



Ethical foundations in the Bhagavad Gita: a unified framework for counselling psychology and Indian jurisprudence

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the fragmentation of ethics in modern professional practice and provides a solution to unify them into a single ethical framework, using the Bhagavad Gita as the foundation for both Counselling Psychology and Indian Jurisprudence. Using a systematic legal textual analysis, the study links the underlying principle of Dharma (Righteous Duty) to the scientific principles of evidence-based Psychology regarding Emotion Regulation. The Study supports the idea that the Gita's ideal of Sthitaprajna (One of Steady Wisdom) can be equated with the Self-Regulatory aspects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and that the Gita's idea of Nishkama Karma (Action Without Attachment) creates a strong Psychological foundation for Judicial Impartiality. This research provides the link between Neeti (Procedural Guidelines) and Nyaya (Real Justice). The Research re-defines the Gita's concept of Svadharma (Prescribed Duty) not as a sectarian point of view, but as a secular concept, beneficial for mankind. Therefore, the Research supports the idea that the Gita is the source of Secular Moral Science.

Keywords: *Bhagavad Gita, Counselling Psychology, Indian Jurisprudence, Dharma, MBSR, Restorative Justice.*

1. Introduction

Today's view of professional ethics from the perspectives of Counselling Psychology and Jurisprudence is facing the greatest crisis in the purpose of both professions. As both groups of professionals are experiencing, an increase in compassion fatigue (i.e., becoming psychologically desensitised to the pain of others), experiencing an increase in ethical desensitisation to their professional responsibilities, and high levels of burnout, they find themselves working within a mechanistic approach that is driven by purely procedural metrics rather than on the basis of the

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substantive well-being of humankind. This fragmentation of self (whereby the person's professional identity as a member of an organisation becomes completely separated from their ethical beliefs) has left an empty space that has yet to be filled by modern secular theories. The Bhagavad Gita has emerged to fill that void, as it addresses not only issues of spirituality and religious philosophy but also offers an advanced understanding of conflict resolution, which exists in our minds and in our society, particularly in the age of materialistic beliefs.

Historically, due to its classification as a religious text, the Gita has seen limited benefit in non-religious government actions as well as its application to therapy. But with new jurisprudence, the previous view that the Gita could only be seen through a religious lens has been dismantled. The judgement by the Madras High Court in 2025 on *Arsha Vidya Parampara Trust v. Union of India* ruled, in a historic decision, that the Gita is not a sectarian type of sacred text, but instead is a compilation of Naitik Vigyan teachings regarding Moral Science. According to the Court's comments, the truths taught by the Gita regarding duty and resiliency are not limited to a particular religion, but are part of an eternal, internal and universal truth about people. Therefore, the Gita forms a part of the larger Bharatiya Civilisation, and is not the property of a particular religion (*Arsha Vidya Parampara Trust v. Union of India*, 2025). This affirmation by the judiciary is of great importance for the reason that it frees this scripture from the confines of religious formalism and situates the text as a legitimate source of ethical jurisprudence of a secular nature. This legal recognition builds upon a robust constitutional legacy. The first case to explore the difference between Dharma and Religion was *A.S. Narayana Deekshitulu v. State of A.P.* (1996), a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of India, where Justice Hansaria referenced the Gita to state that Dharma refers to that which sustains society. Dharma is a secular code of conduct and is therefore essential for building community and joining together; it is not the same as the private religious life (*A.S. Narayana Deekshitulu v. State of A.P.*, 1996).

In terms of psychology, the Gita discusses the same issue of paralysis that many professionals today find themselves in. The Gita begins with a battle scene on Kurukshetra. Arjuna (the main character) feels the stress of despair, an emotional state similar to depression and cognitive dissonance that develops when someone suffers from a situation or has conflicting ideas about themselves and their role in life. Through his actions, he is faced with two conflicting ideas: his duty as a soldier and

loyalty to his family. Krishna's message did not include something religious or platitudinal, but rather, it included cognitive restructuring principles. This concept is also used in modern Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT). Through the teaching of equanimity, the ability to remain constant through success and failure, the Gita gives the practitioner emotional controls that will prevent the practitioner from experiencing burnout (Sharma, 2014).

This paper, therefore, establishes the main assertion that the Bhagavad Gita articulates a comprehensive unified Dharmic Framework which synthesises both an individual's internal psychological aspiration of Samatvam (achieving inner tranquillity) and an external legal objective of Nyaya (manifestation of fairness). Although Amartya Sen (2009) has made a clear division between Neeti (rules as defined by the state) and Nyaya (fairness), the paper argues that this dichotomy does not exist in the Bhagavad Gita. By integrating both concepts, we can state that without a solid base of discipline through yoga, one cannot achieve true fairness (Nyaya). The principle of Nishkam Karam (selfless action) serves as the bridge between these fields by providing both a therapeutic method of addressing anxiety, as well as the basis of the requirement of impartiality in legal proceedings (Bhatia et al., 2013). By combining these concepts, we can create a strong ethical foundation that is based on culture, and in addition to that, one that adheres to the principles of the Law and Constitution.

2. The psychological paradigm: from conflict to clarity

The categorisation of the Bhagavad Gita in terms of religion, and solely as a religious book, may be prevalent; however, when evaluated for its narrative structure, it can be seen that the Bhagavad Gita is an advanced form of psychotherapy. The conversation between Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra is one of the first examples of documented crisis intervention, and it goes beyond philosophy and engages with a psychosocially influenced individual experiencing acute emotional distress. Using contemporary clinical theories, specifically Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and the Process Model of Emotion Regulation perspicuity, this paper will provide insight into the applicability of the findings as a source of Bharatiya Manovigyan.

