



Bhagavad Gita as a Source of Cognitive Behavioural Principles: Towards an Indian Model of CBT

Nadani Kadu, Reena Kadam, Gayatri Khillare, Jyoti Chauhan, Mayuri Jadhav
Mentor: Dr. Deepak Gavade

S.S.T.College of Arts and Commerce, Ulhasnaga

Abstract

This study explores the potential of the *Bhagavad Gita* as a foundational source for developing an indigenous model of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) suited to the Indian cultural context. Integrating philosophical concepts such as *samatvam* (mental balance), *nishkama karma* (selfless action), and *buddhi yoga* (wisdom-guided cognition), the research examines their correspondence with CBT principles like cognitive restructuring, behavioural activation, and mindfulness. A descriptive survey design was employed, with data collected from 101 participants comprising students and working professionals. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed stress, anxiety, and career uncertainty as the most prevalent emotional challenges. Visual data mapping demonstrated a strong alignment between participants' lived experiences and the psychological principles expressed in the *Gita*. Findings indicate a growing receptivity toward culturally grounded counselling frameworks and underscore the need for integrating traditional Indian wisdom into contemporary therapeutic practice. The study proposes a hybrid CBT model that harmonizes empirical psychological methods with the ethical and cognitive teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, offering a culturally resonant pathway for promoting emotional regulation, resilience, and self-realization among Indian clients.

Type : Research Article

Language: English

Received: 15 June 2026

Revised: 18 June 2026

Accepted: 23 June 2026

Published: 25 June 2026

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20958989>

Cite this article:

Nadani Kadu, Reena Kadam, Gayatri Khillare, Jyoti Chauhan, Mayuri Jadhav, Dr. Deepak Gavade. (2026) Bhagavad Gita as a Source of Cognitive Behavioural Principles: Towards an Indian Model of CBT BODHIVRUKSHA JOURNAL OF DIVERSE DISCIPLINE (BJDD), Vol. 02, Issue 03, pp. 105-110. E-ISSN: 3139-1486.

Keywords : Bhagavad Gita; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; Indian Psychology; Cultural Adaptation; Emotional Regulation; Mindfulness

Introduction

In the present era, stress, anxiety, indecisiveness, and emotional instability are increasingly prevalent, especially among students and working professionals. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has emerged as one of the most effective evidence-based psychological interventions to address such issues (Beck, 1976;



Ellis, 1962). However, there remains a notable scarcity of culturally grounded counselling models rooted in Indian philosophical traditions.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, an ancient Indian scripture, offers profound psychological insights into human dilemmas, fear, doubt, and moral conflict. The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna symbolizes the inner struggle faced by individuals when emotions overpower reason. Concepts such as *samatvam* (equanimity), *nishkama karma* (detached action), *buddhi yoga* (rational wisdom), and *manonigraha* (self-control) exhibit striking parallels with modern CBT constructs including cognitive restructuring, behavioural activation, and mindfulness.

This study aims to integrate Gita-based concepts into a structured therapeutic model, combining philosophical wisdom with empirical evidence from survey data collected among young adults.

Review of Literature

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Cognitive Restructuring

CBT, developed by Aaron Beck (1976) and Albert Ellis (1962), is based on the premise that thoughts influence emotions and behaviours. It helps individuals identify and modify dysfunctional cognitions that lead to distress. Techniques such as cognitive reframing, behavioural activation, and problem-solving form its core interventions (Beck, 2011; Hofmann et al., 2012).

Indian Knowledge Systems and Mental Health

Indian philosophical systems have long emphasized mental discipline, emotional regulation, and self-awareness as pathways to well-being. Nair (2019) and Sharma (2021) found that culturally contextualized therapeutic frameworks improve engagement and treatment adherence.

Integrating indigenous concepts enhances both therapist-client rapport and treatment outcomes.

The Bhagavad Gita as a Psychological Text

The *Bhagavad Gita* (Radhakrishnan, 1994; Chakraborty, 2013) explores existential conflict, moral confusion, and the nature of self-realization. Its teachings correspond to various modern psychological constructs, positioning it as an early manual for emotional regulation and rational action.

