Psycho-Pragmatics of Motivational Counselling in the *Bhagavad Gita*

The International Journal of Bharatiya Knowledge System
Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2025, pp. 179-199
ISSN (Online): 3048-7315,
ISSN (Print): 3107-3727
DOI: 10.64641/ijbks.v2.1.082025-009

Braj Mohan[1]

Abstract: Motivational counselling is an interdisciplinary area where social psychology interacts with pragmatics as it requires a good understanding of human psychology as well as of strategies of communication to be a successful motivator. This article explores one of the earliest instances of motivational counselling detailed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, where Krishna counsels Arjuna to bring him out of the mire of conflict and illusion and motivates him to fight the war. The conversation between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Gita* has been analysed mainly in the light of Kurt Lewin's (1935) approach-avoidance theory, and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory with a view to highlighting the scriptural significance of this holy text that goes beyond its philosophical and religious teachings. It has been observed that the symptoms of Arjuna's depression are seemingly caused by his approach-avoidance conflict and cognitive-dissonance in the context of family conflict. Krishna analyses Arjuna's condition, symptoms and causes, and then successfully counsels him using various strategies of motivational counselling.

***Keywords*:** Communication, Depression, Counselling, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Mahabharata*, Persuasion

Introduction

The significance of the *Bhagavad Gita* (the *Gita*) goes beyond its philosophical content and religious significance as it presents one of the earliest instances of motivational counselling strictly based on the principles of psychology. The *Gita* consists of 700 verses in 18 chapters taken from the episode of the first day battle presented in the Bhishma Parva of the *Mahabharata*. The *Bhagavad Gita* (BG) records how successfully Krishna motivates depressed

1. ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2178-6669, Professor of English, NCERT, New Delhi

Arjuna, who was caught-up in the emotional conflict and dissonance. Arjuna's counselling in the *Gita* goes beyond an individual's therapy and achieves the universal significance as Arjuna's problems of fear, sorrow, indecision, and despondence are the universal problems in need of some universal solution. These universal problems are rooted in illusion and ignorance of a special kind which ironically increases with the accumulations of worldly information as is the case with brilliant Arjuna. "Arjuna is intelligent and where there is intelligence there is doubt and where there is doubt there is dilemma" (Sethumadhavan, 2010, p. 10). Therefore, the significance of the teachings of the *Gita* has immensely increased today in this era of spurting information and intelligence.

To understand how Krishna motivates Arjuna to overcome his doubts, fears, and dilemma in terms of modern psychology, one needs to understand the key concepts of motivation and counselling. Chaplin (1968) defines motivation as a concept "to account for factors within the organism which arouse, maintain, and channel behaviour toward a goal" (p. 303). Highlighting its directionality, Ferguson (1994) defines motivation as "the internal states of the organism that lead to the instigation, persistence, energy, and direction of behaviour" (p. 429). Clinger and Cox (2011) combine the two definitions to better understand motivation as "the internal states of the organism that lead to the instigation, persistence, energy, and direction of behaviour toward a goal." (p. 4). Therefore, it can be concluded that motivation is always directional and goal-oriented.

Motivation is basically of two types— intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic motivation pursues a goal for its own sake, whereas the extrinsic motivation pursues a goal as a step to achieve some other final goal (Ferguson et al, 2008; Clinger & Cox, 2011, pp. 6-7). Further, motivation could be appetitive that targets to achieve something, or aversive that targets to avoid some situation (Clinger & Cox, 2011, p. 7). An appetitive goal particularly if it is self-chosen is more fulfilling than an extrinsic goal particularly when it is imposed by others.

Motivation is determined and affected by drive, need, and emotions (Clinger & Cox, 2011). While drive activates an individual towards a goal and modifies attached incentives in terms of prioritising one over the other, need determines the value one places on the incentives of achieving the goal. "Emotions play crucial roles in choosing goals, monitoring their pursuit, steering cognitive processes within them, and reacting to their outcomes"

(ibid p. 8-11). The real pursuit of the goal begins when a motivated individual commits to achieving the goal after thoughtfully analysing the expectancy, value, and cost involved. But sometimes one experiences goal conflict, a situation in which "a goal that a person wishes to accomplish interferes with the attainment of at least one other goal that the individual simultaneously wishes to accomplish" (Emmons, King, & Sheldon, 1993, p. 531). Unless resolved, goal conflict causes agitation and other psychological complications in an individual; therefore, a trained counsellor uses various psycho-pragmatic strategies to help a client resolve his conflicts to restore psycho-physiological normalcy. Arjuna experiences this goal-conflict in the beginning of the *Mahabharata* war when he wants to achieve victory without killing his enemy soldiers, many of whom are his relatives. The study seeks to investigate in the light of modern psychology and pragmatics how various strategies of counselling and persuasion have been used by Krishna to bring him out of his dilemma and depression with a view to highlighting the importance of the *Gita* in the context of Bharatiya Knowledge Tradition in psychology and pragmatics.

Review of Research

In the recent times, the research on Bharatiya Knowledge Traditions has started with a renewed zeal and quite many significant works have been done in Bharatiya traditions in poetics, philosophy, pedagogy, linguistics, literature, medicine, yoga, and psychology, etc. For instance, Tiwari (2024) studies the ancient system of Gurukul education exploring its various dimensions and their relevance in the modern contexts. Similarly, Sharma (2024) studies the eco-philosophical perspectives presented in *Upanishadic* literature. The *Gita* being one of the most studied books, a lot of academic literature is available on this book. However, only the selected works relevant to the current topic have been briefly reviewed here. Gairola and Mishra (2022) are of the opinion that the *Bhagavad Gita* is perhaps the most ancient text that explores the "innermost core of human nature and dynamics of psychotherapy—to understand crisis, anxiety, guilt, cognitive distortions and depression". They consider Krishna the first historically recorded psychotherapist who successfully healed Arjuna of depression. Even today "*Bhagavad Gita* offers psychological relief to individuals seeking answers to existential questions" (Nair, 2024). Human problems across places, cultures, and times have been similar as we all suffer anxiety, fear, dilemma,

and such other psychological crises due to various reasons and Krishna's preaching can sooth our agitation and restore our peace. In this connection, Osho's commentary on the philosophy of the *Gita* published in the book form as *Gita Darshan* (2012) introduces a practical insight into the nature and applicability of the philosophy of the *Gita* for psychological well-being of humankind.

