

## Existential Psychotherapy: Insights from the Srimad Bhagavad Gita

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### Abstract

Existential psychotherapy offers a profound framework for addressing the fundamental anxieties of human existence, including death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. Traditionally rooted in Western philosophical thought, this modality has primarily evolved within Euro-American contexts, often overlooking the wealth of psychological insight embedded in Eastern philosophical traditions. The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, a seminal Indian scripture, presents a narrative deeply resonant with existential concerns, offering psychospiritual responses to suffering, crisis, and the quest for self-realization. Through a theoretical and interpretive analysis, this paper explores the integration of existential psychotherapy with insights from the *Gita*, focusing on themes such as *atma jñāna* (self-knowledge), *karma yoga* (action without attachment), and *svadharma* (personal duty). The existential crisis of Arjuna, as portrayed in the *Gita*, mirrors the human condition's confrontation with despair, choice, and moral ambiguity. Krishna's dialogue provides a therapeutic model that facilitates meaning-making and spiritual transcendence. This paper argues that the *Gita*'s teachings can complement and deepen existential psychotherapy, particularly within culturally diverse therapeutic contexts. The study contributes to the expanding discourse on culturally integrated psychotherapies and positions the *Gita* as a valuable psychospiritual resource for clinicians addressing existential anxiety in Indian and global populations.

**Keywords:** Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Existential Psychotherapy, Meaning-Making, Self-Realization, Death Anxiety

### 1. Introduction

Existential psychotherapy, as a clinical tradition and philosophical approach, is concerned with the human being's confrontation with the ultimate concerns of life: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). It arises from existential philosophy, drawing upon European thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus, all of whom wrestled with the precariousness, ambiguity, and moral responsibility of

existence. Psychotherapists such as Viktor Frankl (1959), Rollo May (1958), and Irvin Yalom (1980) subsequently translated these existential insights into therapeutic practices that support individuals grappling with existential anxiety, despair, and the search for meaning.

Yet, despite its emphasis on the universality of existential suffering, existential psychotherapy has historically remained anchored in Western cultural worldviews, often underemphasizing the spiritual dimensions of human experience (Cooper, 2003). This raises an important question for transpersonal and indigenous psychologies: Can the insights of ancient Eastern traditions, particularly those rooted in Indian philosophical texts, be meaningfully integrated into contemporary existential therapy?

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most revered texts of Indian spiritual literature, presents a profound dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and his charioteer and spiritual guide, Krishna. Set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the Gita begins with Arjuna's existential collapse—marked by psychological paralysis, moral confusion, and spiritual despair—as he confronts the prospect of engaging in fratricidal war (Radhakrishnan, 1948). Krishna's response unfolds across 700 verses, offering a layered psychospiritual framework that encompasses metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and spiritual liberation. Arjuna's crisis mirrors the therapeutic dilemmas of individuals struggling with anxiety, moral conflict, and the fear of death—hallmarks of existential neurosis (Frankl, 1959).

The central objective of this paper is to explore how key existential concerns are addressed within the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, and to examine the potential for integrating its teachings with contemporary existential psychotherapy. The research rests on the hypothesis that the Gita's spiritual approach to suffering and meaning-making provides valuable resources for both therapists and clients, particularly in culturally sensitive, spiritually oriented, or Indian contexts.

This paper will begin with a review of literature on existential psychotherapy and the Gita's existential motifs. It will then present a comparative analysis of core therapeutic concerns—death, freedom, responsibility, isolation, and meaning—through the lens of both existential psychology and Gita philosophy. A theoretical synthesis will follow, suggesting a model of existential psychospiritual integration rooted in *karma yoga*, *atma jñāna*, and *svadharma*. The paper concludes with a discussion of clinical implications, cultural relevance, and future directions in integrative psychotherapy.

## 2. Review of Literature

Existential psychotherapy and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* both attempt to address the same core human predicament: the suffering that arises from the awareness of existence. While existential psychotherapy developed as a modern response to 20th-century existential anxieties, the *Gita* articulates an ancient yet timeless response to inner crisis, responsibility, and self-transcendence. This review explores three major thematic dimensions:

### A. Existential Psychotherapy in Western Thought

Existential psychotherapy is not a singular school but a dynamic tradition influenced by existentialist philosophy, emphasizing subjective experience and the personal responsibility to create meaning. It posits four ultimate existential concerns (Yalom, 1980):

- **Death:** The awareness of inevitable death is both a source of existential dread and a motivator toward authentic living. According to Yalom (1980), clients often repress death awareness, but therapy helps them confront and transform it.
- **Freedom and Responsibility:** In a world devoid of inherent structure, humans bear the burden of freedom and are responsible for their choices and actions (May, 1958).
- **Isolation:** Beyond interpersonal or social loneliness lies existential isolation—an inescapable solitude of the self, which no connection can completely bridge.
- **Meaninglessness:** When traditional sources of meaning—religion, culture, or ideology—fail, individuals confront the need to construct their own purpose (Frankl, 1959).