2.1 The cognitive crisis of Arjuna: a clinical analysis

Chapter one of the Bhagwat Gita, titled “Arjuna-Vishada Yoga”, gives an in-depth view of all the ways that Arjuna’s mental state is suffering from. Rather than serving just as a structural element of the story, the manner in which Arjuna presents his condition mirrors what modern mental health professionals would consider clinical indicators of an Anxiety Attack that has also developed an acute depressive reaction. The combination of physical, emotional and cognitive symptoms makes up the full picture of a syndromic presentation of panic disorders commonly diagnosed by today’s clinicians.

Throughout verses 1.29 and 1.30, we learn that Arjuna is experiencing deep somatic and emotional symptoms. He states that his body shakes because of extreme anxiety before the war (due to the fear of fighting against his family members), as evidenced by his limbs giving way and his mouth becoming dry. He further indicates that he feels a burning sensation on his skin and is unable to support himself. This describes a very high degree of arousal in the autonomic nervous system, a classic fight-or-flight response to the trauma he is experiencing. However, ironically, Arjuna feels frozen due to the overwhelming fear of the consequences his family would face if he were to fight against them.

At the centre of Arjuna’s mental disorder is a cognitive distortion. Beck (1979) referred to a Negative Cognitive Triad, which is defined as the negative attitude that individuals have towards themselves, the world and their future. According to Beck, individuals who exhibit this Negative Cognitive Triad are considered to have a depressive disorder and would include Arjuna within this definition of depressive disorder (Beck et al., 1979).

- 1) **A Negative view of oneself (Personalisation):** Arjuna expresses his self-perception as that of being the most significant contributor or reason for all the potential destruction that could possibly occur due to his actions in the war, and he ignores the political complexities of the war. In contemplating this action, Arjuna asks himself, “What will I enjoy after I kill the sons of Dhritarashtra?” (BG 1.36), effectively creating an anticipatory guilt that he carries prior to the actual battle even occurring.
- 2) **A negative view of the world (negative filtering):** Arjuna has chosen not to recognise the justice or Dharmic righteousness of his cause for entering into this conflict. He defines the war as an action

that will destroy all the family traditions of the people of Kula, through subsequent civil chaos (BG 1.40).

- 3) A negative view of the future (catastrophizing):** Arjuna believes there is an absolute sense of doom awaiting him and his family: “The family destroyers will certainly go to hell” (BG 1.44). His catastrophic future scenario includes the complete collapse of the social order; that all the women in the Kula are going to be corrupted, and that the forefathers will fall from heaven.

According to Sharma (2014), what Krishna sees in Arjuna is not cowardice, but rather Karpanya-dosha (the fault of being a coward); a state of mental collapse characterised by when Moha (delusion/attachment) takes full control of Buddhi (intellect/discrimination). Therefore, Krishna must intervene with knowledge-based methods instead of using other related approaches or administering religious rituals.

2.2 Cognitive restructuring and REBT: Krishna’s Socratic method

Chapter 2 shows Krishna acting as a guideline or support for the Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behavioural Therapies. Unlike other counsellors who might validate how a client feels, Krishna is an example of what Ellis termed a Directive Therapist. This type of therapist will confront clients about the accuracy of their thinking; this is what Ellis called Disputation of Irrational Beliefs (Bhatia et al., 2013).

We can clearly align the ABC Model created by Albert Ellis, who is credited with developing Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), with the dialogue of the Gita. With this structure, we see how Krishna directs Arjun in overcoming his emotional paralysis via di-rective guidance to take constructive action. The A-B-C Model in the Gita operates as:

- A (Activating Event): The impending war.
- B (Beliefs): Arjuna’s irrational belief that “Killing kinsmen is an absolute sin that will destroy the social order and send me to hell.”
- C (Consequences): Anxiety, despondency, and refusal to fight.

Krishna focuses on converting Arjuna’s beliefs (B) regarding the matter, presenting Arjuna with an immediate cognitive jolt by asking him where he obtained the impurity that he was exhibiting (Gita 2.2). In order to deconstruct Arjuna’s logical arguments, Krishna questions him in a

manner similar to that of Socrates. When Arjuna demonstrates sorrow at the thought of his teachers dying, Krishna shows him the error in his reasoning by saying that he is mourning those with whom he should not be mourning while speaking with wisdom (Gita 2.11).

Krishna's principal means of reframing his argument was by focusing on the difference between the Deha (the body) and the Dehin (the soul or self), stating, "As a man dresses himself with new clothes, while leaving his old clothes behind, so too is the soul dressed in a new material body" (Gita 2.22). Arjuna was reframed from an identification with his temporary biological identity to an understanding of his eternal Atman (self), allowing Arjuna to decenter by perceiving the experience from a more detached, objective perspective, thereby reducing the emotional impact of death from a tragedy to a moment of transition (Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

Krishna also deals with Arjun's confusion about his roles as a Kinsmen and Warrior (Kshatriya). To address this confusion, he tells Arjuna that his obligations as a Kshatriya outweigh any personal attachment he may have towards the person he is about to fight against; "the Kshatriya is bound to fight according to the principles of Dharma" (Gita 2.31). Finding a way to resolve a conflict of roles (ambiguities), as Krishna has helped Arjuna do here, is one of the primary goals of modern occupational psychologists in preventing burnout.

2.3 Mindfulness and detached action: the mechanism of Nishkama Karma

A significant contribution of the Gita to clinical psychology is the idea of Nishkama Karma, or Action Without Attachment, which can be likened to how the concept of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction approaches similar mechanisms of stress alleviation.

