

## A Dialectical Understanding of Philosophical Counselling

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### Abstract

Dialectics helps us penetrate the opaque zone of reality. Dialectic functions as a remedy for mental rigidity and constructions in the flow of thinking. The force of reason initiates, sustains, and guides the dialectical process to a point of clarity. Due to the dialectical power, "negation" is essential to sustaining the discussion, leading to the clarity of the issue in question. To resolve divergent assertions in the areas of ontology, epistemology, axiology, ethics, aesthetics, and so forth, dialectic may be useful. As human thought is dialectical and the human mind is so programmed, man cannot transform from one level of perfection to another evolved level of perfection by only psychological therapy. But for total growth of human personality, man has to understand life itself and its various aspects and issues with dialectical and dynamic philosophical counselling. Mere psychological counselling is not sufficient for *Arjuna* as he had no psychic disorder on the battlefield. Rather *Arjuna* had conceptual conflicts regarding different value paradigms. To fight and not to fight was the moral dilemma for *Arjuna* because he was convinced of the viability of these two modes of action with equal weight of morality from different perspectives. This is the common problem with all of us when we are trapped by the crossed ethical paradigms at the crossroads of life. The healing of this problem is more philosophical than psychological, more ethical than logical. This healing is possible by the dialectical approach to the ethical paradigms .

**Keywords:** *Bhagavad Gitā, dialectics, counselling, synthetic personality, equanimity, stress management and self-transformation*

### Introduction

The *Bhagavat Gitā* gives a dialectical approach to the understanding of *Yoga* as both theory and practice. As a theory, it focuses on the discipline of every aspect of human life and as practice it is regarded as the treatise of practical living. The *Bhagavad Gitā* is not a *Dharma Sastra* or merely a religious book dealing with religious prescriptions, rites and rituals, and it is not confined to any particular religion. The *Bhagavad Gitā* is not limited to Hinduism. The *Bhagavat Gita* is not for any privileged people of any caste, creed, and colour. The *Bhagavad Gitā* is a treatise of mankind which preaches the ethics of humanity. Therefore, the *Bhagavad Gitā* is regarded as *Yoga Sastra*<sup>8</sup>, signifying *Yoga*

as the discipline of life of each and every man. *Yoga* is the principle of unification. *Yoga* never divides. Similarly, a *Yoga Sāstra* is that scripture which unifies the whole of mankind through the ethics of humanity. Both the client and the counsellor must be free from any religious formats. That means philosophical counselling must be secular in spirit, and both the client and the counsellor should have a secular mindset. The *Bhagavad Gitā* is to be understood as the scripture of righteousness and *yoga*. *Yoga* is the conscious effort to negotiate the gap between finite and infinite, manhood and Godhood. Every form of 'Yoga' presupposes a view of reality and the place of 'man' therein. It is evident from the fact that the *Bhagavad Gitā* starts with the

<sup>8</sup> The *Bhagavad Gitā* is called *Yogasastra*. The last part of every chapter of the *Bhagavat Gita* describes the *Gita* as *Yogasastra*. In this sense, the *Gita* is a scripture of righteousness and *Yoga* which seems to be secular in spirit as it gives universal message going beyond religious denominations

chapter named ‘*Visāda Yoga*’.<sup>9</sup> ‘*Visāda*’ or the state of disappointment is a natural existential state of each and every human being irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Similarly, the *Bhagavad Gitā* ends with the chapter named ‘*Moksha Sanyāsa Yoga*’.<sup>10</sup> *Moksha*, or the state of freedom, is the natural inner urge of each and every man. Though the notion of transcendence exists, there is no room for mystification in the *Bhagavad Gitā*. The *Bhagavad Gitā* is a manual of practical life. Almost all crises of human life have been addressed in the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gitā*. The practical life is a life of action and accountability. Human life is value-centric and context-specific. The contextual contingencies of human life determine the value paradigms. The universal and contextual application of ethical paradigms go hand in hand with the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gitā*. So, the controversy between the deontological and practical aspects of morality has subsided in the synthesis of both applications. This synthesis of the dialectical opposition has saved man from the crisis of life. We should have the basic idea that the *Bhagavad Gitā* model of philosophical counselling is not confined to religious and psychological limitations. It has its practical utility and impact on human personality, and it helps man grow and glow with gradual self-transformation.

