

A Critical & Comparative Study of Freudian Concept with Bhagwad Geeta

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Abstract

“Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta” is a part of the great epic ‘Mahabharata’ written thousands of years back by the sage Ved Vyaas. The book has eighteen chapters, which contain the quintessence of the entire philosophy and vast ocean of spiritual knowledge of Vedas, Upnishads, Shastras, combined with all the other scriptures and literatures of the ancient India and Sanatan Hindus. But Bhagwad Geeta is not for a particular person, or religion, race, caste, or country, rather it is that divine treasure of knowledge that has been given by the Lord Krishna Himself to the entire humanity. Each individual, who is alive and breathing on this earth, has an equal claim and right over the unparalleled and liberating knowledge of this wonderful song sung by Krishna. Saying anything about Bhagwad Geeta is like showing a lamp to the sun but at the same time it is

absolutely pertinent and important to keep spreading the most invaluable gems and pearls of this divine source of knowledge with people in this era when everyone around seems to be stressed and depressed mentally, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually because this great scripture has the immense potential within itself to answer all the questions and complications that are facing the modern civilizations and men today. It is the elixir that can bring the humanity to immortality and can free it of all the psychological bondages and make it healthy and blissful forever. This research paper attempts to draw the similarities between the theories of Freudian psychologically and the teachings from Geeta and at the same time it endeavours to highlight how this scripture marvelously resolves all the conflicts that remain unanswered by the modern scientific psychological thought.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Structural Theory, Pleasure Principle, Psychosexual Stages, Sankhya Yoga, Karma Yoga, Aatman, Collective Unconscious, Saatwik, Rajas, Tamas, Id, Ego, Super Ego, Bhakti Yoga, Personality.

Introduction

Few Quotes on Bhagwad Geeta

“How much more admirable the Bhagwad Geeta than all the ruins of the East” “Walden” by Henry David Thoreau

“You who came to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.”
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna

On the field of battle.

Not fare well, but fare forward, voyagers”.

In Dry salvages by T.S. Eliot

"That the spiritual man need not be a recluse, that union with the divine life may be achieved and maintained in the midst of worldly affairs, that the obstacles to that union lie not outside us but within us—such is the central lesson of the Bhagavad Gita."

From “The Lord’s Song” by Annie Besant

"I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad Gita. It was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Gita is the universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to skeptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went disappointed. I find a solace in the Bhagavad-Gita that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavad-Gita. I find a verse here and a verse there , and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies -- and my life has been full of external tragedies -- and if they have left no visible or indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of Bhagavad-Gita. -Mahatma Gandhi

Background

The story of Mahabharata, which is believed to have happened around 5000 years ago, revolves around the two families of “Kauravas” and “Pandavas” who are in a constant struggle over the throne of Hastinapur. King Vichitravirya had two sons Dhritrashtra and Pandu. The throne of Hastinapur went to Pandu because Dhritrashtra in spite of being the elder son was blind. Pandu had two wives Kunti and Madri. He was unfortunately cursed by a sage that he would die the moment he would make any intimate relations with his wife. Kunti begot three sons through the power of mantra given to her by sage Durvaasa & Madri by the help of Kunti and her mantra begot two sons. Dhritrashtra on the other hand had hundred sons. Duryodhana, the eldest son of Dhritrashtra, always envied his cousins and never wanted Yudhishtira to become king. He wanted the throne to himself and so the rivalry and the conflict started between the two families since their very childhood which after passing through many bitter episodes of enmity between the cousins and the two families culminated into perhaps the biggest war in the history of mankind at Kurushetra. The scripture of Bhagwad Geeta is consisted in the epic Mahabharata from chapter 25-42 and has almost 701 couplets or shlokas in eighteen chapters. The very first chapter describes in detail the mental condition of Arjuna. He is standing on his chariot right in the middle of the battle field and sees all his near & distant relatives, brothers and cousins, kith and kin, elderly people and teachers of the family ready to fight against him. On seeing this he gets filled with remorse, confusion and a sense of guilt. The feeling of sadness gets over him and as a result he starts perspiring and his entire body starts shaking. He felt that his throat was getting dry because of thirst and he suddenly found himself unable to stand. These are