Current ideas indicate that many cases of anxiety relate indirectly to a belief that one's worth as an individual depends on what happens (i.e., Outcome Dependency). As seen in Gita, verse 2.47 states: "you are entitled to do your duty, but you are not entitled to any of the results thereof" (कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन). Balasubramanian (2017) clarifies how this teaching separates the Karta (Doer) from the Bhokta (Enjoyer). When someone works toward something, there is generally a dual-cognitive process operating on both the task and the future potential results (the fruits). This dual-task interference degrades performance. By

practising Nishkama Karma, the individual focuses 100% of their attention on the process (the duty).

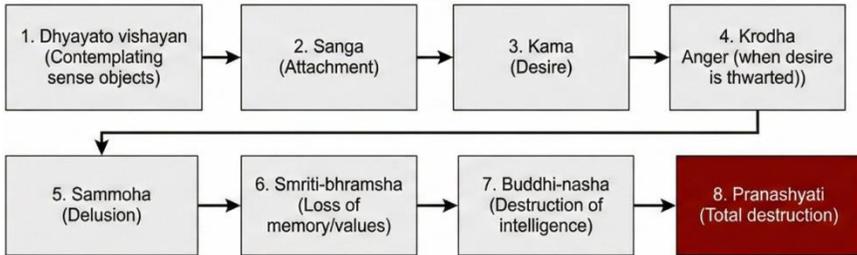
The clinical utility of this approach is backed by recent research conducted by Konduru et al. (2024), through a registered randomised controlled trial, to determine the effects of using a Gita-based intervention for homeless populations in India. The hypothesis was that the Gita's teachings about Atman (the intrinsic self-worth independent of social status) and Karma Yoga (the dignity of labour) would decrease Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) scores. The preliminary findings indicated that this culturally-adapted CBT was able to create a higher level of adherence and resilience to treatment than traditional Western models due to the fact that the therapeutic approach is consistent with the patient's existing spiritual belief system (Konduru et al., 2024).

While MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) teaches non-judgmental awareness, the Gita's teachings on Dhyana Yoga (Chapter 6) take this concept further. Krishna advises practitioners to "hold the body, head, and neck upright...looking at the tip of the nose" (Gita 6.13), which helps to anchor the practitioner's attention to avoid the wandering of one's thoughts. This practice creates a state of tranquillity where the mind becomes "like a lamp in a windless place" (Gita 6.19). This metaphor indicates the development of an extremely stable attentional state with an extremely low level of emotional reactivity and is considered the ideal state of mindfulness training.

2.4 Emotion Regulation: the process model and antecedent control

James Gross's Emotion Regulation Process Model differentiates between the strategies that are applied before an emotion occurs (i.e., antecedent-focused) compared to after an emotion has already occurred (i.e., response-focused). The Gita has clearly provided evidence that it promotes a very advanced technique of antecedent-based emotional regulation through the use of cognitive reappraisal and desire management.

The Psychological Path of Self-Destruction (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verses 62-63)



Krishna provides a causal chain for emotional collapse, known as the ‘Ladder of Fall’. This model anticipates the cognitive-appraisal theory of emotion. It asserts that anger is not a primary event but a secondary reaction to obstructed desire (attachment). Therefore, attempting to suppress anger (Response-Focused) is futile. The effective intervention is at step 1: regulating the contemplation or attentional focus. By practising Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), the individual prevents the initial attachment from forming.

Sthitaprajna is an expression used for the individual who has attained the highest state of wisdom and understanding (situated within the context of wisdom). An individual who is situated within this state is not completely devoid of feelings, but they remain undaunted in suffering, and untainted by the pleasures of happiness (an individual who, although experiencing suffering or sadness, is still able to find joy even in that experience). In addition, the science of Emotional Granularity and Equanimity, found in many psychological studies, refers to the state of experiencing, in the absence of over-identifying one’s with one’s experience, the suffering or sadness resulting from another individual’s discontent or negative experience. Research findings regarding Healthcare Professionals suggest that the practice of Detaching with Caring while practising Empathy (regardless of the difficult circumstances faced by an individual) will help minimise the loss of Compassion Fatigue (Bhatia et al., 2013).

In the sphere of Moral Development, the Trigunas of yoga philosophy provide a unique opportunity to explore a dynamic view of self and personality through the lens of yoga, using these three modes of nature as opposed to trait-based approaches like the Big Five of Western psychology. As an example, an individual suffering from mild to moderate depression may be experiencing Tamas; therefore, a physician may focus on using Karma Yoga techniques to shift this individual into

an active state (Rajas) and ultimately to Sattva (clarity). Likewise, when considering the Gita’s philosophy of morality, the Gita offers another level of moral understanding than what Kohlberg presented, in that the Gita discusses Gunatita or a state of transcending the three modes of nature (Trigunas) and acting as a mere instrument of the Divine Will to achieve a complete dissolution of the ego and the burdens of the moral agency; this may help alleviate anxiety in individuals (Menon et al., 2021).