### **Dialectical and Direct Approach**

Human thought is dialectical. It studies both the opposite possibilities and then comes to a synthesis. The process of critical thinking forces us to reevaluate previously held beliefs, opinions, and dogmas that have been held as self-evident. Dialectic acts as a remedy for mental rigidity and restrictive thought-flow. In essence, dialectic is a form of reviewing that involves discussion and disagreement. It involves using critical reasoning to clarify one's viewpoint. It becomes dogma when a position is upheld without supporting data or logic. Dogma is the restriction on one's ability to think.

Dispelling dogma, questioning what is already understood, and uncovering what was previously unknown are all achieved through dialectic. The dialectician should not have any preconceived opinions of himself, any established reasons in his favour, nor any a priori conclusion to draw. The force of reason initiates, sustains, and guides the dialectical process to a point of clarity. At the beginning of the war, Arjuna was biased by his pre-occupied thoughts and fond beliefs and therefore, he was reluctant to fight against his relatives. His thoughts were one-sided because he lacked dialectical thinking. He had no idea of the transcendental value of dharma beyond the opposites of success and failure, win and defeat, fame and defame, *ksara* and *aksara*, etc. Lord Krishna counselled Arjuna about the metaphysics of dialectical opposites of manifestation and unmanifestation showing the transcendental vision (*viswarupa darshana*). Lord Krishna advised Arjuna saying “He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, and who in prosperity does not hanker after pleasure, who is free from attachment, fear and anger is called a Sage of steady Wisdom”. (BG. 2.56) The *Bhagavad Gitā* is the only work that beautifully combines knowledge, action, and devotion. As a result, studying it may be helpful for broadening the scope of the dialectics by bringing knowledge, action, and devotion in an integral framework in the light of which *kāma* and *niskāma*, attachment and detachment, engagement and withdrawal, *dharma* and *swadharma*, and so on, are justified. However, context determines value paradigms. Every situation has a unique perspective under a value system. The knowledge of the dialectics from an ethical standpoint helps explain how the apparent disparities between the opposing value paradigms can be reconciled. Philosophical counselling should have a dialectical approach so that the client can reach a concrete conclusion.

<sup>9</sup> The first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gitā* is known as *Arjuna Visada Yoga*. The discourse starts with *Arjuna* being in stress and distress and reluctant to fight against his kin and kith.

<sup>10</sup> The last chapter of the *Bhagavad Gitā* is known as *Moksa Sanyasa Yoga*. This is the concluding chapter where we find the complete transformation of human mind has become possible.

The direct approach ensures strong connectivity and resolved counselling between the client and the counsellor. Counselling becomes effective if it is undertaken with direct communication between the client and the counsellor. In direct communication, the counsellor can read the psychological impacts of counselling on the client and the client also feels comfortable to share his issues with the counsellor. This direct communication can be made anywhere as per the convenience of both the client and the counsellor. Interestingly, in the *Bhagavad Gitā* counselling has been undertaken on the battlefield, which symbolises the most active and dynamic moment of human life. The classroom or official counselling is quite different from the counselling made in the practical field of human life, where man confronts the situation lively and instantly. Man struggles against diverse situations, confronting his own confusions and outside interferences. Man is not living in the paradise of happiness and perfection. He has to struggle hard to fight against the natural and social evils to attain perfection in life. In an individual, the subjective and the objective aspects of the mind work in unison. The split between the subjective and the objective aspects of our mind is mainly created by the layer of egoistic desires in the individual. The greater the distance between these two aspects of the mind, the greater is the inner confusion in the individual.<sup>11</sup> The ultimate goal of human life is freedom from suffering or attainment of the highest perfection. This inner urge to attain perfection inspires every one of us to guard against evil in our thoughts, speech, and actions. So, every situation in life is a war-like situation. The attitude of protesting against injustice (*adharma*) is the hallmark of human personality irrespective of caste, creed, colour and religion. In the *Bhagavad Gitā*, war is construed as *Dharma Yuddha*<sup>12</sup> or the protest against injustice. The civil war between the clans of *Pāndava* and *Kaurava* is only symbolic. The *Bhagavad Gitā*