Life is full of challenges and worldly difficulties, which are unavoidable. It is human resilience that gives us strength to face the challenges of life and successfully wade through the mire of pains and problems. Those who cultivate resilience do not get perturbed to see difficulties and challenges but face them bravely. The philosophy of the *Gita* helps one develop resilience and psychological strength required to live a meaningful life (Pandey & Mishra, 2021). Some scholars studied how various lessons of the *Gita* help in developing resilience and management skills in life. A. D. Amar (2019) identifies ten important management lessons in the *Gita*—karma, leadership, knowledge, conquering mind, how to succeed, no extrinsic controls, human personalities, looking for opportunities, not looking for work to be assigned, and the last aggregate message. Similarly, Jon Radwan (2019) explores the concepts of unity, duty, and equanimity and he tries to develop a set of application principles using Yukl's (2000) ten leadership functions to highlight how the *Gita*'s values can help one tackle practical management challenges.

Some scholars tried to study the *Gita* from a rhetorical perspective to highlight its communication structure. Scott R. Stroud (2005) in his essay "Ontological Orientation and the Practice of Rhetoric: A Perspective from the *Bhagavad Gita*" evaluates the justifications for ontological assumptions made by Krishna in the rhetorical situation in the *Gita* and finds that Krishna's rhetoric is invitational as it presents possible counter-arguments alongside his arguments to help Arjuna arrive at a decision. Jaishikha Nautiyal (2013) in her thesis investigates the functioning rhetorical agency in the *Gita* using Kenneth Burke's model of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. She concludes that the discourse of the *Gita* presents a deep understanding of agency that is evident in the dialogic communication between Krishna and Arjuna. Similarly, Bhushan Aryal (2019), in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Bhagavan Krishna Versus the Counter-Rhetoric of Vyas: The Place of Commiseration in the *Mahabharata*", discusses how Maharshi Veda Vyas presents Krishna as a compelling orator and the *Mahabharata* war

as *dharmayuddha* (holy war). After a general analysis, he finds Krishna a great orator of divine status. Sweta Bania (2020) presents a comparative study between Krishna's rhetoric with that of Greek scholars and she finds Krishna's rhetoric more compelling and effective.

Jagadish Paudel (2023) studies the rhetoric of the *Gita* from an Indian perspective using the system of rhetorical and logical assessment as presented in *Nyayasutras*, an important text of Indian logic and philosophy. He analyses the discourse of the *Gita* in terms of *astikya/bhava* (ontological) strategy, *jnapaka* (revelatory) strategy, and *tattva/nyaya* (axiological) strategy, while also evaluating the possible and real counter-arguments in the text. By doing so, Paudel highlights the Hindu rhetorical tradition, which remained unknown for long to the modern scholarship.

I have not come across any work that studies the *Gita* from psycho-pragmatic perspective; therefore, this work undertakes a psycho-pragmatic study of motivational counselling in the *Gita*. This work underlines the intersections of psychology and pragmatics in counselling as well as highlights the Bharatiya Knowledge Tradition in psychology and pragmatics.

Methodology

My analysis is mainly based on Kurt Lewin's (1935) approach-avoidance conflict theory and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Kurt Lewin (1935) in his approach-avoidance conflict theory says that two opposite forces, namely approach force and avoidance force, work against each other when one evaluates a situation to make a decision. Gray (1990) calls the approach force as the behavioural activation system (BAS) and the avoidances force as the behavioural inhibition system (BIS). The approach force of decision making is based on the pros and the avoidance force is based on the cons of the idea proposed. The approach force highlights the possible benefits and motivates one to take the decision in the favour of the idea proposed; whereas the avoidance force warns one against the possible losses and raises doubts and fears about deciding in the favour of the proposal. This approach-avoidance conflict cannot be resolved until one of the two forces becomes significantly stronger than the other. Individuals with high BAS sensitivity are highly influenced by rewards and incentive cues, whereas those with high BIS sensitivity are more sensitive to threat cues in a proposal (Carver, 2000). According to Knowles et al (2004), persuaders can use two types of strategies, namely alpha strategy and omega strategy

to help their client make a decision. The alpha strategies aim at enhancing the approach force by highlighting the positive aspects of the idea proposed and these strategies are often in form of description of incentives, rewards, bright prospects, and other positives of the proposal. The omega strategies aim at reducing the avoidance force by alleviating fear, clearing doubts, and resolving inhibitions (Knowles et al., 2004). The use of alpha strategies can be more effective with the BAS sensitive subjects, whereas omega strategies can be more effective with the BIS sensitive subjects. Skilled persuaders assess the personality of their subjects and use one or both of these strategies in their persuasive efforts. Certain skills in communication and politeness are required to use persuasive strategies effectively as one cannot be forced to change one's mindset but can gently be counselled to change one's mind.