Table 1: Convergence of Bhagavad Gita concepts and modern psychological therapies

Modern Psychological Construct	Bhagavad Gita Concept	Mechanism of Action	Relevant Verse (Gita)
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	<i>Jnana Yoga</i> (Yoga of Knowledge)	Identification and disputation of cognitive distortions (e.g., distinguishing Self from Body to reduce existential anxiety).	2.11
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)	<i>Sakshi-Bhava</i> (Witness Consciousness)	Non-judgmental observation of mental states; decentering from thoughts.	14.23
Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)	<i>Karma Yoga</i> (Nishkama Karma)	Acting according to values (<i>Dharma</i>) rather than feelings; accepting internal events without struggle.	2.47
Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)	<i>Buddhi Yoga</i> (Yoga of Intellect)	Developing High Frustration Tolerance by removing the demand for specific outcomes (<i>Kama</i>).	2.14
Emotion Regulation (Antecedent-Focused)	<i>Sthitaprajna</i> (Steady Wisdom)	Regulating the attentional focus (<i>Dhyana</i>) to prevent the attachment-desire-anger chain.	2.62
Role Transition Therapy (IPT)	<i>Svadharm</i> (Prescribed Duty)	resolving role conflict (e.g., Kinsman vs. Warrior) by clarifying primary ethical obligations.	18.47

In conclusion, the psychological framework of the Bhagavad Gita is not merely a spiritual exhortation but a structured system of cognitive and emotional regulation. By moving the individual from despair to clarity through specific techniques of reframing, detachment, and self-regulation, it offers a timeless, evidence-based paradigm for mental health that complements and enriches modern psychotherapy.

The jurisprudential paradigm: dharma as constitutional value

A significant reconsideration of Indian law doctrine is required for the transition of the psychological internalism of the Bhagavad Gita to the jurisprudential externalism of that same text. While the modern definition of law is often based on Austin's definition of law as 'the command of the sovereign and enforced through sanctions,' in India, as exemplified by the Gita and the Dharmashastras, this definition has been inverted. The monarch is not considered the source of law; rather, he/she is considered a party to the law. In short, the Dharma serves as the 'Basic Structure' doctrine of the universe, binding all individuals, both rulers and ruled. In order to fully grasp the contemporary relevance of the Gita's lessons, one must be able to delineate the subtleties of archaic vocabulary that are often not well captured in the English equivalents. In the following section, the paper will explore how the Supreme Court of India has interpreted the Gita's ethical mandates, namely, the interrelationships between Dharma, Dandaniti (Science of Punishment), Neeti (Rules), and Nyaya (Justice), in order to construct a secular, constitutionally compatible framework of duty and justice.

3.1 Defining dharma, danda, and neeti: the Architecture of Justice

According to the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, of which the Gita is a key philosophical, spiritual, and theological text, Dharma refers to the ideal state or principle of ethics, and has its roots in the word 'Dhri,' meaning to nourish or provide for. In this way, Dharma is seen as the law of nature, with it being the absolute moral law that nourishes and sustains the social order. The goal of Dharma is to promote the welfare and benefit of all beings, whereas Dandaniti refers to the study and practice of the tools of punishment. Ancient Indian legal thought argues for the need for punishment due to the fact that humankind's inherent nature is to exploit others through Matsya Nyaya, or the law of the fish.

Nonetheless, legal scholars such as Kautilya and Manu maintain that Danda exists solely to serve as a servant to Dharma. A King who brings punishment via the rod of punishment without following Dharma will destroy himself and his kingdom (Subha, 2022). This is a parallel to the

modern concept of Rule of Law as found in modern constitutions, including the Constitution of India. The King's (Executive's) position as King/executive does not equate him to the Law but rather establishes that he is only the executor of Dharma (the Constitution). Thus, should an executive violate Rajadharma and harm the interests of his citizens, then that Executive, too, will no longer be legitimate or hold authority in the state as it no longer adheres to Rajadharma. Therefore, the Gita does not encourage Arjuna to fight for the sake of violence (Danda); rather, it commands him to use Danda to reinstate Dharma after the disruption of the constitutional framework (Jois, 2010).

Furthermore, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (2009) has revitalised the distinction between Neeti and Nyaya to critique the limitations of modern legal formalism. Neeti relates to justices within an organisation and how fair procedures through which rules and their governing structures or foundations exist as an organisation. This is illustrated by the character of Arjuna's refusal to fight within Chapter 1 in that it was grounded within the principles of Neeti, as he references the principles of the Kula-dharma or set of social equity that prohibits killing one's relatives or teachers and asks Krishna, "How is it possible for me to shoot arrows against Bhishma or Drona?" (Gita 2.4). At this point in time, Arjuna is immobilised by the written laws of Neeti. Nyaya is the application or enactment of justice within reality and the resolution of acts of injustice occurring in both types of scenarios. Krishna questions Arjuna's following of his commitment to Neeti by providing him with a contextual reference for the greater principle of Nyaya in that if Arjuna were to opt out of engaging in battle by acting out of conscience (a procedural win), it would ultimately result in the establishment of tyrannical rule (a substantive loss of justice). Thus, it is stated in the Gita that the higher state of value or priority is the principle of Nyaya over the procedural vehicle of Neeti, indicating that legal formality can be less valuable than the substantive principle of justice. This is an invitation to today's Indian judges to look to the spirit of the law rather than its literal text when binding to absurd outcomes or unjust resolutions, and is consistent with the principle of purposive construction of the law, where substantive justice transcends procedural rigidity (Sen, 2009).

3.2 The secular dharma: analysis of *A.S. Narayana Deekshitulu* (1996)

Dharma's involvement within a secular constitutional system creates a doctrinal dilemma because the Constitution of India requires the State

not to take a stance on any religion. However, at the same time, the Constitution allows regulation of secular matters related to religious organisations. This argument was tested in a Supreme Court case titled *A. S. Narayana Deekshitulu v. State of Andhra Pradesh* (1996). The issue before the Supreme Court was whether the Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Act, 1987 was constitutionally valid. The Act removed hereditary succession to the position of Archakas (temple priests), and thus a challenge was brought forth claiming that hereditary succession was a foundational component of religious practice and subsequently safeguarded by Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.

The Court ruled that although religious rituals (Upasana) are protected by religion, the appointment, service conditions and succession of priests are secular activities related to religion and are, therefore, subject to State regulation under Article 25 (2)(a). The Court affirmed the established constitutional position that while religious beliefs and practices are protected, the administrative and or financial aspects of religious institutions may be controlled or regulated by the State for the purposes of social reform (*A.S. Narayana Deekshitulu v. State of A.P.*, 1996).