Existential therapy thus encourages authenticity, acceptance of uncertainty, and engagement in life despite suffering. Therapists facilitate a courageous re-examination of life goals, choices, and fears, often guiding clients to confront what they have avoided.

### B. The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* and Existential Crisis

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* begins with Arjuna's moral and psychological collapse as he faces a war involving the death of relatives, teachers, and friends. His trembling limbs, dry mouth, and deep anguish (*Gita*, 1.28–30) are emblematic of a profound existential crisis. Krishna, responding not merely as a strategist but as a spiritual

psychologist, guides Arjuna toward clarity through a model that integrates knowledge (*jnana*), action (*karma*), devotion (*bhakti*), and detachment (*vairagya*).

- **Atma Jnana (Knowledge of the Self):** The soul (*atma*) is eternal and indestructible; suffering arises from misidentifying with the body and ego (*Gita*, 2.20).
- **Karma Yoga (Selfless Action):** One must act without attachment to outcomes, recognizing the impermanence of all things and aligning action with dharma (*Gita*, 3.19).
- **Svadharm (Personal Duty):** Better one's own duty, however imperfect, than another's well-performed (*Gita*, 3.35); this echoes existential authenticity.
- **Stithaprajna (Equanimity):** The ideal person remains balanced in success and failure, pleasure and pain (*Gita*, 2.56–2.57).
- **Surrender (Sharanagati):** The final teaching of the *Gita* is full surrender to the Divine will (*Gita*, 18.66), which provides an answer to existential isolation and purposelessness.

These teachings are not mere metaphysical assertions—they are therapeutic principles that resolve the crisis through an inward journey toward detachment, meaning, and spiritual alignment (Radhakrishnan, 1948; Aurobindo, 1922).

### C. Comparative Convergence and Divergence

Though developed in different cultural epochs, existential psychotherapy and the *Gita* share remarkable thematic parallels. Arjuna's inner dilemma, like that of many therapy clients, reflects uncertainty, responsibility, and death anxiety. Krishna does not offer escape from suffering but reorients Arjuna's perception: suffering is transmuted through knowledge, duty, and self-surrender.

#### Convergences:

- Both frameworks accept suffering as inherent to human existence.
- Both stress freedom, choice, and responsibility.
- Both encourage authentic living based on inner truth.
- Both promote transcendence of ego-bound identity.

#### Divergences:

- Existential therapy often presupposes an agnostic or secular worldview; the *Gita* rests on a divine-centered metaphysic.

- Western existentialism often posits existential aloneness; the Gita proposes union with the divine Self.
- Meaning in existentialism is constructed; in the Gita, it is discovered through dharma and spiritual insight.

This synthesis of literature suggests that the Gita can offer existential psychotherapy a metaphysical depth, moral direction, and spiritual anchoring—qualities often criticized as lacking in secular therapy models (Cooper, 2003; Rao, 2005).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The present paper employs a cross-cultural theoretical framework that integrates existential-phenomenological psychotherapy, Indian psychospiritual philosophy, and transpersonal psychology to examine how the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* contributes to a broader existential therapeutic paradigm. This pluralistic lens allows for a culturally nuanced interpretation of suffering, meaning-making, and personal transformation, grounded both in contemporary psychotherapy and ancient Indian thought.

#### **A. Existential-Phenomenological Foundations**

Existential psychotherapy, as articulated by May (1958), Frankl (1959), and Yalom (1980), is rooted in the phenomenological tradition that emphasizes the individual's subjective experience of existence. This approach posits that the human being is "thrown" into a world without preordained meaning and must grapple with the "ultimate concerns" of existence: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. The therapeutic process involves helping clients confront these existential givens, explore the anxiety they produce, and construct meaning authentically.

Yalom (1980) conceptualized the psychotherapist's task as facilitating existential insight, particularly around issues of responsibility, choice, and the avoidance of existential guilt. Likewise, Frankl (1959) emphasized the "will to meaning" as the core motivational force in humans and advocated for a spiritual dimension within therapeutic work through his logotherapeutic method. Together, these thinkers provide a philosophical-therapeutic scaffold upon which this study builds its comparative exploration.

