

## Comparative Study Between Bhagvad Gita And Maslow's Hierarchy

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**Abstract— Evolution is inevitable, so are the studies involving human mind. Many have witnessed the significant rise of men like Sigmund Freud, Carl Rodgers, Abraham Maslow, Goldberg etc. whose works are being followed in academics across the globe. But time has forgotten the valuable contribution from the east because of the influence the west has created. Therefore, I have researched from the angle of comparative study between the Maslow Hierarchy and “Bhagavad Gita”, recited to Arjun by Lord Krishna in the midst of the battlefield at Kurukshetra. The main reason for such a comparison is that both have many things in common, such as Maslow talks about human moving from lower level of needs from “basic physiological needs” to “self-Actualization”. Similarly, in Bhagavad Gita, it says person moves from lower state called Thamas to highest state called as Sattwa. Similarities go much deeper and we can witness it as we proceed with this paper. This quest started with how two different people from two completely different time of human evolution talk about similar qualities (in fact as we further proceed in this paper we can notice that there is possible contribution to Maslow that can still be made from the ancient knowledge present in the Indian literature) and thus I have not only tried to map the similarities but also contribute towards the limitations of Maslow theory.**

**Index Terms— Maslow's Hierarchy; Bhagavad Gita; Self-Actualization; Three Gunas; Self-Transcendence**

### I. INTRODUCTION

Human psychology has matured significantly especially over the past century and this has witnessed various theories put forth by various psychologists. The interest of western scholars has not only contributed a huge deal to such research but their influence went further rooted by penetrating into normal world practices. With no dispute in a large scale, that they have successfully laid the foundation for future quests. From another perspective this has also led to downfall in recognition of various ancient literature which also deals with human mind. Not only they have been forgotten but as time elapsed their significance in main stream has drastically reduced even

though they still hold better compared to modern theories especially in case of literatures like Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord). Bhagavad Gita has been wrongly intercepted as a religious book specifically for Hindus. But that is not the truth. Bhagavad Gita teaches the ways to lead your life, connect and elate yourself with the cosmic order and the need for spiritual quotient inside everyone. The philosophical thinking has not outdated even after 5000 years and in many cases withstands

and upbeats even modern psychological theories. Thus a comparative study between Maslow's Hierarchy not only proves the above statement but it is also evident through addressing the limitation of Maslow's theory and potential contributions from the ancient Indian literature of Bhagavad Gita.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emphasis on ancient Indian literature is on rise and we can see many scholars doing so. There are lot of paper in corporate world where they elaborate Bhagavad Gita as a basis for growth. In “*Impact of Vedic worldview and Gunas on transformational leadership*”, Aditi Khejriwal has enforced the Indian view point that the three Gunas are constituents of all humans in her Tri-Dimensional theory of Gunas. In “*Maslow's self-actualization and its conflicting theory towards Indian ethos*”, concentrates on the basis that self-actualization as said in Indian literature is distinct from self-actualization as experiences happening to people are different in either of the cases and taking the former as a better state than the latter. In other paper “*Purushartha: Maslow Revisited*”, says that the paper's purpose is to link the Western concept of motivation and the Hindu principles of Purushartha. They first examine how the Western model works and controversies surrounding it, then propose a way to reconcile these controversies, using Hindu motivational constructs. Although there is no empirical support for this proposed link, explication of Purushartha as an alternative adaptive system, hopefully will encourage others to further examine these other aspects of motivation and contribute to expanding the scope of Maslow's need hierarchy.

As Gayathri.N says in her “*Emotional Intelligence: Universal or Culture specific? An analysis with reference to the*

*Bhagavad Gita*”, goes through the qualitative side of “Ability Model” put forth by Mayer and Salovey and compares this with that of Bhagavad Gita. Apart from this many scholars have argued that Maslow’s upward directional needs theory by stating that the individuals may shift back and forth in the hierarchy triangle at any point of their life depending upon the necessity. According to Poston in his paper “*Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs*”, even a two-year-old may have problems with his/ her self-esteem and questions how and why self-esteem is located in the higher in the triangle rather than in lower part in this case. Also adds to the fact that in order to reach the self-actualized state one need not necessarily be a visionary rather says that one can reach such a state at any point of time in one’s life. Even Frankl in “*Self-transcendence as a human phenomenon*”, goes further beyond by stating that self-transcendence needs are the one which are to be addressed first and this is not the case with self-actualization.