Politeness helps a persuader in building rapport and avoiding conflict with the subject, which is required for smooth communication. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is based on the concept of face, which is an individual's self-image. Politeness is in maintaining and enhancing the hearer's face as well as in reducing threat to the hearer's face. The face is of two types— the positive face (an individual's desire for getting accepted and appreciated) and the negative face (an individual's desire for not getting impeded and disturbed by others). The strategies enhancing and maintaining the positive face of the hearer come under positive politeness. These strategies include good wishes, appreciation and intimacy and approval for the hearer. The things that pose threat to the hearer's positive face, such as disapproval, disrespect, indifference, criticism, etc., are considered impolite. The strategies that show sensitivity towards the hearer's time, things, peace, and privacy come under negative politeness as they mitigate threat to the hearer's negative face. These strategies include apology, seeking permission, showing concern for the hearer's comfort, etc. Things like not showing concern for the hearer's time, comfort, and things are considered impolite. The analysis mainly uses the strategies of persuasion and politeness alongside general terms of motivational counselling.

Analysis

On the first day of the *Mahabharata* war, when the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas are poised against each other in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna requests his friend and charioteer Krishna to station his chariot between the two armies in the battlefield. From his chariot Arjuna

sees his relatives, friends, teachers, and elders in both the armies and he gets emotionally overpowered (BG 1.34)[1]. His intellect becomes unable to decide whether he should fight (BG 1.35-37)[2]. He loses all confidence and experiences giddiness and excessive sweating, and his mouth is parched and his hair stands rigid due to horripilation (BG 1.28-29)[3]. His bow slips from his grip and he experiences burning sensation in his skin and he becomes unable to keep standing so he sits down in the chariot (BG 1.30)[4]. He refuses to fight and becomes silent and he sits down in the hinder part of his chariot leaving his bow and arrows (BG 1.47)[5]. These are all the symptoms of acute depression rooted in goal conflict arising from his desire of winning the war but hesitation in killing the enemy soldiers, many of whom are his kinsmen. Here, Arjuna is caught up in the approach-avoidance conflict and he is unable to decide what to do. Due to the pressure of the situation, he shows the symptoms of acute depression. Fight or flight are the two natural physiological responses when one faces an extremely challenging situation (Gupt, et al., 2023).

At this point, Krishna does his counselling on philosophical, social, and practical grounds and finally convinces him to fight the war. Alongside the established precepts of *Vedantic* Philosophy, Krishna uses some communication strategies and psychological principles in the counselling of Arjuna to cure his acute depression. A systematic analysis of persuasion and communication strategies in their conversation in the *Gita* has been presented here.

Symptoms and Causes of Arjuna's Depression

In the *Gita*, Arjuna's condition is termed as '*Vishad*' which means 'depression' and 'melancholy' in most dictionaries. Arjuna experiences psychophysical complications in the form of numbing body (सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि), parching mouth (मुखं च परिशुष्यति), shivering and horripilation (वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते)[6]. His bow slips from his grip and he experiences dizziness, burning sensation in his skin[7]. His symptoms of Arjuna's acute depression as seen by Krishna in chapter two of *Bhagavad Gita* are— overwhelmed with pity, and his gloomy eyes full of tears (कृपयाविष्टमश्रुपूर्णाकुलेक्षणम्)[8], losing heart and feeling weakness (क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं)[9], excessive thinking, loss of desire to live (न जिजीविषाम)[10], besieged by cowardice (कार्पण्यदोषोपहत)[11], grief-stricken (विषीदन्त)[12], grieving about things not worth grieving (अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं)[13], and

sorrow drying-up his senses (यच्छोकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम्)[14]. Arjuna experiences an emotional conflict mainly due to four reasons (social, moral, philosophical, and spiritual conflicts) which he is unable to resolve. Krishna helps him resolve each conflict by counselling him on social, moral, philosophical, and spiritual grounds. To resolve Arjuna's conflict, Krishna uses alpha and omega strategies along with pragmatic strategies in his counselling.

The first cause of Arjuna's depression is his goal conflict. His social training of respecting social and familial relations. His social acculturation trained his psyche to give utmost respect to friends, family, teachers, and elders. When he sees his kins, teachers, and elders in both the armies, his morally trained conscience pricks and experiences approach-avoidance conflict (BG 1.26-27)[15]. He is not ready to win the war at the cost of killing all these people, which will lead him to remorse and self-hatred (BG 1.32-35)[16]. From a social point of view, this could be the response of any person trained in high standards of social morality.

The second reason for his conflict is his belief system. His belief system is based on *puranic* precepts that talk about one's duty towards gods, rishis, and ancestors, who live in higher worlds or heavens. According to a popular Hindu faith, the continuity of family line is very important for the satisfaction of the ancestors in heaven. Arjun has a fear that this war will finish several family lines of his kins, teachers, and friends. The widowed womenfolk of his clan and of his gurus will be spoiled in due course and will bear illegitimate children, who will not be eligible to offer *pindodaka* to the ancestors (BG1.40-42). Hence, the ancestors will be thrown into hell for indefinite duration. Hence, fighting this war will be a great sin.

The third reason for Arjuna's depression is his fear of sin and complete spiritual degradation. It is rooted in ethics and morality. Killing is considered sinful and killing one's kinsmen and friends is even more sinful (BG 1.36-39). Arjuna is unable to determine why he should indulge in the heinous action of killing his kinsmen due to greed of the throne (BG 1.45-46).

The last reason for his hesitation is uncertainty of the result of war. Due to self-doubt, he is not sure whether his side will win or his enemy will win (BG 2.6)[17]. This is a very practical reason for hesitation as all sensible people hesitate to undertake an action that can potentially lead to their loss.

Arjuna is a *Kshatriya* and warrior and all his life he has been trained in bravery and courage but at the crucial moment of battle he is showing cowardice. His behaviour shows cognitive dissonance. Festinger's (1957)

cognitive dissonance theory states that when a person's action is different from his belief, he experiences cognitive dissonance. He tries to reduce dissonance by justifying his action and changing his belief. Arjuna tries to defend his dissonance by moralising his cowardice and interpreting the situation in the light of social precepts. He experiences conflict and depression because he is unable to resolve his dissonance due to pressure of the situation.