To clarify the distinction, the Court examined the concept of Dharma. Citing from the Bhagavad Gita and the Karanaparva of the Mahabharata, the Court concluded that Dharma is not the same as religion (pantha). In essence, Dharma refers to one's responsibilities, duties and ethical behaviour that uphold the structure of society and the welfare of all. Religion mainly deals with personal beliefs, faith or modes of worship. The quotations from Hindu scripture were used to explain the concept of dharma in an Indian civilisational context, but were not relied upon as religious authority.

The Court reiterated that secularism in India does not suggest a hostile attitude towards religions but allows for the intervention by the government to eliminate abuses of religious institutions, and to ensure that the institutions operate in accordance with the values set forth in the Constitution. The hereditary priesthood system, in which religious institutions rely upon succession from father to son, is not vital to the practice of religion and is susceptible to change to promote optimal efficiency and inclusion.

The opinion of the court shows that ethical principles derived from the traditional Indian philosophical systems can inform our construction of the Constitution and that this construction will not violate the secular and

pluralistic nature of the Constitution. Thus, it creates a framework for future legal scholarship on the duty-based ethical systems established in India.

3.3 Contemporary judicial discourse: environmental ethics, restorative justice, and secular morality

Over the last few years, we have seen an interesting development in Indian legal thought. Courts are increasingly using the ethical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita when interpreting and applying laws & other rights, particularly so in cases related to public policy, environmental management, and liability for criminal behaviour. Many recent decisions from 2024 through 2025 highlight how strongly judges are relying on these ethical principles from the Gita, a marked change relative to how incidental they were prior to this new development in legal history. In bringing together the Rule of Law and the Rule of Dharma, both are seen as being derived from the same source, the teachings from ancient Indian philosophers, a universal Moral Science that can provide the foundation for a just society.

In Environmental Jurisprudence, the Supreme Court of India has issued an important ruling in *In Re: T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad* (2024). This case involved the conservation of Sacred Groves (Orans) in Rajasthan, which had been adversely affected by the disappearance of formal notifications that would have prevented their degradation as a result of their designation as Community Protected Forests. In its ruling, the three-member bench of the Court relied on the metaphysical realism of the Gita to support the state's obligation to conserve Sacred Groves. In particular, the Court specifically referenced Chapter 13, Verse 20: "The whole of Nature (Prakriti) is the source of all Material Things, the Maker of Material Things, and all Material Things that come into being are made by Nature (Prakriti), and the source of Consciousness is the Spirit (Purusha)." Citing this verse demonstrates that, while in the past, Forests have been exclusively viewed through a utilitarian lens as Resources for Economic Benefit, the Court is now recognising that Forests are also living entities (Prakriti), which form an integral part of Human Consciousness (Purusha). By means of its own philosophical foundation, the Court has mandated the Union of India to enact a federal policy for the protection of Sacred Groves in order to convert this fundamental concept of Lokasamgraha (Universal Welfare) from Scriptural Connexion to Concrete Legal Policy (*In Re: T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad*, 2024).

This interpretative approach has also been applicable to the field of criminal justice and specifically restorative justice through the interpretation of restorative justice by using Interpretive Legal Theory. In *Arun Kumar Mohanty v. State of Odisha* (2025), the High Court of Orissa found that the principles of repentance in the Gita could be used as the basis to quash a criminal complaint of cheating where the accused had voluntarily returned all money received under a mistaken identity. Justice Sibho Sankar Mishra stated that it is necessary to weigh the ethical behaviour of an individual after the commission of an offence in conjunction with the stringent application of *mens rea* (guilty mind). Citing the Gita as stating that the true experience of guilt along with sincere repentance and service to God leads to redemption and rest, the Court established that a person who has made an ethical correction in goodness may not have the need to submit to the retributive system of the State, from a mechanical standpoint. This concept is in line with the idea presented in the Gita that through his or her transforming experience from within, rather than from external punishment, a person can heal societal wounds rather than strictly enforcing the rules of law through the imposition of penalties for technical breaches (*Arun Kumar Mohanty v. State of Odisha*, 2025).

The judiciary has also been confronted with how secularism co-exists with how the Gita may be used pedagogically, as demonstrated in the 2025 landmark decision of the *Arsha Vidya Parampara Trust v Union of India*. The Madras High Court overturned a decision by the Ministry of Home Affairs that denied FCRA registration to the Trust, citing the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita as a ‘religious activity.’ Justice G.R. Swaminathan determined that the Bhagavad Gita should be regarded not just as a ‘religious text’ but also as a Moral Science (i.e., Ethics) text and as a Rashtriya Dharma Shastra, i.e., a National Scripture of Duty. Additionally, he stated that the Bhagavad Gita belongs to an all-encompassing Bharatiya (Indian) civilisation; therefore, using a narrow sectarian lens to judge the Gita dismisses its ability to apply to all humanity and cannot define the underlying universal moral truths of humans’ duties through the Gita. This ruling has jurisprudential ramifications, in that it distinguishes Dharma from Pantha; that is, civilizational ethics versus sectarian religion; hence, it supports incorporating Gita-based values into secular education and activities of the public trust without doing violence to the secularism established by the Constitution (*Arsha Vidya Parampara Trust v. Union of India*, 2025).