This study is further supported by Koltko-Rivera in “*Rediscovering the later version of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: Self-transcendence and opportunities for theory, research, and unification*” who states that self-actualization limits only to an individual while self-transcendence goes further deeper by putting individual interest aside and thereby working towards the betterment of the society rather than self-centric. He uses Malala as an epitome in this case. In few cases health management can also be achieved through self-transcendence according to “*Self-transcendence and mental health in oldest-old adults*”, as said by PG reed. Maslow himself proposed the “*Rectified Maslow’s Hierarchy*” in which he positioned Self-Transcendence at the top but never mentioned how to attain such a state.

Apart from this there are paper such as “*Transpersonal Psychology in Bhagavad Gita: Reflections on the Consciousness, Meditation, work and Love*”, by Sangeetha Menon, put forth that Bhagavad Gita is not a conversation between two people, rather it is a psychological as well as guide us to a spiritual living. Also the significance of Guna is taken a prime importance to lead a mentally healthy life. In, “*Simultaneous Concept Analysis of Spiritual Perspective, Hope, Acceptance and Self-transcendence*” by Joan E Haase, helps to clarify the elusive thoughts on Self-Transcendence, need for spirituality inside everyone and their interrelationship.

“*Comparison of the Conceptualization of Wisdom in Ancient Indian Literature with Modern Views: Focus on the Bhagavad Gita*”, by Dilip V. Jeste; Ipsit V. Vahia, depicts the comparisons between the ancient knowledge and today’s concept of emotional intelligence, control over desires, mastering mind etc.

This also is supported by “*The Vedic psychology of the Bhagavad-Gita*”, by M.C.Dillbeck, portraying the sufferings a person faces due to lack of inner stability and possible solutions in the Bhagavad Gita are explained. “*Impact of Gunas and Karma Yoga in transformation leadership*”, Agarwala, Seshadri and Krishnan explains about the effects of Gunas and Yoga in a leader. From a management perspective studies have put forth the possible contributions from Bhagavad Gita to modern management lessons. This is evident from the “*Lessons from Management from Bhagavad Gita*” by Sujith Kumar Acharya where he talks about the present day

pragmatism and linkages to modern management practices. “*Principles of management and the Bhagavad Gita*”, by Shankar B. Chandekar does a similar contribution to the modern thinking and human management and lessons from the ancient Indian literature.

### III. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

#### **Delineating Maslow’s hierarchy and three basic Gunas in Bhagavad Gita:**

##### **Physiological needs and Basic needs according to Maslow:**

These are basic needs which deals with maintenance of human body and these are very important for fundamental survival such as food, water, air, sleep etc. Maslow believed that these needs are the most instinctive needs because all needs become secondary until these needs are met. Followed by this a man thrives hard for security.

##### **Thamas Guna according to Bhagavad Gita:**

In chapter 14, verse 13, Krishna says in his shloka that,

*aparakāśho ’pravṛṭṭiḥ cha pramādomohaeva cha  
tamasyetānījāyantevivṛṭṭiddhe kuru-nandana*

A person in Thamas Guna, is not well organized and is filled with ignorance, disorder, chaos, anxiety, impure, destructive, delusion, negative, dull or inactive, apathy, inertia or lethargy, violent, vicious. They go behind just basic requirements such as food, water, shelter etc. and never towards the real knowledge. They are struck there and shows no improvement. This is similar to what Maslow has said as the basic requirement of human.

##### **Psychological Needs according to Maslow:**

These ae needs which are required for the basic motivation which are required to attain goals and also to perform deeds. Apart from this Safety and Security needs include: Personal security, Financial security, Health and well-being, adding to this he also states about the Self-Esteem needs of an individual in the society he lives in.

##### **Rajas Guna in Bhagavad Gita:**

In chapter 14, verse 12, Krishna says in his shloka that,

*lobhahapravrittiraarambhahakarmanaamashamaspruhaa  
rajasyetaanijaayantevivṛṭṭiddhebharatarshabha*

According to Bhagavad Gita, Rajas Guna is where a person saves money, keeps himself secured in all aspects. Apart from Krishna also said a person in this Guna expects results for what he does and in that process he nurtures his intelligence too. A person in this stage always aims to get better and never satisfied by what he currently possesses. Social status will be his another priority, for example if he has a house to live now he never realizes that this is enough for his present single state. Rather he aims for bungalow. He never realizes that where ever he lives in is never permanent and still goes behind just for his satisfactions which are not permanent either.

Another major factors which is never mentioned in the hierarchy of needs is the social contribution of a person towards the society. While Bhagavad Gita states that a man in Rajas Guna is also an active contributor towards his society and environment. Here Bhagavad Gita goes a mile ahead than the hierarchical model.

