

Strengthening Hope in context of Bhagavad Gita during COVID 19 Crisis

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ABSTRACT

A positive psychological approach in the scenario of pandemic like COVID 19 is the strong call of the present time. Elevating positivity and motivation among individuals is the need of the hour. Hope is a well-known construct of positive psychology which is linked with improved physical health and better psychological well-being.

In the face of this current infection, hope can be strengthened by using the teachings of bhagavad gita. Bhagavad Gita is a popular Hindu scripture which is a source of empowering spiritual knowledge that covers variety of domains including yoga, karmic wisdom, nature of soul etc. Knowledge and understanding of bhagavad gita on a regular basis can be used to ignite hope in the minds of anxious and stressful people of the society. It can also facilitate the experience of emotional stability and benefit individuals in finding the solutions of the problems confronted with more ease. The present paper theoretically highlights the importance of strengthening hope with regard to bhagavad gita in the scenario of COVID 19. This paper also gives a basis for increasing intrinsically motivated experience among individuals that can enhance psychological and physical health.

Keywords

Hope, Bhagavad Gita, COVID 19

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Introduction

The times of epidemic adversity, give rise to not just physical suffering but various other form of psychological discomforts. One such adversity faced by the global population in the year 2020 is COVID 19 crisis. According to World Health Organization the newly discovered virus called coronavirus has caused an infectious disease called coronavirus disease or COVID 19 that results in respiratory illnesses among individuals. Fast spread of this disease has created anxiety, grief and hopelessness among many elderly and young adults. In this regard, one of the widely discussed domain of positive psychology that can be used to combat the psychological discomforts is hope.

Hope is a way of thinking which is deliberate but entirely learned and not genetically determined (Snyder,1994). It is a goal directed thinking where the individual has a perceived capacity to find routes towards desired goals (pathways thinking) and necessary motivations for the usage of those routes (agency motivation). The positive psychology literature suggest that an overall level of hope determines how different a stressor is interpreted by an individual. It means that the barriers are construed as challenges by high hope individuals and these high hope individuals explore alternate routes in future and also exercise their motivations to those alternate routes.

Hope can be strengthened by using the powerful guidelines of ancient hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita, which is a part of Mahabharata epic that consist of eighteen discourses. It is a narrative dialogue framework between Lord Krishna and Pandava prince Arjuna that unfolds spiritual knowledge, providing solutions to the emotional conflicts and struggles faced by the individuals during adverse circumstances. The knowledge delivered by Gita acts as a medium that has an immense potential to elevate their levels of hope and give a sense of psychological empowerment. Precisely, in the ongoing scenario of coronavirus epidemic, the usefulness of bhagavad gita in context of boosting hope is undoubtedly of great value. It can be integrated into the daily life functioning of the individuals in order to create a synergy between their work and recreational activities, and most importantly to overcome anxiety, hopelessness, fear and panic due to the virus outbreak.

Hope Strengthening guidelines of Bhagavad Gita during COVID 19 crisis

Bhagavad Gita emphasize the following guidelines in its eighteen discourses that can strengthen hope in the tough scenario of COVID 19:

Connecting with the Self and Meditation

The second discourse of Bhagavad Gita namely Sankhya Yoga, along with the fifth discourse i.e., the Yoga of Renunciation of Action, draws attention towards the importance of evenness of mind and meditation as a way to connect with the self (Sivananda, 2000). It asserts on building up connection with one's self which includes meditation and introspection. Significance is given to the belief that individuals should give personal time to themselves, in which they can meditate, introspect, be mindful and rejoice within. It also emphasizes, to exercise control over one's senses that can result in the experience of peace as well as happiness.

Therefore, in the ongoing virus situation specifically with regard to meditation and connection with the self, the regular study of bhagavad gita can simplify the understanding of its profound knowledge. It can also be practically implemented by the individuals that can further result in elevating their hope levels by reducing the emotional discomforts and creating a peaceful state of mind. A study also shows that individuals practicing meditation exhibit higher hope levels and reduced stress (Munoz, Hoppes, Hellman, Brunk, Bragg, & Cummins, 2016).

Self-Controlled Actions

Second discourse of Bhagavad Gita i.e., Sankhya Yoga asserts that individuals practicing self-control in actions keep their senses under control and are neither influenced from attraction nor behave repulsively, as a result they experience peace (Sivananda, 2000). Sankhya Yoga explains that a self-controlled person is awake, it gives the meaning that such a person is aware and open minded about each and every circumstance of the existing time. It emphasises that the individual whose senses are controlled to such a person wisdom is steady and is not shaken by the adversity.

Understanding this guideline of self-controlled actions in relation to the COVID crises, and implementing it into one's day to day activities can help sustain hope levels during the times of coronavirus infection. For example, exercising self-control to stay at home as much as possible, going outside only for the essential activities by maintaining social distance, restricting travel from

one place to the other, controlling the urge to eat delicious food items at the crowded restaurants.

Practicing such measures into one's lifestyle can elevate physical and psychological well-being and can therefore strengthen hope levels among people by lowering the risk of getting infected by the coronavirus. A study also shows that both hope and self-control are related positively (Vohs & Schmeichel, 2002).

Knowledge of Self for Well-Being

In the second discourse of Bhagavad Gita i.e., Sankhya Yoga, the imperishable nature of the eternal self-i.e., atman is explained (Sivananda, 2000). It asserts that atman is the true self of every human being that never dies hence one must not grieve. This belief helps in overcoming the fear of death. Realising it and becoming aware of the consciousness of self during meditation and in the moments of silence gives a sense of relaxation and helps in reducing fear, specifically during uncertain epidemic times.