the physical symptoms of a person who is at least momentarily suffering from neurosis. He lost his self-control and confidence to the extent that he was unable to differentiate between right and wrong and he finds himself unable to fight and lead his side in the war. He informs about his physical-mental condition and his decision not to be a part of that war to his closest friend, philosopher and guide Lord Krishna who was playing the role of his chariot chauffeur (Saarathi). Arjuna starts elaborating about the harms, sins, and disadvantages of fighting the war. He says that most persons who are standing on the other side of the battle field were his blood relations and near relatives and therefore no joy or happiness could be possible for him in life after killing them. He goes on to explain that if all his cousins and men folk of his extended family die then the women will procreate with men from outside the family and thus the “Dharma” of the family would be destroyed. He says in very clear terms that he had no wish to enjoy the kingdom and its materialistic gains because those would be stained with the blood of his family members. He also said that committing fratricide was a sin and he did not even want the kingdom of the entire earth if it meant killing his brothers, cousins, uncles, teachers, grand fathers and near and distant relatives. He further said to Krishna that it would be better if Kauravas (sons of Dhritraashtra) killed him in battle as it would save him from committing sin. After saying all this Arjuna sat down in a state of sheer dejection & despondency totally confused and clueless not knowing what was exactly right for him to do on that very moment. Lord Krishna here started dealing with the situation at his hand through questioning and counseling in a meticulous manner like a seasoned therapist and thus unfolds the most remarkable, divine, wisdom and knowledge now universally known as Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta. He starts questioning Arjuna in order to elicit the psychological reason behind his queer behaviour like a true clinical psychologist. Lord Krishna starts answering the queries of Arjuna and the conversation then slowly progresses and in

between it takes the form of a discourse also. This entire conversation of Bhagwad Geeta has been translated into many languages and published all over the world.

“A Critical and Comparative Study of Freudian Concept with Bhagwad Geeta”

The word “Personality comes from the Latin word “Persona” which was used to convey the meaning of a “theatrical mask” that artists used to wear while performing different roles on the stage. In today’s world, this word represents the image of a person as perceived by others while playing or performing different social roles in his/her day to day life.

Sigmund Freud, a Viennese Neuro-Pathologist, is most commonly credited with doing an organized study on psychology and personality in the West & coming up with the clinical method of “Psychoanalysis” that, according to him, could give a rational explanation of complex multi-faceted human behavior. Freud during his life time used this method to treat people with mental illness of various types like neurosis. Even the later era psychologists like Carl Jung and Alfred Adler were initially the followers of Freud. He only worked with patients of neurotic and psychotic disorders throughout his life. Most of his case studies were based on his own patients who were mostly middle aged women, around thirty five in number, from Vienna, & only one child.

Evidently, he never got an opportunity to work with people who were leading a normal family, social, and spiritual life. Or maybe he was so much possessed by his own ideas & engrossed into his work that he chose to include only the diseased in his experiments and studies. Therefore, his theory and results cannot and should not be used to understand and explain the personalities of people in the world generally. From where Freud was seeing the human personality could he even ever imagine, contemplate upon, analyze and explain the personalities like Lord Krishna, Jesus Christ, Gautam Buddha, or Guru Nanak? The answer is obviously a

categorical “No”, simply because, his only aim was to understand those disorders and ailments for which there was no visible organic reason available.

On the other hand in India for past many thousands of years all the scriptures, sages, scholars, and the entire fundamental thought process of the nation have majorly stressed upon moulding the character, and understanding & shaping the personality of an individual right from his childhood so as to develop him into a balanced, physically- emotionally- psychologically healthy, and into an individual having higher level of wisdom thereby making him blissfully complete in all aspects of life along with being an asset for the humanity.

Those various branches or schools of thought in Vedic Philosophy, that throw light on life and human personality, have been summarized by the supreme soul Lord Krishna in his divine message to humanity, the song celestial, eternally relevant “Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta”. He has brought together the very essence or elixir of all those philosophies, and the best thing about this divine book is that it is useful to scholars of different subjects around the world even today including scholars and students of psychology and personality. The influence of Bhagwad Geeta may be understood through the examples of Seton Hall University in New Jersey, America where there is a compulsory study of Bhagwad Geeta as a subject for all the students since the year 2008, and the prestigious Harvard University in US has students learning Leadership from it.