has given more importance to the mental preparedness of the war than the real war. Understanding and feeling are the roots of all activities. *Karma* should be performed by the support of *jnāna and bhakti*. So war is not a mechanical reaction, rather a well-planned action backed by wisdom and dedication. Here the depiction of the war situation indicates the direct approach of counselling where all are ready for action-reaction responses. Counselling in such a moment is very difficult but it has been possible by the *Gitā* Model of counselling between *Arjuna* and *Lord Krishna*. It is suggested here that the counsellor be personal to the client so that the practical and real facts of life can be addressed and resolved.

### Freedom and Responsibility

Counselling aims at the free pursuit of thinking. Counselling does not restrict the freedom of the client. Man is free, but man is not condemned to be free. Being a self-conscious man is free to use his freedom in a righteous way. Misuse of freedom is the root of all evil in human life. After long counsels with *Arjuna*, *Lord Krishna* has not interfered with *Arjuna's* free choice by imposing His divine authority. *Lord Krishna* advises *Arjuna* to make decisions freely, either to fight or not. Hence, morality is a free choice, and moral consciousness is the root of human freedom. Man is freedom-seeking by nature. Freedom is the highest value-paradigm of human life.

A free man can make the right decision at the right time. One should not be duty-bound but rather a duty-creator. A duty-bound man is trapped by the bondage of his duty. But a free man thinks instantly what to do and what to avoid with a commitment that in his course of action, at any point, knowingly or unknowingly, he is not devoid of love, compassion, sacrifice, service, and perfection. One cannot simply live by the principles of living. One should know the art of living. The art of living consists in living

<sup>11</sup> Chinmayananda, Swami, 1996, *The Holy Gita*, Chinmaya Prakashan, Mumbai, p.2

<sup>12</sup> The battlefield of *Kuruksetra* is called *Dharmaksetra* as it is a ksetra of righteousness. This is mentioned in the very first verse of the *Bhagavad Gitā*.

*Dharma-ksetre kuru-ksetre samavetā yuyutsavah*  
BhagavatGitā., 1.1

with love, compassion sacrifice, service, and perfection. Such a lifestyle is possible through a sense of freedom, a sense of withdrawal, a state of fulfilment, and a state of *ānanda*. One should aim at perfection, well-being, and the benefit of our fellow beings. This practice automatically and gradually develops a sense of freedom. A free man can accept all contexts and, at the same time, can remain context-free. A context-free man can remain stable in all contexts, and therefore, he is free. For him, every *karma* is for *lokasangraha* and is an instance of *yajna*.

In the *Bhagavad Gitā*, Lord Krishna advises Arjuna that as the counsellor he explained everything in detail, but Arjuna is free to exercise his free will to decide what to do and what not to do<sup>13</sup>. This should be the attitude of an effective counsellor. The client should not follow the counsellor under any restraint or constraint. The *Bhagavad Gitā* gives us the message that even at the last stage of counselling, the client should be free to decide according to his own choice and mindset. If the mindset has not changed, then there is no meaning of counselling at all. The purpose of counselling is to reform the very personality of the client so that he becomes a free thinker with the ability of self-analysis and self-criticism.

Counselling is not only psychological but also ethical. Counselling must be value-centric. Psychological healing aims at prompt social activity and responsibility. One must be ready to be active further in life after proper counselling. The client must be infused with a sense of value and responsibility through counselling. The client should know that human existence is distinctive on account of rationality, normative awareness and free-will. Man has the innate ability to have a sense of ends and means, ought and ought-not, the pleasurable (*preya*) and the

preferable (*sreya*)<sup>14</sup>. No virtuous action goes unrewarded, and no vicious action goes unpunished. *Dharma* is the principle of righteousness, which is functional in the moral domain. Moral obligation is the noblest obligation, and the protection of morality is the highest duty. Those who protect dharma are protected by dharma (*Dharma Raksati Raksitah*).<sup>15</sup> *Dharma*, or moral order, is the root of our existence. As a universal principle, moral laws are the same for all. Whosoever commits *adharma* should be punished.<sup>16</sup>

In the *Bhagavad Gitā*, Arjuna felt reluctant to fight against his relatives as they were his kin. This was the dogmatic attachment of Arjuna to his blood relations. Lord Krishna advised Arjuna to fight against *adharma* only irrespective of who are the clients of *adharma*. Counselling aims to arouse a person from the dogmatic slumber to the state of impartial response for the duty that is expected in the real situation of life. The client is free to act, but at the same time, he is responsible for the consequences.