Krishna as a Divine Counsellor

The above analysis of the causes of Arjuna's mental condition shows that he is badly caught up in approach-avoidance conflict and he shows high BIS sensitivity. His inhibitions are not that of a common ignorant person who knows nothing of social, moral, and religious principles but of a brilliant prince who is well educated in all these things. His problems are of universal nature in need of a universal solution. Therefore, Krishna as a divine counsellor, cures him of all conflicts presenting a universal solution to all fears and dilemmas that humankind suffers.

Perception precedes persuasion; therefore, any skilled persuader will ensure correct perception of the problem and clear communication of suggestions. Just clarity of language is not enough as validity of meaning partly depends upon the agency of the speaker. Therefore, it becomes important that the speakers/counsellors should establish their trustworthiness through strategies of ethos building (establishing trustworthiness) as Aristotle says in his *On Rhetoric*. Since Arjuna is already impressed by Krishna's intellect as an advisor and strategist, and he also considers Krishna his benefactor and friend, he seeks his guidance. Krishna as a counsellor doesn't depend on already established trust but boosts his status even further. For the first time, he claims his authority as a divine preacher of the eternal secret-knowledge when he sees that his counselling based on practical social wisdom and beliefs is not working on Arjuna (BG 4.1-6)[18].

A good motivator/ counsellor never loses confidence to see a daunting patient. One who is himself afraid cannot treat others' phobias. Therefore, Krishna maintains his utmost confidence and shows it through his smile, ease of talking, and total control of language and emotions. Though he understands Arjuna's problems, he doesn't get emotionally involved beyond his professional role. He doesn't seem to share or approve any of the doubts and fears that Arjuna explains. In total composure and confidence, he

starts Arjuna's counselling to treat his fears (BG 2.10)[19]. Krishna takes up Arjuna's fears one by one and tries to resolve them through his philosophical counselling.

Resolution of Arjuna's Approach-avoidance Conflict

Krishna tackles Arjuna's first and biggest hesitation of killing his kinsmen which is socially, morally, and religiously wrong. Krishna mainly uses Omega strategies, which mainly work on reducing fear, inhibitions, and resistance. Krishna exposes the weak foundation of his inhibitions and motivates him to overcome his emotional crisis. Krishna counsels Arjuna by reiterating the immortality of soul, importance of duty, and significance of remaining detached. Krishna tells Arjuna that nobody kills and nobody dies as the soul is immortal and it keeps transmigrating from one body to another body (BG 2.22)[20]. One must do one's duty to avoid sin (BG 3.35)[21]. Socially and morally, it is Arjuna's duty to fight a rightful war as he is a *Kshatriya* warrior. There is no question of sin as all the enemy soldiers have come to fight with him of their own accord and they are siding with the evil. Very few fortunate *Kshatriyas* get such a rightful war like Arjuna as he stands with what is right (BG 2.32)[22]. Bliss and sorrow are not real but caused by the ignorance of the involved mind (BG 2.14)[23]. If he does his duty without getting emotionally involved, he will incur no sin (BG 2.48)[24].

Arjuna's second fear is related to his first fear. Arjuna thinks that many family lines in his clan may be finished due to war and the religious rituals of offering service to the ancestors will be broken leading to their falling into hell. Therefore, Arjuna believes that such a deed of killing kinsmen will cause immense sin. Krishna exhorts Arjuna on philosophical and religious grounds further as a part of omega strategy. Krishna says that one incurs sin when one considers oneself a doer and does an action with attachment to its result. One who does his rightful duty without attachment to its results, does not accumulate sin (BG 3.9)[25]. One that is born will surely die and the dead will surely be born again; therefore, one should not give so much importance to life and death but to rightful duty (BG 2.27). Arjuna should not show emotional despondence as heaven is not the ultimate goal but *nirvana*, the ultimate emancipation from worldly sorrows (BG Ch. 9).

To address Arjuna's last fear about victory and defeat, Krishna advises him that he should focus on his duty and not worry about results. All these soldiers have already died and Arjuna has to become just an instrumental

cause and get victory (BG 11.33)[26]. One who undertakes a task as a duty is not affected by its results (BG 2.47)[27]. Krishna further says that those who do their duty soon get success in this world (BG 4.12). But a true yogi who has achieved the blissful state is the one who never gets affected by sorrow and happiness, profit and loss, victory and defeat (BG 2.38)[28].

Omega strategies play a powerful role in addressing the doubts, fears, and inhibitions that stop someone from taking the proposed action. These deep-rooted inhibitions kill an individuals' all enthusiasm and motivation if left unaddressed. Krishna uses omega strategies quite frequently in his counselling of Arjuna. These strategies are used with some politeness strategies to make them even more effective. For instance, to address Arjuna's hesitation in killing the enemy, many of whom were his own kins, Krishna redefines death on the philosophical ground and nullifies Arjuna's fear. Krishna convinces him that one should not fear death because the soul never dies and death is just the transmigration of the soul from one body to another body (BG 2.20-24). Even if he considers death real, he should consider that death is inevitable after birth and so is inevitable birth after death; hence, one should not worry about death (BG 2.26-27). Krishna further convinces Arjuna that nobody kills and nobody dies as the soul is immortal. As one leaves old clothes and puts on new clothes so our soul leaves old bodies and puts on new bodies (BG 2.22)[29]. Family relations are a part of worldly illusion as the same soul has taken innumerable births in different species, genders, and clans. Therefore, Arjuna's emotional interpretation of relations and sin are not justified. During his counselling, Krishna consistently addresses Arjuna by various names suggesting his great attributes to boost his morale. A detailed analysis of names has been given later in this article.