In the very first chapter of Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta, we see that Arjuna wants to flee away from the battle field of Kurukshetra not because he is afraid of losing the battle, or he feels himself inferior to his opponents, or even that he is scared about the proposition of getting slain at the hands of Kauravas. He wants to exit from the war field because he doesn't want to become the emperor of even the entire earth nor he does wish to enjoy the riches and unlimited splendor

in life at the cost of lives of his brothers, relatives, friends, and near & dear ones. (Chapter 1 Verse 35) Therefore he pleads in front of Krishna to either allow him to leave the battle field or let him be killed at the hands of Kauravas because that would save him from becoming the vicious destroyer of his entire clan. (Chapter 1 Verse 40)

Sigmund Freud while using the “Pleasure Principle” in “Scientific Psychology” of 1895, and in the “two principles of mental functioning of 1911” tried to firmly establish that “human mind always seeks pleasure and avoids pain”. He went on to the extent of connecting the pleasure principle to libido in 1923. Few years later in 1930 he described pleasure principle as the watchman over life.

But the pleasure principle fails to explain the above mental situation of Arjuna where he not only is willing to leave all the royal status and pleasures of life, but at the same time, he is keen to accept the lifelong derogation on himself for saving the life and securing welfare of his enemies. Moreover Arjuna is not doing this with any sexual motive or any suppressed sexual urge of his past years. So libido doesn't have any role to play in this scenario. What Freud completely failed to understand was that although sexual feelings or libido has an important part in human life, but it is not the foundation stone of it. Furthermore, Srimad Bhagwad Geeta talks & propagates about the universal principle of “Anasakti Yoga” or “action without any sort of attachment”. Lord Krishna has urged Arjuna to establish himself in equanimity and disregard all forms of attachments (Chapter 2 Verse 48). Pleasure seeking makes a person somewhat selfish and necessarily attaches him to the result or fruit of an action. Non fulfillment of a desire, whether sexual or nonsexual in nature, interferes with the enjoyment of pleasure and ultimately brings emotional and psychological pain & stress. Therefore Bhagwad Geeta advocates non attachment and not harnessing of desires to seek pleasure. It ultimately establishes the seeking of

pleasure as the actual reason of getting pain (Chapter 2 Verse 71). In our Indian tradition, we have the glaring example of sage “Dadhichi” who very happily gave away his life and body just for the sake of Truth. Even today, we see many people around us doing charity, philanthropy, and social service without any sexual motive and all these arguments prove that pleasure principle does not always stands good.

Let us now move ahead on the other aspects of Freudian theory. He used to think and believe that most human suffering is determined during the developing years of a child and in order to explain this he went ahead to propose the psycho sexual development wherein any child passes through at least five different stages which are namely Oral, Anal, Phallic, Latency, & Genital. According to him the oral stage runs through 0-1.5 years of age in which the child develops a fixation on all things oral. During the anal stage (1.5-3 years) the child learns toilet habits. In Phallic stage (3-5 years) the child develops Oedipus complex. At the psycho sexual stage of Latency (5-12) years a child develops dormant sexual feelings for the opposite gender. In the final stage of Genital (12+) all the earlier tasks and learning that has been acquired through experience from the previous stages defined above gets integrated into the mind resulting in the start of healthy and hygienic sexual emotions and conduct throughout life time. The Indian tradition disagrees with this theory in two major ways. The Sankhya Yoga in Bhagwadgeeta talks about the superiority of the soul and talks about the concept of transmigration of soul from one body to another. The concept of soul or the real self of a person is infinite and Krishna declares in unequivocal terms that it is an indestructible & eternal part of Him. The first thing that comes out is that it gives a psychological assurance to every human being on earth that they are not destined to doom; and they do have within themselves the enormous potential psychologically, emotionally, intellectually to not only cure themselves of any psychological

ailment, but also to become the controller and owner of their own destiny. Secondly, it doesn't give undue importance to sexual aspect of life and that too at such a tender age.

Actually, there are two underlying principle of these psycho sexual stages as defined by Freud. The first one is, all children are born with a sexual drive called "libido", and the second one that while passing through those stages a child experiences inner psychological conflict between his physical drives & the set of social behavioral traits expected of him. But now the modern medical science has also established the general age of puberty to be around 13 years in girls and around 15 years in boys and therefore the claims of Sigmund Freud do not stand the ground at least fully and completely.