At last, in the case of *Rajeev Dagar v. State & Ors.*, 2024, the Gita is noted by the Delhi High Court to be used as an example of mediation and not litigation in relation to Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). In several places throughout the judgment, the Delhi High Court has referred to the teachings of the Gita to reinforce the belief that mediation is a greater tool than litigation. Additionally, the Gita is structured in such a way that it resembles a written dialogue and is thus an excellent model for resolving crises. More courts across India are now recommending that Judges move away from simply being arbiters of the legal term law and become more active in resolving disputes between parties as Mediators and, as a result, resolve the real cause of the dispute instead of just the conditions alone. As a result of the combined jurisprudence of the Supreme Court and High Courts in India, the teachings of the Gita will serve as a living source of law which imparts the necessary ethical framework to enable the harmony of statutory certainty (Neeti) with the realisation of true justice (Nyaya) within the context of Indian Society (*Rajeev Dagar v. State & Ors.*, 2024).

4. Conclusion

Analysis of the Bhagavad Gita within the context of this study shows that it is not simply a work on religion or theology. It is one of the first great works of philosophy to argue that there must be a relationship between the way you think and feel and what you do. The main conclusion of this study is that Dharma (or ethic) is the means by which an individual's mind and character come into agreement with the way of life of the community. This is not something that can happen overnight but requires the practice and dedication of the practitioner. There is a growing concern within professional ethics, whether in the legal or psychological field, that the professional and the individual are becoming separate entities, which has resulted in the presence of many professionals who have lost their ethical compass. The Gita shows that an individual must develop their psychological abilities before they can be effective within the community because there is no 'Just Society' without the development of the psychological abilities of the individuals who are a part of it. An individual such as Arjuna in the story will never experience success and resolution if they only change the laws of war or society without first transforming themselves from a state of despondency (Vishada) to one of equanimity (Yoga). The message of the Gita is that the 'Rule of Law' can only be created by following the 'Rule of Self.' An individual who adheres to their Svadharma (duty) with the Nishkama

Karma (attachment) principle will create harmony between their own will and the cosmic order, thus reducing social conflict while increasing social welfare (Lokasamgraha).

Legal education today is overwhelmingly based on the ideas of Western legal positivism, which defines law simply as an order from power with penalties. While this model might be valid, it does not teach students how to develop the intrinsic sense of morality necessary for real justice. This article suggests that the Bar Council of India and law schools incorporate the schools of thought from the Gita into their ethics training. More defined than that, all ethics training for lawyers and judges must include the concept of Karma Yoga as a model for the ethics of lawyers and judges in the courtroom and advocacy settings. This training would allow lawyers and judges to operate within the ideals of engagement free from outside pressures such as populism, corruption, or a cognitive bias that might preclude them from effectively supporting the Basic Structure of the Indian Constitution. The case of *A.S. Narayana Deekshitulu* illustrates how the constitutional values of Dharma provide the Secular Code of Conduct for society as social integration. Therefore, training for all next-generation lawyers and judges must be modified and include Dharmic Jurisprudence modules in addition to other traditional legal subjects, which will contrast the procedural justice of Neeti with the realised justice of Nyaya, so as to encourage future legal practitioners to strive for substantive equity as opposed to strictly adhering to technical compliance with all laws.

Further, as medical and psychological educators, they have direct correlations to their practices and changing practice. The increase of burnout, compassion fatigue, and moral injury among health care providers shows that the current bioethics, primarily focused on autonomy and beneficence, are not adequately protecting the mental wellness of the healer. Therefore, this article suggests that the National Medical Commission (NMC) should include concepts derived from the Gita in to the AETCOM module (Attitudes, Ethics, and Communications), as prescribed by the Medical Council of India, so that future medical providers benefit from having principle of Atmaupamya (seeing oneself in others) as a more powerful foundation than simply clinical detachment to establish a sense of empathy for their patients. Moreover, additional techniques used in the practice of palliative care and grief counselling, such as cognitive restructuring, can be established through the application of the teachings found in the Gita, including the concept that the Atman (the true self) is not bound to the suffering body.

Additionally, training medical students in concepts such as Nishkama Karma can protect students from the paralysis of the fear of failing, allowing them to develop a complete focus on the duty of care, rather than the outcomes of their treatment.

The purpose of bringing the Bhagavad Gita to bear on today's professional education is twofold: it provides a means to decolonise India's intellectual environment and validates Indigenous Knowledge Systems through their use in modern professional curricula; and it represents a holistic approach to address many of the ongoing issues facing modern societies, particularly with regard to issues of professional isolation.

By bridging the artificial dichotomy between an individual as a secular professional and as a spiritual being, the Bhagavad Gita offers a means for building a new, free, and just society, in which fulfilling one's Duty is viewed not as a burden, but rather as liberation. As envisioned by the Bhagavad Gita, today's modern professional legal and medical systems will not only have technicians who are proficient at delivering services related to their respective disciplines, but also be composed of Karma Yogis; individuals who are trained to serve their communities with the skill and efficiency of an Expert and the tranquillity of a Sage. In the unison of Dharma, Nyaya, and Yoga as established by the Bhagavad Gita lies the blueprint for a future society that will be resilient, ethical, and just.

Notes

1. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is a brief, 10-item self-report questionnaire used to screen for general psychological distress, particularly anxiety and depression, in adults by asking how often they experienced certain emotional states in the past 30 days, with scores indicating levels from low to severe distress, guiding potential referrals for mental health support.
2. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, is a structured, eight-week program using meditation, yoga, and body awareness to teach non-judgmental present-moment awareness, helping individuals manage stress, chronic pain, anxiety, and other conditions by changing their relationship with difficult thoughts and sensations, rather than trying to eliminate them.