##### **Self-actualization according to Maslow:**

The apex of the hierarchical model explains about the self-actualization. This is the apex of the pyramid which is considered to be the most important for the person to reach the ultimatum according to the Hierarchy of needs. There are various characteristic traits which are exhibited by persons which were put forth by Maslow. The consolidated traits are given below as follows and lets us also see how this triangle is just a part compared Bhagavad Gita.

### **StithprajnyaPurusha in Bhagavad Gita:**

Lord Krishna explains about the characteristics of StithprajnyaPrusha in Bhagavad Gita as a person who has distanced himself from the objects of please and enjoyment but the taste for such things remains inside one's self. But even this taste decreases as his submission to the ultimate consciousness increases. In chapter 2 and verse 59 Krishna in his shloka says,

*viṣṭ hayāvīnivartantenirāhārasyadehinah  
rasa-varjātmāso 'pyasyaparaṁdī iṣṭ hṭ vānivartate*

where he explains the characteristics of a StithprajnyaPurusha. This can be mapped to Maslow when he talks about the peak experiences for a self-actualized person. According to Maslow in his book "Towards the Psychology of being" explains about the experiences of "Peakers and Unpeakers" which is similar to that of characteristics of StithprajnyaPurusha

### **1. Self-Actualized person have a democratic world view**

They see everyone around them equally and they don't see any difference between themselves and others. Neither does he care about one's history and as a result of such a character he hardly differentiates beings around him having the democratic and self-acceptance. Eventually, shortcomings come to be seen not as shortcomings at all, but simply as neutral personal characteristics. With all its shortcomings, with all its discrepancies from the ideal image without feeling real concern one does not complain about water because it is wet, or about rocks because they are hard simply noting and observing what is the case, without either arguing the matter or demanding that it be otherwise.

### **Parallel thoughts in Bhagavad Gita:**

In chapter 5 verse 18, Krishna says in his shloka that

*vidyā-vinaya-sampannebrāhmaṇegavihastini  
śhunichaivaśva-pāke cha paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinah*

Krishna says, a man who has learnt the ultimate truth of knowledge sees everything around him as equal. Whether it is living or non-living. He sees "Paramathma" inside everything which is also present inside him. He sees no differences whatsoever.

### **2. Self-Actualized person prioritize and enjoy the journey, not expect result:**

In this quality Maslow says that a real self-actualized person is the one who never cares about results and works without any expectation. He just enjoys the journey through which he is travelling and thus whether it is a positive or even a negative outcome he does not pay any significant attention to them.

### **Parallel Thoughts in Bhagavad Gita:**

In chapter 2 verse 47, Krishna says in his shloka that

*karmaṇy-evādhikāraṣṭemāphaleṣṭ hukadāchana  
mā karma-phala-heturbhūrmātesaṇ go 'stvākarmaṇi*

The message from this verse is that, one is entitled only to do the task and should never expect back the results. One of the reason why Lord Krishna is saying so is because that if one

starts expectations to build upon for his work this may lead to disappointment if he fails to achieve the desired target.

### **3. Self-actualized people resist socialization:**

**According to Maslow a self-actualized person never reacts to normal physical world. Neither he responds to the changes nor he engulfed by them. He neither follows them like a sheep nor reject them like a rebel. He is autonomous by himself and so are his decisions. He is self-functioning and thereby he cannot be influenced so easily.**

### **Parallel thoughts in Bhagavad Gita:**

In Chapter 12 verse 17, Krishna says in his shloka that

*yonahr iṣṭ hyatinadveṣṭ hṭ inaśhochatinakāṇkṣṭ hati  
śhubhāśhubha-parityāgābhaktimānyaḥ sa me priyaḥ*

Those who neither rejoice the fame from society for what they have achieved for nor who feels deeply disappointed for what he has failed to achieve so and he who is not involved by the normal worldview are very dear to the Lord according to Krishna.

### **4. Self-Actualized person accepts life as it is and embraces the unexpected with no fear:**

They are neither threatened by the unexpected events nor they hurt anyone because of what has happened to him. They accept it instead of complaining around like what normal people do. He has no wish to hurt anyone or to fight them instead he will undergo all the normal worldly practices simply because such self-actualized person know people will be hurt or embarrassed by any other kind of behaviour. They are also ready to accept reality for what it is and thus they embrace truth and wisdom.

### **Parallel thoughts in Bhagavad Gita:**

In Chapter 12 verse 17, Krishna says in his shloka that

*tulyanindaastutirmaunisantushtoyenakenachita  
aniketahasthiramatirbhaktimaanmepriyonaraha*

Krishna says that a person to whom praises and insults are the same, one who embraces silence and always content with what he possesses. He neither hurts others nor picks up fight, and he is the one who he is a dear devotee and who always embraces Me following the path of Dharma.