Indian thought has been very clear in this regard. In "Bhagwad Geeta" Lord Krishna urges Arjuna to become a "Yogi". The first and foremost principle of Yoga is "Yama" which again is formed by the combination of five different sub principles or axioms. These are Truth, Non-Violence, Non Stealing, Non possession, and "Brahmacharya" or "Celibacy". Brahmacharya serves a double purpose in human life. It is important not only from spiritual point of view; but also it is very crucial in making a child emotionally, physically, mentally, and psychologically stable and nonvolatile at such a tender age. The practice of Brahamcharya or celibacy makes a child healthy physically and mentally and enables him to build his body, mind, and soul or character strong in the initial phase of his life for leading a fit and absolute healthy life in future. Furthermore, Freud talks about the existence of something called "Oedipus complex" which according to him takes shape or is found into the sub conscious mind. He gave no clinical evidence as to how does it happen or what factors are responsible specifically for its development. Freud was of the opinion that all the psychological problems and issues which occur in the life of a person at an adult age happen because of disturbances and maladjustments

in the psycho sexual stages of childhood. Bhagvad Geeta, on the other hand, that Kaama (sexual instinct) although is an integral and essential part of human existence but it is the nonfulfillment of the desire, which produces anger and frustration in a human being and therefore he asks Arjuna to gain victory over this strong enemy as its hunger is insatiable and it makes a human being lose his conscience. (Chapter 3 verse 43)

The most important part of Freudian theory is the concept of “existence at least three different levels of human consciousness” as perceived by him. According to him the three levels are Id, Ego, and Super Ego. Freud presented a hypothetical model of mind which he later described through the analogy of an iceberg. The human mind according to Freud has three levels namely conscious, sub-conscious, and unconscious. The conscious mind is the small visible part of the iceberg (mind) and contains the information that we know presently. The subconscious part lies just under the conscious mind and contains the stored information, which may be used just with a little effort of memorizing. In other words, the information from it can be transferred to the conscious brain as and when needed. The unconscious mind is the biggest part of the iceberg lying deep into the water of the ocean about which we are unaware and cannot become aware about. In fact, the entire purpose and objective of psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious. This model of mind is called hypothetical because these three areas are not physical in nature but only exist in theory. The unconscious part of human brain according to Sigmund Freud is like a vessel that contains the most primordial wishes and feelings of a human. Id is a part of unconscious brain model of Freud &, as stated by him only, further consists of two separate instincts of “Eros” and “Thanatos”. Eros may be simply defined as the life instinct and is based on the life supporting and life sustaining activities such as respiration, eating & drinking, and sex. The energy that is created through Eros is called “Libido” or the sex energy as

it propels the sex drive in a human being. The “Thanatos” is the opposite of life instinct and in the opinion of Freud the self destructive death instinct is less powerful than the life supportive Eros. The most important aspect of this theory established & propounded by him is the functioning and foundation of Id on the pleasure principle. The other part of the human mind is Ego which acts as the humble servant of Id and works to find out the socially acceptable ways and means to satisfy the hunches and desires of Id. In this manner, we can see that the concepts & theory of Sigmund Freud is too much centered on Sex. The pleasure principle lays high level of stress on the gratification of those instincts, urges, and hunches that arise from libido. Therefore, as a whole Freud says that the role of unconscious mind and especially Id is more crucial and important in understanding the personality, behaviour, and curing physical & emotional problems or ailments than as understood generally by people.

The Indian thought as summed up by Bhagwad Geeta goes at a much deeper level. Lord Krishna talks about four different levels of human existence. Those are Body, Mann (Emotional aspect), Buddhi (Intellect), and Aatma (Soul). In the verse XIII of Chapter II Krishna says that it is the soul that is embodied and travels from the stages of childhood, youth, and old age. So the importance is given to soul and not the emotional and intellectual aspects of the existence. In the very next verse he explains that pleasure and pain are created with the contact of the senses with the objects in the world. Further in the verse XV of the same chapter he very clearly says that immortality is attainable only by those men for whom there is no difference between pleasure and pain. Krishna has talked about a man of balanced mind; someone who neither gets swayed by the happiness nor he sinks into the ocean of pain, because either of the situations is a departure from the equilibrium of mental state, and hence a cause of psychological ailment. In other words, according to Bhagwad Geeta too much attachment to the wishes, desires

and lust creates an imbalance in the entire system and thus creates problems at all the levels in body and mind. Lord Krishna eulogizes a human being who achieves equanimity and treats pleasure & pain, gain & loss, victory & defeat as equal and lives his life with internal bliss of soul. The pleasure principle of Freud entangles a human mind into the pair of opposites of pleasure & pain and thus becomes a reason of an internal conflict leading to all psychological issues.

