bhagavad Gita, while elaborating on the issue of mind control Sri Krishna said – “Lord Sri Krishna said: O mighty-armed Arjuna, it is undoubtedly that mind is very difficult to curb & is restless, but it is possible by suitable practices of meditation & by detachment. For one whose mind is unbridled, uncontrolled, self-realization is a difficult work. But he whose mind is controlled and who strives by appropriate means is assured of success. That is My opinion.” (VI.35)

6. Coordinating mind and body for integrated personality: ‘sri-bhagavan uvācha asamsayam mahābāho mano durnīgrāham chalam abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyena cha grhyate’ (VI. 35)

An uncontrolled mind is very weak and unstable; as a result even a small obstacle coming in its way may make it lose initiative. “One who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends, but for one who has failed to control their mind, the mind will be the greatest enemy”. (VI.6) O mighty-armed Arjuna, it is undoubtedly that mind is very difficult to curb & is restless, but it is possible by suitable practices of meditation & by detachment. For one whose mind is unbridled, uncontrolled, self-realization is a difficult work. But he whose mind is controlled and who strives by appropriate means is assured of success. That is My opinion.” (VI.35) By doing meditation & other yoga techniques, one can control one's mind & a disciplined mind can be made to concentrate on one's job better, producing better results. Few minutes of Prayers & Meditation daily, go a long way in building up reserves of Peace and happiness within. Harmonising the head and the heart will shape an integrated personality. Disintegration causes stress. Integration gives tremendous satisfaction.

7. Altruistic service, the purpose of living:
Karma literally means deed or action; what is

sometimes called the “law of karma” refers to an underlying law of cause and effect that is seen to permeate all existence. The idea is that every action leads to a reasonable result – and, consequently, that everything that happens can be traced to something done in the past. Actions determine destiny: this is the basic idea of karma. The way out of this maze of cause and effect, is not to avoid work, especially the duties required by his station in life, but to perform those duties without selfish attachment to their “fruit,” or outcome. If Arjuna follows this path of selfless work, Krishna explains, he will enjoy this world as well as the next. More important, he will gain a spiritual blessing and will be lessening his debt of karma. ‘Fulfill all your duties; action is better than inaction. Even to maintain your body, Arjuna, you are obliged to act.’ (III. 8,9) ‘At the beginning, mankind and the obligation of selfless service were created together. “Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find the fulfillment of your desires”- this is the promise of the Creator.’ (III. 10) ‘Every selfless act, Arjuna, is born from Brahman, the eternal, infinite Godhead. Brahman is present in every act of service. All life turns on this law, O Arjuna. Those who violate it, indulging the senses for their own pleasure and ignoring the needs of others, have wasted their life. But those who realize the Self are always satisfied. Having found the source of joy and fulfillment, they no longer seek happiness from the external world. They have nothing to gain or lose by any action; neither people nor things can affect their security. (III. 15,16,17,18) Strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world; by devotion to selfless work one attains the supreme goal of life. (III. 19)

8. Moderate living for healthier ‘YOU’:
‘Yukāharavīharasya yuktachēstāsya karmasū.
Yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yoga bhavati dukkhaha’
(VI.17)

It means “the one, whose diet and movements are balanced, whose actions are proper. whose hours of sleeping and waking up are regular, and who follows the path of meditation, is the destroyer of pain or unhappiness.” Lord Krishna further clarifies this (VI.16) by saying that, eating too much food or starving, and sleeping too much or remaining awake all the time is not health friendly. Such people cannot concentrate or do sadhana.

Every person is distinct as his or her personality depends upon three attributes called satva, rajas and tamas. The food one eats and one's personality are related (XVII.7). People with predominant satva eat food which is greasy, nourishing, appealing and succulent (XVII.8). People with predominant rajas eat food which is bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent, dry and burning. Excess amount of these foods makes one miserable and sick (XVII.9). People with predominant tamas in the body prefer to eat half cooked food which is dry, bad-smelling, stale, defiled and impure.

The Bhagwad Gita also explains how to eat: “while eating, one should concentrate only on eating as the food is served to one's consciousness” (IX.27). Lord Krishna says that even eating leaves, fruits, and water suffice to keep us healthy”.

During the last minutes of life, a person's mind remains under the influence of his/her dominant attributes and this determines our next birth. People who die with dominant satva guna, take rebirth as people who are pure in their mind

(XIV.14). On the contrary, dying people with predominant rajas guna will be reborn in families devoted to action, and if a person's soul departs when the tamas guna is growing, the soul takes rebirth in people who are stupid. Lord Krishna elaborates that there are four types of food, which are consumed by human beings, and they are the foods, which are either eaten, sucked, drunk or licked. They all lead to the increase of digestive fire, which is dependent on prana vayu and apana vayu. The functioning of this digestive fire is dependent on one's consciousness.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to teach Bhagavad Gita at schools and colleges to prepare better citizens. The researcher has tried her best to provide valuable information related to Mental Health covered by Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita. Lord Krishna says "Whatever has happened, has happened for good. Whatever is happening, is happening for good. Whatever will happen, shall also happen for good. What have you lost, that you cry for? What did you bring, that you lost? What did you create, that was destroyed? You came empty handed and will go empty-handed. Whatever is yours today, was somebody else's yesterday, and will be somebody else's tomorrow". For better mental health, it is good to follow the direction of the inner voice because everything is within us.

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