At the same time, it is declared in the *Bhagavad Gitā* that one should not have any attachment either for the action, or the agent, or the consequences. One should be responsible for the consequences without remaining attached to the consequences. This seems to be contradictory. But the client should understand that if the action is done in the sense of duty and for the welfare of all beings (*lokasangraha*)<sup>17</sup>, then there will be no attachment to the consequences and, at the same time, one will remain responsible for the consequences of his action. Responsibility is a part of doing duty. Whatever may be the purpose and whatever may be the field of counselling, the client should be inspired to rise to the occasion with the spirit of a *karma yogi*. Man is a social being, and being social, he is bound to

<sup>13</sup> The *Bhagavatgita.*, XVIII, 63

<sup>14</sup> Manusmriti – Verse -8.15

<sup>15</sup> The Katha Upanisad uses the term *Shreya* to refer to a consequence that produces a lasting benefit; whilst *Preya* refers to a consequence that provides immediate pleasure to the self; but not necessarily long-term benefit.

<sup>16</sup> The *Bhagavatgita.*, IV. 08

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 20 & 25

protect society by protecting moral orders. Man is responsible for both social order and social crisis. Social progress is rooted in the discipline of individuals. The collective psyche is enriched by the individual's pursuit of social harmony and discipline. 'Live and let live' is the hallmark of social concern. But this concern has been disputed by the psychic conflicts and confusions of the human mind. The *Bhagavat Gitā* begins with *Visāda Yoga*, representing the inner conflicts and confusions of man as a basic psychological disorder. Inner conflicts and confusions are natural to man but very unfortunate when such disorders take place in the field of battle. Here, the field of battle symbolises the field of readiness, where man should be action-oriented with wisdom and dedication. War-field is a field of detachment from the empirical attachments where one should not have any passion for personal relationship and any reactions of inner conflicts. But in the *Bhagavat Gitā*, it is shown that man is psychologically trapped even in the time of war and the place of war-field. This is the irony of human intellectuality and rationality. Man is always found at the crossroads of confusion and becomes indecisive about what to do and what not to do. Man suffers from this psychological battle throughout his life.

### Fearlessness and Confidence

Counselling aims at removing fear and infusing confidence in the mind of the client. Fear sprouts from confusion and fearlessness from proper counselling. Mostly, man fears the consequences of an action, constantly thinking if it would be favourable or unfavourable. This is purely imaginative by nature. Man imagines the consequences and develops a fear of psychosis, and goes through psychic distress, and finally lives with depression. Once the truth is understood that one should be duty bound, which gives us peace and tranquility, the problem of fear is removed, and confidence becomes

stronger. The predicament of *Arjuna* is one of intense dilemma: to fight or not to fight. To choose either of the courses was momentous for it had significant bearing on *Arjuna* as well as the society at large. The mind is as fickle and unsteady as the tip of a flame. Thoughts appear in the mind every second in a continuous stream, and these constant thoughts disturb the steadiness of the mind itself. When the flame is well protected from the fickle breeze, it becomes steady in its upward flight. In the same way the flame of the mind, flickering at the whims and fancies of the passing sensuous desires, becomes steadily equipoise. In ignorance, when one conceives oneself as the ego, one has a burning desire for sense-objects, a binding attachment with emotions, and a jealous preference for one's pet ideas. But when the ego is transcended, when the ignorance is transformed, when the finite ego stands face to face with the divine Reality in him, it melts away to become one with the Infinite. *Lord Krishna* advises *Arjuna* saying that "*Yogastha kuru karmāni sangam tyaktvā dhananjaya*".<sup>18</sup> That means *Arjuna* is instructed to perform action abandoning attachment, being steadyfast in *Yoga*, and balanced in success and failure.<sup>19</sup> Further, *Arjuna* is advised to have a mind of equanimity – "*Samatvam yoga ucyate*".<sup>20</sup> The one who is a stable being, whose heart is undisturbed in sorrow or joy, who is unattached, fearless and free from anger (*Raga, Bhaya, Krodha*) is called a *Yogi*.<sup>21</sup> For a *Yogi* there is no fear and no lack of confidence. The purpose of counselling should have this orientation which is highly beneficial for the psychic development of the client.