According to Bhagwad Geeta human nature consists of three attributes (Guna) which are Sattwa, Raajas, and Tamas (Chapter 14 verse 5). The “tamas” is akin to Id, Ego is akin to “Raajas” and “Super Ego” is similar to Sattwa. However, they are a little close yet there is a remarkable distance and difference between them. The three attributes mentioned by Krishna in Geeta are not limited to human nature, but they encompass everything that exists in this nature and universe. So, the circumference of the Gunas as described by Krishna has within itself the entire existence (Chapter 14 Verse 3). According to Krishna, a true Yogi knows that body, “Buddhi” (intellect), or even the Mann (Emotional Aspect) is not the performer of the actions but it is all the result of interplay and interaction of three universal attributes (Triguna) (Chapter 3 Verse 27-28). When a person knows himself as the doer of all the actions then he automatically takes the credit of the good results or feels guilty by taking the blame unto himself. Both the situation are a departure from a balanced state of mind and therefore produces imbalance in the mental state thereby ultimately bringing some kind of psychological ailment or sickness which is harmful for the human psychology.

Now the most pertinent question arises that what kind of personality should a person have according to Krishna? The answer lies in the various scattered shlokas or couplets of Geeta itself. Lord Krishna instructs Arjuna to have a personality with an intellect full of equanimity. In

Saankhya Yoga, Chapter 2 and verse from 55 to 57 Krishna explains to him that a person may be called equanimous when he has forsaken all the desires. A person is called “Sthitpragya” when he doesn’t get perturbed by the miseries of life nor does the happiness is able to take his feet off the ground. So these dual pairs of happiness-sadness, victory-defeat, gain-loss, cold-hot etc. aren’t able to induce any attachment, fear, and anger into a person then that is the personality one should strive for. Here Krishna explained this fact through the analogy of a tortoise which folds all its limbs and saves himself from being seen and getting recognized by others so in the same manner a wise person should take his mind away from all the desires because it is these desires which become the root cause of all psychological illness (Chapter 2 verse 58). He went ahead to explain this further through another fine example of a boat sailing in a river which gets swayed by the wind is similar to mind, which is under the control of the lust and desire produced in the physical senses. But by saying that does Krishna mean a person should not enjoy his life and live like only a hermit or ascetic? The answer is no, not at all. To explain this, he uses another analogy of an ocean in which the water from all the rivers keep falling without creating any disturbance and similarly a wise person is the one who does not allow his psychological and mental balance to be lost by the materialistic gains and possessions. (Chapter 2 verse 70)

Another trait of psychological imbalance is the pride which is again described as a deviation from the ideal equanimous state of the mind or intellect. But the approach of Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta is quite clear and unambiguous in this regard. Krishna says that all the actions are actually in reality the result of interplay & interaction of the three divine attributes of Satwa, Raajas, and Taamas and a person who thinks himself to be the performer of any action does not understand anything in this concern like a foolish. Here Krishna is freeing the mind of a person from all types of the undue stress that arises from the sense of responsibility to perform,

the pride which takes birth from taking the credit of the success and the guilt from the failure. The mutually conflicting and dueling pair of success and failure is again not allowed by Lord Krishna in a very subtle psychological manner to negatively affect the emotions of a human being and make him ill mentally and psychologically. Sigmund Freud has put the entire focus on the sexuality and libido as the decisive factor in the moulding of the human personality but Bhagwad Geeta says that senses act at the deeper level than the physical body and hence are more powerful than it, the “Mann” or the emotional aspect of consciousness is beyond the senses and controls it. The intellect or the “Buddhi” aspect of consciousness is more powerful similarly than the “Mann” and the “Aatman” exist even above the intellect and hence is the most powerful and is the real self of all the human beings (Chapter 2 Verse 42).

Conclusion

The aim of any scientific study is to put it into practice after verifying its concepts; but the primary limitation with the Freudian principle is that although it can be used to explain certain behaviour and cure few psychological ailments up to a certain extent, but it cannot help in predicting behaviour of people. It sees the body and the sexual energy behind all the problems and has gone too far in explaining even the adult behaviour in terms of sexual development stages of persons from childhood. Lord Krishna has given a comprehensive understanding of human nature and personality from many different angles and aspects. The need today is to inculcate our age old learning from our own culture into the studies and analysis of questions that are related to not only human personality, but entire human society because only then we shall be able to create a happy and healthy humanity. We shall be able to gain victory over all our

problems only when we recognize Krishna within all of us and devotedly dedicate to Him as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of all that exists.

References

Important links

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libido>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasure_principle_\(psychology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleasure_principle_(psychology))

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