By using alpha strategy, Krishna convinces Arjuna about the duty of a *Kshatriya* warrior for whom fame and duty are supreme (BG 2.31)[30]. A *Kshatriya* should never shy away from a righteous war as it is like an open door to heaven. Those who fight for a good cause go to heaven after death and they earn fame. Further, omega strategy has been used to dissuade him from his decision of not fighting by berating him for his cowardice. There is nothing more ignoble for a warrior than cowardice. If Arjuna does not fight, he will be considered a coward and all his fame as a brave warrior will be destroyed (BG 2.33-36)[31]. Loss of fame is more painful than death for a true *Kshatriya*.

Positive politeness and motivational strategies have been used in addressing Arjuna by his great names that all show his reputed clan and personal attributes. Since Arjuna is Kaunteya (the son of Kunti), Kurunandan (scion of the great clan of Kuru), Bhaarat (scion of brave Bharat's clan), he must give-up all weakness and stand up for war. The great names of Arjuna have been used to boost his morale and remind him of the great ideals of the *Kshatriya* clan.

As Arjuna's personality seems to be more BIS sensitive than BAS sensitive as he has more inhibitions than motivations to fight the war. Due to this reason, Krishna relies more on omega strategies that focus on alleviating doubts, fears, and inhibitions. But just removing inhibitions is not enough in motivational counselling; highlighting the positives of the proposed action is equally important. Krishna highlights the positives of winning the war by using alpha strategies. All verbal acts that highlight the positives of the proposal to persuade the subject come under alpha strategy.

Since Arjuna is a *Kshatriya*, his temperament is *rajasik*, loving action, fame, and power. Compelled by his temperament, he will fight some war and there is no more rightful war than this war. These alpha strategies are anchored upon three things— fighting a rightful war to fulfil a *Kshatriya*'s duty of earning victory, fame and the kingdom, or going to heaven after death.

Using the alpha strategy, Krishna convinces Arjuna on the basis of prevailing social order that fighting a rightful war is in itself a reward for a Kshatriya whose duty is to fight for the protection of the kingdom. Therefore, Arjuna should fight to prove himself a valiant and dutiful *Kshatriya*. If he does not fight, he will be considered a coward and he will earn ignominy and lose all his social prestige (BG 2.33)[32]. Therefore, dying fighting a rightful war is better than losing all fame.

Krishna further convinces Arjuna using alpha strategy that his despondence in the battlefield is not desirable. Like a true warrior, he should fight bravely and win unlimited fame and the kingdom or die a soldier's death and go to heaven (BG 2.37)[33]. This alpha strategy aims at the basic temperament of a *Kshatriya* who always gives high importance to fame of victory and royal titles. By using alpha strategy Krishna highlights the positives of dying a soldier's death (BG 2.32)[34]. A soldier who dies fighting a rightful war goes to heaven as per popular scriptural instructions. Those who die a warrior's death are respected in society for their bravery and dutifulness. Therefore, Arjuna should not hesitate as fighting is better in either way.

Redefining Arjuna's Identity through Strategic Nomination

Counsellors sometimes redefine their client's identity to enhance their self-worth, boost their confidence, and change their self-perception. Most of the time, they accompany these strategies with politeness maxims as politeness builds the speaker's rapport with the hearer and keeps the flow of communication smooth and savoury, which otherwise could become congested and disharmonious. Krishna uses politeness strategies throughout his counselling. Krishna redefines Arjuna identity by addressing him by various names and descriptives that remind him of his great attributes.

Nominal reference	*Frequency*	*Meaning*
Arjuna	24	His proper name
Partha	38	Son of Pritha (Kunti)
Kaunteya	22	Son of Kunti
Bhaarat	31	Son of Bharat
Pandava	8	Son of Pandu
Kurunandan	5	Scion of Kuru's clan
Parantapa	8	Scorcher of Enemy
Mahabahu	11	One who has big and strong arms
Dhananjaya	11	Conqueror of wealth
Gudakesha	4	Conqueror of sleep
Kapidhwaja	1	Whose chariot carries the insignia of Hanuman
Nispapa/Anagha	2	Sinless
Purusharshabha	1	The best of men
Savyasaachi	1	Ambidextrous archer

All these names praise his great lineage, his bravery, skill, and virtues as a great human being and warrior. The rules of communication, politeness, and counselling insist on addressing a person respectfully by his name. As a positive politeness strategy, it enhances the hearer's self-image and disposes him positively towards the speaker. Further, one's appreciation is always considered polite according to Geofrey Leech's (1983) approbation maxim.

A close study of these names reveals that the use of these names is not just for politeness purposes but they target Arjuna's emotional self for counselling purposes. By Arjuna's symptoms of depression and unwillingness to fight on account of the reasons already mentioned, Krishna understands that Arjuna

is emotionally very sensitive. Therefore, any strategy of his motivational counselling should not leave the anchor of human emotions. Due to this reason, Krishna most frequently addresses Arjuna by his matronymic names, 'Partha' (son of Pritha) and Kaunteya (son of Kunti) for his mother has two names— Pritha and Kunti. It has been observed that men in India are more sensitive to their metronymic identity than to their patronymic identity as the former touches their emotional chords better. Metronymic references easily invoke responses of bravery, generosity, and honour in males. Due to this reason, Krishna uses Arjuna's metronymic names a total of 60 times. Further, the mention of his mother's name reminds him of all those pains and problems that his mother suffered during his wife's insult and their exile. His sense of duty towards his mother is invoked to take revenge and prove himself a worthy son. The son of so worthy a mother cannot be a coward; therefore, Arjuna must not lose heart and fight.