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BOOK REVIEWS

H.K. Thakur & B. Bhatia (2025). Democracy, multiculturalism and security – Indo-Canadian relations under the shadow of Khalistan

Annapurna Nautiyal

The recent “referendum” on Khalistan organised by Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) in Ottawa on November 24, 2025, has reignited a diplomatic tinderbox between India and Canada. The word ‘Khalistan’, in the Punjabi language means ‘Land of the Pure’ representing the desire of a small group of Sikhs who consider themselves as a separate nation in the northern Indian state of Punjab. The Government of India has raised concerns over pro-Khalistan actions in Canada, stating that they pose a significant risk to India’s sovereignty and security. The Khalistan Movement was originated in the 1970s which sought to establish a sovereign state governed by Sikhs. It acquired significant influence in 1980s affecting the Punjab state of India. The book titled “Democracy, Multiculturalism, and Security: Indo-Canadian Relations under the Shadow of Khalistan”, edited by Harish K. Thakur and Binesh Bhatia (2025) is anthology of research papers from scholars, academicians and subject experts dissecting the Khalistan movement’s diaspora dimension. In June 2023, the assassination of Advocate Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a renowned Sikh activist for the Khalistan cause in Canada has substantially influenced India-Canada ties. Nijjar was a separatist, seen by some people as a prominent advocate for Sikh rights within the community, while for others, notably the Indian government, a terrorist engaged in operations supporting referendums and secessionism. The edited volume by Thakur and Bhatia (2025) is a compilation of scholarly papers divided into two sections. Section-I presents a brief overview of the bilateral relations between India and Canada with special reference to the recent tensions and Section-II briefly presents the prefaces of

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different chapters compiled in the volume. The Bilateral Relations among India-Canada can be traced as a part of the British Empire. The shared colonial past facilitated early migrations and cultural exchanges. Canada and Australia were granted Dominion Status by the British in 1901, whilst the Indian battle for independence ended in 1947. This book focuses a critical blueprint for understanding and perhaps resolving the current tensions as recently vividly articulated by High Commissioner Patnaik exposing the performativity absurdity of SFJ's referendum. A non-binding poll among Canadian Sikhs advocating for a sovereign Khalistan carved from India. As the High Commissioner noted, "Referendums have a certain process. This is a referendum by Canadians done in Canada". Drawing on Canada's own Quebec referendums of 1980 and 1995 formal exercises in democratic self-determination, Patnaik highlights the illegitimacy of SFJ's stunt, which drew a modest crowd but amplified global headlines. The event's optics, featuring banners of violence, further inflamed sensitivities, prompting Patnaik's analogy: "Imagine a situation where some other country would do the same thing with Quebec...how do you feel?".

Thakur and Bhatia's volume frames this as emblematic of a broader pathology. In the opening remarks of former Consul General of Canada, Patrick Hébert message notes "India as an important partner in its Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) that focuses on democracy, diversity, and multiculturalism as core values". The chapter by Sanjeev Kumar examines the influence of Khalistan Movement on the relationship between India and Canada specifically focusing on formation of militant groups like the Sikh Youth Federation, Babbar Khalsa and the World Sikh Organization, reveals how it led to the loss of innocent lives in Punjab. Kumar further analyses Justin Trudeau's connections to the Khalistan Movement and his partnership with the New Democratic Party (NDP), which publicly supported the Khalistan Referendum in Canada.

Other researcher Pavithran Nambiar focuses on how the Khalistan Movement in Canada, bolstered by tacit support from the Canadian government, has played a pivotal role in reinvigorating the struggle in Punjab. The recent assassination of Hardeep Nijjar, the leader of the Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) in Canada, by two unidentified individuals and the Canadian Premier's accusation of India being responsible for the murder, not only emboldened Khalistani militants but also strained India's bilateral relations with Canada.

The common objectives of democracy and multi-cultural aspects among India-Canada relation need to address to implications of the Khalistan

referendum demanding priorities of India's national interest in territorial integrity, sovereignty, and unity, a multi-pronged approach. Enhancing diplomatic efforts to counter external propaganda by engaging its community diaspora through cultural and economic ties will definitely emphasize India's democratic interest. Domestically, investing in the Punjab's development will revive its agriculture, education, and job creation to alleviate economic grievances fueling separatism could be one solution. Further, a need of strengthening legal framework against Khalistan to prevent hate speech and foreign interference without suppressing legitimate Sikh rights is the need of hour. By promoting interfaith dialogues and national integration programs may foster harmony and witness strengthened bilateral ties and may avoid direct referendums, as they risk balkanization. The editors suggest diaspora dialogue, media literacy and intelligence sharing for inclusive governance reforms among India-Canada relations to address stability in Khalistan issue.

H.K. Thakur. Sardar Patel: an icon of India's unity

Bhawna Sharma & Misbahuddin Yousufzai

The present-day political and ideological landscape of India has seen the reassessment of Indian national leadership, shaped by the post-globalisation dynamics like the identity politics, rise of populist outcry, and shifts in party dominance patterns. The emergence of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as a vehement nationalist force in India has stirred up debates around the legacies of prominent leaders such as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose, V. D. Savarkar, Bhagat Singh, and B. R. Ambedkar, which has resulted in recalibration of historical narratives about India's freedom struggle and nation-building. Sardar Patel, however, has been accorded particular prominence as the "Iron Man of India," symbolising national unity, administrative rigor, and pragmatic political leadership. State-sponsored commemorations such as Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (RED) and monumental projects like the *Statue of Unity* reflect this renewed emphasis.