#### **B. Indian Psychospiritual Psychology and the Gita**

Indian psychology, in contrast, operates from a fundamentally different ontological foundation. It assumes the existence of an immortal soul (*ātman*), the law of karma,

and the possibility of spiritual liberation (*moksha*). The *Bhagavad Gita* is emblematic of this worldview, proposing that psychological suffering arises from ignorance of the true Self (*avidyā*), attachment to impermanent objects (*moha*), and identification with the egoic self (*ahamkāra*) (Radhakrishnan, 1948).

Within this schema, transformation occurs not merely through cognitive restructuring but through *jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (righteous action), *bhakti* (devotion), and *vairagya* (detachment). The Gita's psychological model is thus both ethical and spiritual, inviting the seeker to align with cosmic order (*dharma*) and transcend dualities of pleasure and pain, success and failure, through equanimity (*stithaprajñatā*) (Aurobindo, 1922).

### **C. Transpersonal Integration: Bridging East and West**

The transpersonal psychology movement—pioneered by Maslow (1968), Grof (1976), and others—sought to integrate spiritual dimensions into psychological theory. Maslow's concept of self-transcendence as the pinnacle of human motivation and Grof's work on altered states of consciousness opened the door to reconsidering ancient spiritual texts as psychological blueprints.

Indian thinkers such as Rao (2005) and Misra (1994) have advocated for a culturally informed psychology that includes meditative states, non-dual consciousness, and the yogic path as valid domains of psychological inquiry. In this light, the *Gita* is seen not merely as a religious scripture but as a psychospiritual manual offering therapeutic metaphors, existential guidance, and models of ego dissolution.

### **D. Conceptual Mapping: Existential Concerns and Gita Themes**

As shown in Table 1, the *Bhagavad Gita* offers structured therapeutic responses to existential concerns, integrating self-knowledge, spiritual surrender, and ethical responsibility into a coherent psychospiritual model.

**Table 1**

**Theoretical Correspondence Between Existential Psychotherapy and the Gita’s Teachings**

Existential Concern	Gita-Based Concept	Therapeutic Implication
<b>Death and Mortality</b>	<i>Atma jñāna</i> (knowledge of the Self)	Transcendence of death anxiety through identification with the soul
<b>Freedom and Responsibility</b>	<i>Karma yoga</i> (non-attached action)	Embracing action without egoic clinging to outcomes
<b>Isolation</b>	<i>Bhakti</i> (surrender to the Divine)	Spiritual union as resolution of existential isolation
<b>Meaninglessness</b>	<i>Svadharmā</i> (duty aligned with nature)	Discovering meaning through rightful conduct and inner alignment

**Note.** Existential concerns are drawn from Yalom (1980), Frankl (1959), and May (1958). Gita-based psychological concepts are interpreted from *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* (Radhakrishnan, 1948; Aurobindo, 1922) and contextualized through Indian psychology perspectives (Rao, 2005; Misra, 1994).

This conceptual integration reveals the potential for a **Bhagavad Gita–inspired existential therapy**, wherein clients are guided not only to confront existential realities but to transcend them through insight (*jñāna*), duty (*dharma*), and devotion (*bhakti*).

**4. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical-interpretive methodology to analyze the convergence between existential psychotherapy and the philosophical-psychological framework of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. It is not an empirical study with participants and statistical analysis, but a conceptual inquiry employing hermeneutic and comparative philosophical analysis, grounded in both Western and Indian psychological traditions.

**a. Research Design**

The research follows a **philosophical hermeneutic design**, in which textual analysis is employed to extract, interpret, and correlate existential and psychospiritual constructs. Hermeneutics, as a method of interpretation, is appropriate for engaging

with classical texts and their psychological meanings (Gadamer, 1975; Ricoeur, 1970). Within this tradition, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is analyzed as a psychospiritual narrative addressing the existential condition.

This design is particularly suitable for the present study's objective: to bridge the psychological insights of Eastern scriptures with Western therapeutic models. The approach is also influenced by **cross-cultural psychology** and **indigenous psychotherapeutic epistemologies** (Misra & Gergen, 1993; Rao, 2005).

## **b. Source Material**

The present study relies on a carefully curated selection of primary and secondary textual sources, chosen for their philosophical, psychological, and therapeutic relevance. The **primary sources** include the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* (Gita Press Edition, 1950), which was consulted in its original Sanskrit along with Hindi-English translation, and two authoritative classical commentaries: Radhakrishnan's (1948) annotated translation and Aurobindo's (1922) psychospiritual exposition. These foundational texts provided the interpretive basis for extracting psychological constructs embedded in the Gita's teachings.