Krishna addresses Arjuna by using various patronyms such as Pandava (son of Pandu), Bhaarat (scion of Bharat's clan), and Kurunandan (scion of great Kuru's clan) total 44 times. A *Kshatriya* warrior lives to protect the fame and glory of his family and ancestors. Such a way of addressing is full of praise; hence, it is a part of positive politeness. It further reminds Arjuna the glory and bravery of his great forefathers. Therefore, Arjuna has the social and moral obligation to protect the name and fame of his great father and forefathers. Since he is the son of King Pandu, he is entitled to the throne and he must fight to get his rightful place.

In the same way, Krishna further uses various names appreciating Arjuna's various qualities, such as bravery, skill, character, and uprightness. Krishna calls Arjuna Parantapa (scorcher of the enemy) 8 times, Mahabahu (with big and strong arms) 11 times, and Dhananjaya (conqueror of wealth) 11 times. In doing so, Krishna praises his bravery not just to sound polite but also to motivate him to fight. In the past, he conquered many enemies and showed super strength as a soldier so people gave him these titles. He must recognise his strength and shun all emotional weaknesses that may eclipse his glory. Further, he carries the insignia of Hanuman on the flag of his chariot so Krishna addresses him as Kapidhwaja. His ideal Hanuman is very brave and dutiful so Arjuna should also follow his ideals.

Similarly, quite frequently Krishna addresses Arjuna by names that remind him of his skills and virtues of head and heart. Krishna calls Arjuna Gudakesha (conqueror of sleep), Anagha (sinless), Purusharshabha

(the best among humans), Savyasaachi (ambidextrous archer) to remind him of his qualities and skills to motivate him.

Against the background of all the positives mentioned above, Krishna seems to hurt Arjuna's ego of courage, bravery, and clan when he says, "Do not go to despondence as it does not suit you; give up weakness and cowardice and stand up to fight" (BG 2.3). The word *klaivya* has been used to question Arjuna's male ego and bravery as this word has been derived from the word *kleeva* which means 'eunuch'. This strategy of hurting ego for persuasion somehow works with the males of the Indian subcontinent and that's why it is used as the last resort.

Dialogic Politeness in the *Gita*

People generally do not like to be interrupted, instructed, and ordered as exercise of too much authority is considered impolite. Rather they like to be heard, advised, and convinced. Too much imposition without any concern of the hearer's sentiments is unjust and undesirable in motivational counselling. Little (1998, 2011) believes that counsellors cannot adjudicate moral and ethical decisions for their clients but they can provide information that will enable their clients to make informed choices. The counsellor can persuasively suggest to them which projects to pursue, which to redesign, which to defer, and which projects to leave with proper logic. For doing so, the counsellors require some understanding of persuasive and pragmatic strategies of communication. In his counselling, Krishna is considerate and congenial in the choice of words, speech acts, and sentence structures that maintains his intimacy with Arjuna as well as performs the speech act of persuasive counselling. In other religions of the world, deified instructors are totally instructive in their style and they generally do not allow questions. Their instructions are to be accepted and carried out. Krishna, though speaks with divine authority, presents his teaching as proposals and welcomes all questions related to them maintaining dialogic politeness and justice.

At times, Arjuna seems to lose temper and expresses his dissatisfaction with Krishna's teachings by pointing out the conflicting ideas in his proposal (BG 3.1-2)[35]. Krishna maintains seriousness of communication and clears Arjuna's doubts without falling in his emotional trap. It is a quality of a successful motivational counsellor to respect difference of opinion and avoid conflict through dialogic politeness.

Honest counselling is based on informed decisions; therefore, a good counsellor should not hide any valid information related to the concern of the subject. Krishna explains in detail all related information related to Arjuna's concerns and resolves them one by one. He entertains Arjuna's counter questions and also raises some possible counter-arguments from his side and resolves them to establish his thesis. For instance, Krishna says that if Arjuna considers the soul as the one that takes birth and dies, even then he should not worry as whatever is born will die. Though Arjuna does not seemingly raise the doubt about the death of the soul, still Krishna raises it as one of the possible concerns following Indian dialogic tradition that presents all adversary points (*poorva paksha*) and then goes on to present own arguments (*uttar paksha*).

The real dialogic politeness of Krishna does not truly rest on the use of appreciative names and words while addressing Arjuna but on giving all required information so that Arjuna can make an informed decision. His advice is in the form of a proposition and not as imposition. Krishna explains clearly what he should do, why he should do it, and how he should do it. He also hints possible loss of not undertaking the suggested action. Seemingly Krishna helps Arjuna balance the pros and cons of the situation and the suggested action but like a deft counsellor and persuader, he always keeps the ultimate target of persuasion and motivation in his focus.

Conclusion

Krishna's motivational counselling as presented in the *Gita* is exemplary in the sense that it treats Arjuna of acute depression. Krishna's counselling based on practical philosophy is of universal importance as Arjuna's problems are universal problems. Krishna's teachings are capable of guiding humans out of the mire of depression, despondence, self-pity, and dilemma. Like a deft counsellor, Krishna recognises human psyche as the true cause of sorrow and happiness in the world. A trained and disciplined mind is our true friend, whereas a depressed, untrained, and undisciplined mind is our enemy. Therefore, it is important to discipline our mind to lead a meaningful and happy life. In his counselling of Arjuna, Krishna is an excellent communicator and counsellor who understands the problem, its root-cause, and its solution. He understands the importance of place, person, and times in choosing his strategies of communication and counselling. Therefore, it can be observed that many modern theories of communication, persuasion, and counselling can be traced back to *Bhagavad Gita.*

Krishna undertakes the task of counselling Arjuna like a professional counsellor and motivator. He systematically analyses Arjuna's personality, his problem with symptoms, and the causes of his problem before starting his counselling. Like a smart communicator Krishna boosts the positives and reduces the negatives by using alpha and omega strategies to resolve Arjuna's approach-avoidance conflict. Krishna relies more on omega strategies to address Arjuna's fears and doubts as Arjuna has a BIS sensitive personality. His motivational counselling is based on treating Arjuna's fears through well-reasoned negotiation of ideas in the light of practical wisdom, duty, and philosophy. Suitable strategies of communication and politeness have been used in Krishna's counselling. Krishna uses the strategies of positive politeness in appreciating Arjuna's qualities and attributes, listening to his concerns, and showing intimacy. Krishna strategically avoids conflict when Arjuna raises doubts about his teachings.