It is in this backdrop and the evolving historiographical and political context that *Sardar Patel: an icon of India's unity* intervenes. The volume moves beyond the conventional rhetoric of presenting Sardar Patel as the integrator of 564 princely states and presents him as a master mass mobiliser, institution-builder, adept minister, constitutional thinker, and realist statesman. Comprising twelve thematic chapters, the book examines Sardar Patel's role as a grand mass mobiliser, in secularism, education, governance, party organisation, civil services, internal security, and foreign policy, contending that his vision of unity was grounded in strong institutions, social harmony, and responsible citizenship principles central to the making of the modern Indian state.

The volume builds upon and critically extends a substantial body of scholarship on Patel. Besides the multi-volume projects like *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, edited by Durga Das (1974), *Select Correspondence of Sardar Patel* edited by V. Shanker (1974),

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and *Collective Works of SVP*, edited by P.N. Chopra (1991), the volume also draws from the biographies and appraisals by V.P. Menon (1956), D.V. Tahmankar (1970), P.N. Chopra (1977), Maniben Patel's diary (1989), Rajmohan Gandhi (1990), N.D. Parikh (1996), Vijay Tendulkar (2002), Balraj Krishna (2012), Sinha & Roy (2018) and Kothari (2019). All these volumes have variously framed Patel as a realist nationalist, a staunch mass mobiliser during the freedom movement, a stabilising post-independence force, an integrator, an inspiration behind the modern Indian civil service, a constitution maker and a strategic thinker. Thakur's edited volume distinguishes itself by integrating these strands and offering a multi-dimensional reassessment that combines institutional, ideological, ethical, and strategic perspectives.

Patel as mass leader, organiser, and nationalist

Several chapters of the volume foreground Sardar Patel as a strong organisational strategist, discipline maker, saviour of Congress and mass mobiliser. Amit Dholakia's analysis of the Bardoli, Borsad and Kheda Satyagraha presents how Patel evolved as a leader, displaying his exceptional power to translate the complex political demands into accessible language and mobilise both rural and urban constituencies. Abha Chauhan's chapter traces Patel's wide-ranging ideological trajectory situating his political engagement across peasant mobilisation, the swadeshi movement, satyagraha, advocacy for women's rights, and interventions in minority and tribal affairs portraying him as a pragmatic reformer guided by civic values, secularism, and social harmony.

On nation, constitution and secularism

A major strength of the volume lies in its treatment of Sardar Patel as a constitution maker and a critical constitutional thinker. Investigating the role of Patel as Chairman of the *Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights* Ranjita Chakraborty highlights his decisive influence on constitution-making, particularly his role in shaping fundamental rights, federal balance, civil services, and national security. Patel's view about the rights of minorities and individual freedom and social stability constitute the defining feature of his constitutional philosophy.

Harish K. Thakur in chapter five undertakes a critical and comparative evaluation of the conceptualizations of nationhood and nationalism articulated by Patel, Nehru, Gandhi, Tagore, and Aurobindo, thus foregrounding the philosophical foundations, and political implications that guided their notions of the Indian nation. Thakur argues that his nationalism was state-centred and closer to constitutional patriotism than

cultural nationalism. Khalid Mohammed further strengthens this idea when he contrasts Sardar Patel's secular nationalism with Marxism, communalism, and imperialism. Khalid also highlights how Sardar opposed the idea of a Hindu Rashtra and stood firm against sectarian politics, including the banning of the RSS following Gandhi's assassination.

Civil services, and internal security

The volume provides a significant discussion of the debates on governance and administration. Terry Beitzel assesses Sardar's enduring legacy in public administration, critiquing contemporary challenges such as corruption, elitism, and lack of accountability. Beitzel also argues that Sardar Patel's emphasis on integrity, impartiality, and service to citizens is an ever-relevant idea. Pavithran Nambiar, relying on theories like Domestic Impact, Government Legitimacy, and Power Distance analyses Patel's view of internal security and state consolidation. Nambiar also highlights how Sardar Patel transformed the colonial civil services into patriotic national service and emphasised the interdependence of security, social justice, and transparency.

Strategic Realism

Though explored scarcely, the volume consistently reflects upon Sardar Patel's strategic vision and counsel on foreign policy. Vinay Kaura explores the counterfactual possibility of Sardar Patel's becoming as first Indian Prime Minister, suggesting that his strategic realism and emphasis on military preparedness and intelligence consolidation might have altered India's trajectory on Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Tibet. Suresh R. and Rakhee Viswambharan examine Sardar Patel's view of China and Tibet. The correspondence between Nehru and Zhou Enlai, argue the authors, establish that Patel foresaw the strategic consequences of China's actions and advocated a firmer stance. Sardar Patel as a prescient thinker had a deep understanding of the long-term national security. One interesting take is by Chandrakant Langare and Charu C. Mishra who examine Patel's portrayal in Ketan Mehta's film *Sardar* (1993). The author argue that the cinematic representation of sardar Patel has played a significant role in reviving Patel's marginalised legacy. It has also enthused public reflection on the dynamics of post-independence politics in India. The chapter also notes the importance of cultural memory in shaping political understanding.

Therefore, the volume *Sardar Patel: an icon of India's unity* succeeds in presenting Patel as a great statesman whose contributions to the success

of Indian national movement, integration of Indian princely states, constitutional governance, consolidation of Indian administrative service, and strategic realism remain ever relevant. The volume's pluralistic approach avoids hagiography while offering a nuanced reassessment of Sardar Patel situating him within the broader challenges of postcolonial state-building. The volume not only acquaints the reader with the available prominent literature on Sardar but also encourages critical re-engagement with Patel's ideas, and thus book makes a significant contribution to Indian political history. The book is particularly significant for the scholars of nationalism, governance, strategic thinking and constitutional development. The volume bringing together twelve scholars with diverse areas of expertise offers a timely and valuable intervention in contemporary debates on leadership, unity, and the nature of the Indian state.

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