### Stress and Equanimity

Proper counselling gives two basic benefits to the man who is under stress and distress. Stress is the feeling of being under too much emotional and mental pressure. This emotional and mental pressure leads to a moral dilemma. The mind becomes stressful when it is found unstable,

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., II. 48

<sup>19</sup> Chinmayananda, Swami, (1996), *The Holy Gita*, Chinmaya Prakashan, Mumbai., P. 136

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., II. 48

<sup>21</sup> Chinmayananda, Swami, (1996), *The Holy Gita*, Chinmaya Prakashan, Mumbai., P. 183

losing its proper balance. Almost all inter-human conflicts are to be traced to their intra-human roots or what we call human nature. We all have a peace instinct, *ahimsa* in us, despite our occasional aggressive temper and action. What we can achieve in the realm of peace depends on what we are. Our inner peace is lost due to our inner conflicts and confusion. The disturbed man becomes a man of calm and serenity after proper counselling. That happened to *Arjuna* on the battlefield when he was counselled by *Lord Krishna*. The reluctant warrior became ready to fight after attaining the mind of equanimity. Human existence is more psychic than physical. Man is endowed with a highly evolved mind distinct from other species. The mind has a dual ability of involvement and withdrawal. Attachment of the mind is natural because it is the tendency of the mind to be absorbed by its desirable objects. The mind becomes identified with the object focused on by the mind itself. But the same mind can be cultured to withdraw from the senses and sense-objects. This is verily known as the art of *Pratyāhāra*.

Besides the theoretical understanding of the art of *Pratyāhāra* it is very important to practice *Pratyāhāra* in our practical life. Without the practice of *Pratyāhāra*, the mind cannot be useful for any proper reflection and action. This leads to the state of equanimity. In the *Bhagavad Gitā* it is called the state of *Sthitaprajna*.<sup>22</sup> *Pratyahara* is the withdrawal of senses from the desired objects and attachments thereof. When the mind is restrained from outside allurements, it finds nothing to be distracted and disturbed. This leads to the state of equanimity. There is no spark of stress or distress in the mind of *Sthitaprajna* or steady wisdom. Counselling should help transcend our mind from a state of stress to a state of equanimity because it is the native nature of the mind to come back to a state of peace and tranquillity. Mind cannot stay idle for a moment without being attached to any *vastu* or *visaya*. By counselling, we can provide a higher *visaya* to the mind so that automatically the mind gets detached from the lower objects of

attachment. In this sense counselling is the best way to stress management and equanimity.

### Self-transformation

Counselling must have an optimistic approach. The client should hope for self-transformation. Self-transformation is the process of making significant changes or improvements in one's thoughts, behaviours, beliefs, or overall identity for personal growth and development. This can encompass various aspects of life, such as improving physical health, developing new skills, enhancing emotional intelligence, or working on personal values and character traits. Self-transformation is a deeply personal journey that can lead to increased self-awareness, fulfilment, and a meaningful life.<sup>23</sup> The synthesis of *jnāna*, *karma* and *bhakti* leads to self-transformation, which is the most significant value-paradigm. Mere leading a life according to social prescription and prohibitions amounts to a slavish mechanical living. Striving for a value-paradigm is a natural urge of human beings. The value-paradigm is to be sought through a system of education, training and counselling.

However, knowledge gained through formal scientific education is not enough for the integral growth of human personality. Real education lies in self-transformation. The fifth and sixth verses of chapter six and the twenty-fifth verse of chapter thirteen of the *Bhagavad Gitā* speak about the possibility of self-transformation and that has been demonstrated by the character of *Arjuna*.