According to the second discourse of Bhagavad Gita, the understanding of self gives the experience of stability of mind and it can only be achieved by abandoning excessive desires. The unnecessary desires with regard to the virus infection include a strong urge to socialize in gatherings that can be firmly avoided, overcoming the impulsive compulsions to go out for shopping in the crowded areas specifically during festival times, preferring to eat take away food items from the eateries and avoiding all those wishful activities that increases the risk of getting infected by the contagious virus.

The knowledge of self as described in Bhagavad Gita helps in uplifting well-being among individuals, and in this regard an article of a newspaper also asserts that Bhagavad Gita promotes holistic well-being of the people. It emphasizes that when an individual comprehends the nature of true self, it is only then that the person is able to overcome the fear of death and of old age and therefore starts appreciating the true meaning of life (Singh, 2020). This improved well-being can result in enhancing hope levels among individuals. A study also shows that improved psychological and physical wellbeing is experienced by higher hope individuals (Singh, Singh, & Srivastava, 2013). Another study shows

that subjective well-being and hope are strongly related (Pleeging, Burger, & van Exel, 2019).

Karma Yoga in Actions and Stress Management

The superiority of karma yoga is explained in the fifth discourse of Bhagavad Gita i.e., The Yoga of Renunciation of Action (Sivananda, 2000). Karma Yoga as the name suggest is a type of yoga which means to unite or connect while performing karma i.e., action. This connection with one's self while engaged in various activities is significant in managing stress, as the individual is not lost in the activity itself but is also in tune with his own self that gives him the attainment of peace therefore, it can be practiced in day-to-day life functioning.

The karma yogi while involved in activities becomes a spectator of every scene of his life i.e., without getting emotionally entangled with the consequences of the task performed. Karma Yoga gives the knowledge to surrender oneself completely to the divine energy, here surrendering includes their thoughts and feelings related to the actions performed. Surrendering actions is a psychological way of transferring the stress of the expected outcomes to the divine power that results in elevating hope in the minds of the people.

Karma Yoga in the fifth discourse has been described as a way to the yoga of meditation, and this yoga turn out to be the destroyer of pain. With regard to the yoga of meditation, it has been shown in a study that the individuals practicing meditation show higher levels of hope and reduced stress (Munoz et al., 2016).

Another study emphasizes that karma yoga can be a useful therapeutic technique for managing stress, reducing apprehension and anxiety (Kumar & Kumar, 2018). With regard to hope and stress, one more study shows that a negative relationship found between perceived stress and hope. It means that low stress is perceived by highly hopeful individuals (Sukan, 2019).

Therefore, in the times of coronavirus epidemic where stress levels were raised due to unpredictable spread of the virus infection, in such a challenging situation the true understanding of karma yoga and its practice in daily life functioning can raise hope among the individuals by dropping their stress levels.

Inculcating and Enhancing Sattwa Guna

The fourteen discourse of Bhagavad Gita i.e. The Yoga of the Division of the Three Gunas, emphasizes upon inculcating and uplifting Sattwa Guna among the three gunas namely sattwa, rajas and tamas (Sivananda, 2000). Gunas are the attributes or qualities of human behaviour that are present in all the individuals.

The first guna i.e., the sattwa guna is a personality attribute that includes various positive characteristics including purity of thoughts and actions, wisdom, happiness, truthfulness, peace and virtuous living. The rajas guna is the second personality attribute that is manifested by passion, strong attachment, greed, egoism and restlessness, whereas the tamas guna is the third attribute that results due to ignorance, inertness, heedlessness, lethargy and delusion.

The highest of all the three gunas is the sattwa guna. The fourteen discourse of Bhagavad Gita asserts that these three gunas exist in all the individuals in different proportions, but efforts should be taken to cast out the tamas guna from one's nature and also to control rajas guna by wisely diverting its energy towards righteous actions, whereas sattwa guna should be developed, cultivated and enhanced within oneself.

Inculcating and enhancing sattwa guna can lead to holistic growth of one's personality. It can result in elevating well-being among individuals. A study also found a positive correlation between sattwa guna and well-being whereas a negative correlation of rajas guna and tamas guna with well-being (Khanna, Singh, Singla, & Verma, 2013). This elevated well-being can result in enhancing hope levels among individuals. With regard to hope and well-being another study found that enhanced psychological and physical well-being is experienced by higher hope persons (Singh et al., 2013).

Another study confirms that subjective well-being and hope are related strongly (Pleeging et al., 2019). Therefore, instilling and enhancing sattwa guna as described in Bhagavad Gita plays an important role in uplifting hope levels among individuals. Specifically, in context of spread of coronavirus infection, the increased sattwa guna can boost the positive characteristics that underlie within this attribute, and can therefore act as a catalyst in elevating hope levels among the

individuals. For example, increase in the characteristics of happiness, peace, wisdom and purity that exist under this guna can result in reducing stress and other emotional discomforts, thereby can strengthen hope levels among people.

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt is made to theoretically highlight the hope strengthening guidelines of Bhagavad Gita during the ongoing phase of coronavirus epidemic. These guidelines when practically used in daily lives can help reduce anxiety as well as stress levels caused due to the virus spread, and have the potential to increase hope levels among individuals during the uncertain times of COVID crisis

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