Motivational counselling is essentially persuasive in nature whose success depends on effective communication marked by clarity, brevity, logic and politeness. Modern counsellors and motivational speakers can learn some valuable things from the ancient wisdom presented in the *Gita*. This article catches only one shade of an aspect of the *Gita*, a lot of philosophical, spiritual as well as worldly wisdom is there in this revered text. The analysis presented here is not exhaustive due to constraint of space and hence inquisitive readers are invited to read the *Gita* to explore more about Bharatiya Knowledge Tradition in philosophy, psychology, and communication.

Disclosure Statements

1. This project did not receive any funding from any source.
2. The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

Notes

1. आचार्या: पितर: पुत्रास्तथैव च पितामहा: | मातुला: श्वशुरा: पौत्रा: श्याला: सम्बन्धिनस्तथा ||
2. एतान्न हन्तुमिच्छामि घ्नतोऽपि मधुसूदन | अपि त्रैलोक्यराज्यस्य हेतो: किं नु महीकृते ||
   निहत्य धार्तराष्ट्रान्न: का प्रीति: स्याज्जनार्दन | पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान्हत्वैतानाततायिन: ||
   तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान्स्वबान्धवान् | स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिन: स्याम माधव ||
3. दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् |सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति |
   वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते |गाण्डीवं स्रंसते हस्तात्त्वक्चै व परिदह्यते |

4. न च शक्नोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ।निमित्तानि च पश्यामि विपरीतानि केशव ।
5. एवमुक्त्वार्जुनः सङ्ख्ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् ।विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्नमानसः ॥
6. सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति। वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥
7. गाण्डीवं स्रंसते हस्तात्त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते। न च शक्नोम्यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः॥
8. तं तथा कृपयाविष्टमश्रुपूर्णाकुलेक्षणम् ।विषीदन्तमिदं वाक्यमुवाच मधुसूदनः॥
9. क्लैब्यं मा स्म गमःपार्थ नैतत्त्वय्युपपद्यते। क्षुद्रं हृदयदौर्बल्यं त्यक्त्वोत्तिष्ठ परन्तप॥
10. न चैतद्विद्मः कतरन्नो गरीयो, यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।
यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषाम- स्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः ॥
11. कार्पण्यदोषोपहतस्वभावः, पृच्छामि त्वां धर्मसम्मूढचेताः ।
यच्छ्रेयः स्यान्निश्चितं ब्रूहि तन्मे, शिष्यस्तेऽहं शाधि मां त्वां प्रपन्नम् ॥
12. तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत ।सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः ॥
13. अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे ।गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः ॥
14. न हि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद्यच्छोकमुच्छोषणमिन्द्रियाणाम् ।
अवाप्य भूमावसपत्नमृद्धं राज्यं सुराणामपि चाधिपत्यम् ॥
15. तत्रापश्यत्स्थितान्पार्थः पितॄनथ पितामहान्।आचार्यान्मातुलान्भ्रातॄन्पुत्रान्पौत्रान्सखींस्तथा,
श्वशुरान्सुहृदश्चैव सेनयोरुभयोरपि ।
तान्समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान्बन्धूनवस्थितान्, कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत्॥
16. न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च, किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा॥
येषामर्थे काङ्क्षितं नो राज्यं भोगाः सुखानि च, त इमेऽवस्थिता युद्धे प्राणांस्त्यक्त्वा धनानि च ॥
आचार्याः पितरः पुत्रास्तथैव च पितामहाः।मातुलाः श्वशुराः पौत्राः श्यालाः सम्बन्धिनस्तथा ॥
एतान्न हन्तुमिच्छामि घ्नतोऽपि मधुसूदन।अपि त्रैलोक्यराज्यस्य हेतोः किं नु महीकृते॥
17. न चैतद्विद्मः कतरन्नो गरीयो, यद्वा जयेम यदि वा नो जयेयुः ।
यानेव हत्वा न जिजीविषाम, स्तेऽवस्थिताः प्रमुखे धार्तराष्ट्राः॥
18. इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् । विवस्वान्मनवे प्राह मनुरिक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥
19. तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत । सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः
20. वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय, नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥
21. श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्, स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥
22. यदृच्छया चोपपन्नं स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम्, सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पार्थ लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम् ॥
23. मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः, आगमापायिनोऽनित्या स्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥
24. योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय, सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वंयोग उच्यते॥
25. यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः । तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥

26. तस्मात्त्वमुत्तिष्ठ यशो लभस्व जित्वा शत्रून् भुङ्क्ष्व राज्यं समृद्धम् ।
मयैवैते निहताः पूर्वमेव निमित्तमात्रं भव सव्यसाचिन् ॥

27. कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन । मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

28. सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ । ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

29. सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ । ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

30. स्वधर्ममपि चावेक्ष्य न विकम्पितुमर्हसि । धर्म्याद्धि युद्धाच्छ्रेयोऽन्यत्क्षत्रियस्य न विद्यते ॥

31. अकीर्तिं चापि भूतानि कथयिष्यन्ति तेऽव्ययाम् । सम्भावितस्य चाकीर्तिर्मरणादतिरिच्यते ॥