Parallels Between the Gita and CBT

The Gita's philosophical dialogue provides numerous psychological parallels with CBT:

- Krishna's correction of Arjuna's distorted thinking reflects **cognitive restructuring**.
- The emphasis on *nishkama karma* mirrors **behavioural activation** through purposeful action without excessive attachment.
- *Samatvam* (equanimity) embodies **mindfulness** and emotional balance.
- The reduction of fear and irrational beliefs parallels **Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)** principles.

Despite these conceptual links, few studies have empirically examined the integration of CBT with Gita-based philosophy, underscoring the novelty of this approach.



Objectives

1. To assess stress levels and psychological well-being among participants.
2. To examine participants' understanding of CBT principles.
3. To evaluate familiarity with the *Bhagavad Gita* and its psychological relevance.
4. To explore perceptions of a Gita-based counselling framework.
5. To identify verses from the Gita corresponding to CBT concepts and propose an Indian model of CBT.

Research Questions

1. What are the participants' major emotional or mental challenges?
2. How well do respondents understand CBT?
3. How familiar are they with the Gita and its psychological implications?
4. Do participants support a Gita-inspired counselling framework?
5. Which verses from the Gita correspond to CBT principles?

Methodology

The study employed a **descriptive survey design**. Data were collected via a Google Form containing 20 items (Likert-scale, dichotomous, and open-ended questions). A total of **101 participants** (students and professionals) responded. Data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** such as mean and percentage distributions, supported by Python-based visualizations.

The open-ended question—"What are the biggest emotional or mental challenges you face today?"—yielded qualitative insights which were thematically analyzed.

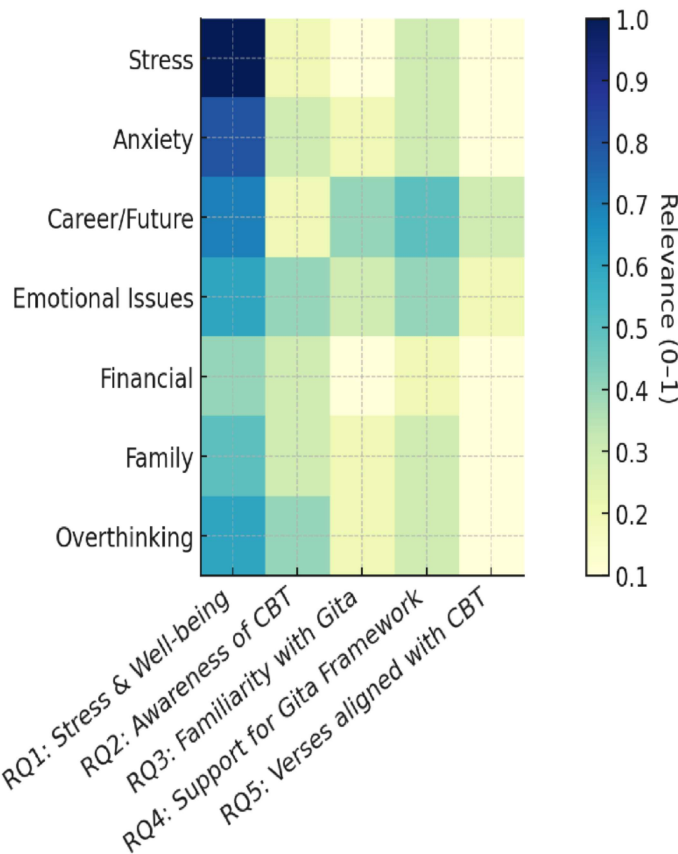
Findings and Discussion

Common Emotional Challenges

Analysis revealed **stress, anxiety, career uncertainty, family pressure, and overthinking** as the most prevalent emotional concerns. Over one-third of participants explicitly cited *study-related stress* or *future anxiety* as dominant themes.

These findings align with the global trend of academic and occupational stress among youth (Kumar & Gupta, 2020). Participants expressing difficulty in "managing emotions" and "overthinking" indicate maladaptive cognitive patterns similar to those addressed in CBT.