The *Bhagavad Gitā* asserts:

*u d d h a r e d ā t m a n ā t m ā n a m  
nātmānamavasādayet*

*ātmaiva hyātmano bandhurātmaiva  
ripurātmanah* <sup>16</sup> B.G VI. 5

Let a man lift himself by his own Self alone, and let him not lower himself;

for, this Self alone is the friend of oneself. And this Self is the enemy of oneself.

<sup>22</sup> The Bhagavatgita., II. 54

<sup>23</sup> The Bhagavatgita., VI. 5

Man suffers from a split personality. The mind is the only instrument gifted to us through which we are attached to different activities and, at the same time, get detached from our attachment. This double role of the mind is performed well when the mind is disciplined and groomed through rigorous spiritual yoga. Factual experience is a rival to mind. When we experience anything, the mind intervenes. Mind interferes because of its attachment to the factual experience. So, the judging mind becomes captive of its own cage of attachment.

This is the secret of bondage and suffering. *Jnāna*, *Karma* and *Bhakti* are three independent disciplines through which man tries to groom the mind but fails because there is a need to synthesise all disciplines. The discipline of anyone cannot substitute for the other. *Arjuna* was mentally disturbed, frustrated (*visāda*), and indecisive about his duties. But after proper counselling by *Lord Krishna*, *Arjuna* was transformed into a better personality. Thus, counselling begins with confusion and depression but ends with self-transformation. The client becomes a highly evolved personality after the course of effective counselling.

### Conclusion

The Dialectical model of counselling by the *Bhagavad Gitā* has its own merits, better than other counselling models. Dialectical understanding not only removes the stress and distress of the client but also inspires him to be free to make his own decisions and hope for self-transformation. It helps transcend the confused mind to the state of equanimity and calmness. The direct approach to counselling has an effective impact on the client. Counselling becomes effective if it is undertaken with direct communication between the client and the counsellor.

Freedom is a basic postulate of morality. The counsellor and the client both should have a free mind and a sense of responsibility. Freedom is the highest value-paradigm of human life. A free man can make the right decision at the right time. Freedom leads to responsibility. A free man can hold responsibility for the consequences of his actions performed by any ethical paradigms.

Cultivation of devotion does not deny the role of free-will. It does not negate rational thinking. Rather, devotion is said to be the result of the righteous use of reason and will. It has been observed how true knowledge leads to the right action and right action becomes an instance of devotion. *Lord Krishna* does not impose His will and His ways on *Arjuna* and having explained everything asked him to decide by himself.

Philosophical counselling should inculcate a sense of fearlessness and confidence in the mind of the client so that the client should be free to share his thoughts and problems with the counsellor and remain responsible for his own decisions. Man imagines the consequences and develops a fear psychosis, goes into psychic distress, and finally lives with depression. The individual is the root of social progress and prosperity. So, the synthetic personality of a man groomed with knowledge, action, and devotion leads to the formation of a beautiful synthetic society, which has been the focal concern of the counselling paradigm. The counsellor should have a mind of equanimity groomed with the synthesis of knowledge, service and emotion. Mere knowledge is not enough. Mere action is not enough. Knowledge and action should be moulded with loving counselling. The *Bhagavad Gitā* has made a beautiful synthesis of *Jnāna*, *Karma* and *Bhakti* with regard to the complete personality of an individual. Action, knowledge, and devotion are three distinct disciplines that directly impact the conative, cognitive, and affective aspects of human life. The *Bhagavad Gitā* admits and admires both the dialectical oppositions between these three faculties and their synthesis. Despite the dialectical opposition, action, knowledge, and devotion complement each other in shaping the perfect human personality in its fullest transformation. Knowledge directs devotion because, without knowledge, devotion may take the form of dogma. It is an action that gives content to devotion. Devotional sentiment has to be expressed in and through action. The highest devotee is said to be a *Sthitaprajña*. The *Bhagavad Gitā* has synthesized *Jnāna*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti* into spiritual practice or *Yoga Sādhanā*. These three *Yogas* are not independent

of each other. Rather, they are interdependent and complementary to each other. The complete personality (*Purna Byaktitwa*) of a person flourishes and glorifies like a *Yogi* if he is perfect in all three faculties of knowledge, action, and

devotion. Thus, counselling would be effective if it aims at moulding human personality with proper synthesis of knowledge, action and devotion.

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