### **5. Self-actualized people have purpose, grateful and humble:**

**Self-actualized people are usually infiltrated with mission, always have tasks to fulfil both inside themselves as well as outside of them. Also they are sort of persons who are grateful and humble. They seem to thank for what they have got and irrespective of their possession and position in their life they have the positive attitude with the help of humbleness.**

### **Parallel thoughts in Bhagavad Gita:**

Chapter 13 verse 8 to 12, Krishna says in his shloka that,

amanitvamadamhritvam  
 ahimsa ksantirarjavam  
 acaryopasanamsaucam  
 sthairyamatma-vinigraha  
 indriyarthesuvaragyam  
 anahankaraeva ca  
 janma-mrtyu-jara-vyadhi-  
 dukkha-dosanudarsanam  
 asaktiranabhisvanga  
 putra-dara-grhadisu  
 nityam ca sama-cittatvam  
 istanistopapattisu  
 mayicananya-yogena  
 bhaktiravyabharini  
 vivikta-desa-sevitvam  
 aratirjana-samsadi  
 adhyatma-jnana-nityatvam  
 tattva-jnanartha-darsanam  
 etajjnanamitipraktam  
 ajnanamyadato 'nyatha

He who embraces tolerance, non-violence and who is always simple and humble with all by approaching the spiritual master by distancing himself from the state of false ego and staying positive through elimination of ignorance, by serving the attachment of materialistic world is the real seeking of knowledge.

#### **Shortcomings in Maslow Hierarchy Model:**

Maslow never concentrated on the social contribution towards the society, instead he concentrated primarily on individual achievements, goals and unleashing potential thus making this theory self-centric. Another disadvantage of this model is that it never talks about self-transcendence anywhere and limiting itself only till self-actualization. Transcendence is a state where the experiences are beyond the normal physical state of human nature. The importance for such a state is given by the fact that, a self-transcended person not only unleashes his potential (Self-Actualized person according to Maslow) but also helps people around him to attain transcendence without any expectations. Even though many research had an emphasis that transcendence is even higher than the actualization, they have failed to mention the path by which it can be attained. Apart from these the lack of spiritual quotient, cosmic viewpoint to a problem downgrades the theory further more.

But are these shortcomings addressed anywhere else? The simple answer is yes and it is present in Bhagavad Gita. Let us now see where Bhagavad Gita goes even beyond the Maslow's Hierarchical model such as attainment of Self-Transcendence and need for spiritual quotient inside a human.

#### **Overcoming the absence of Self-Transcendence in Maslow's Hierarchy through Bhagavad Gita:**

#### **Role of Detachment and Submission to Divine in attaining transcendence:**

In chapter 4 verse Lord Krishna in his Shloka says,

karmaṇ yakarmayaḥ paśhyedakarmaṇi cha karma yaḥ  
 sabuddhimānmanuḥ hyeḥ susayuktaḥ kṛ itsna-karma-kṛ it  
 "Karma Yogi" are really are those who are indulged in all activities but never attached in any of them by submitting the

results to the Divine. By such nature he is neither disappointed by failures even after he has fully unleashed his potential nor he is boastful when he tastes success when doing the same. This is the part where Maslow's hierarchy has limited itself by placing Self-Actualization at the apex of triangle.

In chapter 4 verse 23 Lord Krishna in his shloka says,

gata-sangasyamuktasya  
 jnanavasthita-cetasah  
 yajnyacaratah karma  
 samagrampraviliyate

One who has no attachment and has completely submitted himself to the Divine will surely merge himself into knowledge of transcendence

Why attachment management is very important is because many around the world today believes that without the holding of such things/services one can never be happy as if his/her satisfaction dependent upon the external factors. Attachments restrict one's quest for real knowledge, freedom and awareness. This may sound bit wayward, but the truth that western psychology has never had its influence of detached nature. In fact, many has discontinued the idea that "Detached nature" does lead to betterment of human mind. But maybe they may find out in the future but what Bhagavad Gita has stated as one among the first step to reach the real transcendence is to lead by an unattached nature towards everything around us.

#### **Further scope:**

As more and more people are moving towards the traditional aspects of life, such studies will definitely help in bridging the gap between the western thinking and Indian literature. Not stopping there alone, further research based on such work will also encourage people to study sticking their roots to ancient Indian knowledge and if possible bringing them into academic curriculum is also seen as a potential utility.

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