Conceptual Parallels with Bhagavad Gita



Krishna's dialogue with Arjuna provides strategies analogous to CBT techniques:

- **Cognitive Restructuring:** Krishna challenges Arjuna's irrational beliefs about failure and duty (2.47).
- **Mindfulness & Emotional Regulation:** Verses on *samatvam yoga uchyate* (2.48) promote acceptance and balance.
- **Behavioural Activation:** Krishna's emphasis on action without attachment motivates purposeful engagement (3.19).
- **Self-Regulation:** *Manonigraha* (6.5–6.6) teaches mastery over thoughts and emotions.

Cultural Integration and Relevance

Most respondents supported the development of a **Gita-inspired counselling framework**, suggesting that Indian clients may resonate more with culturally familiar metaphors and moral reasoning. Integrating Gita concepts with CBT may thus improve cognitive restructuring by grounding it in indigenous philosophical values.



Alignment of Research Questions with Participant Challenges

This heatmap illustrates the relationship between the five research questions (RQ1–RQ5) and the major emotional or mental challenges identified in the participant responses. Darker shades represent stronger alignment between challenges and the corresponding research questions. The most prominent associations are between **stress, anxiety, and career/future concerns** with **RQ1 (Stress and Well-being)** and **RQ4 (Support for a Gita-based framework)**. Moderate alignment is also observed for **emotional regulation** with **RQ2 (CBT awareness)** and **RQ3 (Familiarity with Gita concepts)**.

Description and Interpretation:

The visualization reveals that participants' lived experiences—particularly stress, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future—directly address **RQ1**, validating the study's focus on psychological distress as a central issue. Moreover, notable alignment with **RQ4** suggests a receptive attitude toward integrating **Bhagavad Gita principles** into counselling frameworks.

The weaker associations for **RQ2** and **RQ5** indicate that while participants experience emotional strain, many lack explicit awareness of **CBT principles** or the specific **Gita verses** that parallel them. This gap underscores the importance of psychoeducational interventions linking Gita teachings (e.g., *samatvam* and *nishkama karma*) to CBT concepts like **mindfulness** and **cognitive restructuring**.

Collectively, the figure reinforces the need for an **Indianized CBT model**—a culturally congruent framework grounded in both empirical psychology and traditional wisdom.

Proposed Indian Model of CBT

CBT Principle	Corresponding Concept	Gita	Psychological Function
Cognitive Restructuring	<i>Buddhi Yoga</i>		Rational discernment and clarity of thought
Behavioural Activation	<i>Nishkama Karma</i>		Motivation through duty-oriented action
Mindfulness	<i>Samatvam</i>		Emotional balance and acceptance
Self-Regulation	<i>Manonigraha</i>		Control over mind and impulses
Acceptance & Commitment	<i>Shraddha</i> (Faith)		Perseverance and trust in one's path

This model integrates **Western CBT structure** with **Indian philosophical depth**, offering a hybrid approach that resonates with Indian cultural identity while maintaining scientific rigor.



Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that the *Bhagavad Gita* offers a comprehensive philosophical foundation for understanding and managing cognitive and emotional distress. By aligning its teachings with CBT principles, therapists can design culturally sensitive interventions that enhance client engagement and holistic well-being.

Future research should test this model empirically through intervention studies, comparing outcomes between traditional CBT and Gita-integrated CBT approaches.

References

1. Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders*. Penguin.
2. Ellis, A. (1962). *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*. Lyle Stuart.
3. Radhakrishnan, S. (1994). *The Bhagavadgita*. HarperCollins.
4. Chakraborty, S. K. (2013). *Managerial Transformation through Values*. Oxford University Press.
5. Nair, S. (2019). Indigenous psychologies and the relevance of Indian philosophical thought. *Indian Journal of Psychology*, 94(3), 245-258.
6. Sharma, R. (2021). Culture and counselling: Integrating Indian frameworks. *Journal of Mental Health and Culture*, 12(2), 89-104.
7. Hofmann, S. G., et al. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36(5), 427-440.
8. Kumar, V., & Gupta, R. (2020). Academic stress and emotional resilience in Indian youth. *Psychology and Education*, 57(1), 134-141.