32. अथ चेत्त्वमिमं धर्म्यं सङ्ग्रामं न करिष्यसि । ततः स्वधर्मं कीर्तिं च हित्वा पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

33. हतो वा प्राप्स्यसि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम् । तस्मादुत्तिष्ठ कौन्तेय युद्धाय कृतनिश्चयः ॥

34. यदृच्छया चोपपन्नं स्वर्गद्वारमपावृतम् । सुखिनः क्षत्रियाः पार्थ लभन्ते युद्धमीदृशम् ॥

35. ज्यायसी चेत्कर्मणस्ते मता बुद्धिर्जनार्दन । तत्किं कर्मणि घोरे मां नियोजयसि केशव ॥
व्यामिश्रेणेव वाक्येन बुद्धिं मोहयसीव मे । तदेकं वद निश्चित्य येन श्रेयोऽहमाप्नुयाम् ॥

References

Amar, A. D. (2019). Ten key management messages from the Bhagavad Gita. In S. Dhiman & A. D. Amar (Eds.), *Managing by the Bhagavad Gītā: Management, change, strategy and positive leadership*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99611-0_4

Aryal, B. (2019). The rhetoric of the Bhagavan Krishna versus the counter-rhetoric of Maharshi Veda Vyas: The place of commiseration in the Mahabharata. *Humanities*, 8(4), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3390/h8040154

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Carver, C. S., Sutton, S. K., & Scheier, M. F. (2000). Action, emotion, and personality: Emerging conceptual integration. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(1), 741-751.

Chaplin, J. P. (1968). *Dictionary of psychology*. Dell.

Emmons, R. A., King, L. A., & Sheldon, K. M. (1993). Goal conflict and the self-regulation of action. In D. M. Wegner & J. W. Pennebaker (Eds.), *Handbook of mental control* (pp. 528–551). Prentice Hall.

Ferguson, E. (1994). Motivation. In R. J. Corsini (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of psychology* (Vol. 2, 2nd ed., p. 429). Wiley.

Ferguson, M. J., Hassin, R., & Bargh, J. A. (2008). Implicit motivation: Past, present, and future. In J. Y. Shah & W. L. Gardner (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation science* (pp. 150–166). Guilford.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford University Press.

Gairola, V., & Mishra, P. K. (2022). Bhagavad Gita and psychotherapy: A cure for soul? In S. K. Sia, L. S. Crane, A. K. Jain, & S. Bano (Eds.), *Understanding psychology in the context of relationship, community, workplace and culture* (pp. 245–259). Springer.

Gray, J. A. (1990). Brain systems that mediate both emotion and cognition. *Cognition and Emotion*, 4(1), 269–288.

Gupt, D. K., & Panchal, S. (2023). A cognitive interpretation of Arjuna's depression in context of Mahabharata. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry*, 24(8), 1–5.

Klinger, E., & Cox, W. M. (2011). Motivation and the goal theory of current concerns. In W. M. Cox & E. Klinger (Eds.), *Handbook of motivational counselling: Goal-based approaches to assessment and intervention with addiction and other problems* (2nd ed., pp. 3–47). Wiley Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470979952.ch1

Knowles, E. S., & Linn, J. A. (2004). Approach-avoidance model of persuasion: Alpha and omega strategies for change. In E. S. Knowles & J. A. Linn (Eds.), *Resistance and persuasion* (pp. 117–148). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410609816

Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman Group Ltd.

Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality*. McGraw-Hill.

Little, B. R. (1998). Personal project pursuit: Dimensions and dynamics of personal meaning. In P. T. P. Wong & P. S. Fry (Eds.), *The human quest for meaning: Theory, research, and clinical application* (pp. xx–xx). Erlbaum.

Nair, V. (2024). Philosophical counselling in the context of Bhagavad Gita: With reference to Osho. *Philosophical Papers*, 20(1), 131–146.

Nautiyal, J. (2013). Rhetorical agency in the Bhagavad Gita (Graduate thesis). North Dakota State University of Agriculture and Applied Science. https://library.ndsu.edu/ir/handle/10365/27021

Osho, R. (2012). *Gita Darshan*. The Rebel Publishing.

Pandey, A., & Mishra, P. C. (2021). Pursuit of resilience: A deep analysis in pages of Bhagavad Gita. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(1), 527–531. https://doi.org/10.25215/0901.052

Paudel, J. (2023). The rhetoric of the Bhagavad Gita: Unpacking persuasive strategies from a non-western perspective. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 53(2), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2022.2095421

Radwan, J. (2019). Leadership and communication in the Bhagavad Gita: Unity, duty, and equanimity. In S. Dhiman & A. D. Amar (Eds.), *Managing by the Bhagavad Gītā: Management, change, strategy and positive leadership*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99611-0_5

Sethumadhavan, T. N. (2010). Bhagavad Gita – Chapter 1 (Part-2): Yoga of the despondency of Arjuna. *The Medha Journal*. https://www.medhajournal.com/bhagavad-Gita-chapter-1-part-2-yoga-of-the-despondency-of-arjuna/

Sharma, N. (2024). Eco-philosophy and Environmental Ethical Concerns in the Upaniṣad. *The International Journal of Bharatiya Knowledge System*, 1, 111-120.

Stroud, S. R. (2005). Ontological orientation and the practice of rhetoric: A perspective from the Bhagavad Gita. *Southern Journal of Communication*, 70(2), 146–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940509373320

Tiwari K. (2024). Great Indian Knowledge Networks of Ashrams & Gurukuls for the benefit of HEIs: Mandate of NEP 2020. *The International Journal of Bharatiya Knowledge System*, 1, 151.

Vyas, V. (n.d.). *The Bhagavad Gita* (with commentary by Swami Mukundananda). https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/