The **secondary sources** consist of key existential psychotherapy and logotherapy texts authored by Frankl (1959), May (1958), and Yalom (1980), which articulate the central themes of Western existential thought. In addition, the study draws on contributions from Indian psychology, especially the works of Rao (2005) and Misra (1994), who have advocated for the integration of indigenous Indian philosophical systems into contemporary psychological discourse. Each of these sources was critically examined to identify conceptual parallels, symbolic language, and therapeutic intentions across traditions, forming the core framework for comparative interpretation.

## **c. Analytical Procedure**

The data (i.e., the philosophical-psychological ideas within the texts) were analyzed through the following steps:

### **i. Thematic Textual Analysis**

Major existential themes (e.g., death, freedom, isolation, meaning) were first identified within existential psychotherapy literature. Parallel motifs were then extracted from the *Gita*, particularly those emerging from Arjuna's dialogue with Krishna.



## ii. Hermeneutic Interpretation

The selected verses and philosophical constructs from the *Gita* were interpreted using the lens of existential psychology, examining how the *Gita* addresses suffering, fear, responsibility, and self-transcendence.

## iii. Comparative Integration

A synthesis was created between the two systems by aligning existential concerns with the *Gita*'s spiritual prescriptions. Interpretations were guided by conceptual fidelity to both traditions—preserving the philosophical integrity of Indian metaphysics while maintaining clinical relevance to psychotherapeutic goals.

## d. Ethical and Epistemological Considerations

While this study does not involve human participants, it adheres to scholarly ethical standards by using authentic and published sources, avoiding cultural appropriation, and ensuring respectful representation of Indic traditions. Moreover, it acknowledges epistemological pluralism: the idea that multiple valid knowledge systems (Western scientific and Eastern philosophical) can contribute meaningfully to psychological healing and well-being (Rao, 2005).

In sum, this methodology aims to uncover deep structural commonalities and ontological divergences between existential therapy and the *Bhagavad Gita*, offering insights that can enrich both theoretical discourse and therapeutic practice.

## 5. Analysis

This section presents a thematic and interpretive analysis of existential concerns as addressed in existential psychotherapy and their corresponding treatment in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. Drawing from the hermeneutic-comparative methodology described earlier, the analysis identifies four major existential themes—**death and mortality**, **freedom and responsibility**, **isolation**, and **meaninglessness**—and examines how each is interpreted and resolved within the *Gita*'s philosophical framework. Each theme is analyzed as a psychological construct and then aligned with specific verses, ideas, or teachings in the *Gita*, revealing deep structural convergence as well as ontological distinctions.

### a. Death and Mortality: Atma Jñāna (Self-Knowledge) as Antidote to Death Anxiety

In existential psychotherapy, the confrontation with death is considered a fundamental source of existential anxiety (Yalom, 1980). While Western therapy encourages individuals to acknowledge and accept the inevitability of death as a condition of authentic life (May, 1958), the *Gita* offers a radically different ontological solution: the **immortality of the Self** (*ātman*).

Krishna teaches Arjuna in *Gita* 2.20:

*“na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ; ajo nityaḥ śāśvato ’yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre.”*  
(The soul is never born, nor does it ever die. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting, and primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain.)

This teaching reframes death not as annihilation but as a transition. By shifting Arjuna’s identity from the body (*deha*) to the Self (*ātman*), Krishna dissolves death anxiety at its root. In contrast to Western existentialism, which views death as final and meaning-making as emergent from that awareness (Frankl, 1959), the *Gita* proposes that true liberation (*mokṣa*) arises from realizing the soul’s imperishable nature. This insight offers a **transpersonal resolution** to what existentialists view as an **irreducible fact**.

### **b. Freedom and Responsibility: Karma Yoga as a Path of Liberated Action**

Existential psychotherapy holds that with freedom comes the weight of responsibility. Human beings, in an indifferent or meaningless universe, are free to choose their values and actions, but they must accept the existential guilt that follows from avoiding this responsibility (Yalom, 1980). The *Gita* echoes this existential emphasis on agency, but it does so within a dharmic cosmology.

Krishna instructs Arjuna to act according to his **svadharma**—his inherent moral and social duty—as a warrior:

*“niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hy akarmaṇaḥ”*  
(Perform your prescribed duty, for action is superior to inaction; *Gita*, 3.8)

He further elaborates in *Gita* 2.47:

*“karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana”*  
(You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action.)

This ethic of **non-attached action (karma yoga)** harmonizes freedom with discipline. In existential therapy, responsibility often evokes anxiety due to the burden of choice. In the Gita, responsibility (*kartavya*) is anchored in the cosmic order (*ṛta*), reducing existential paralysis by contextualizing one's freedom within a larger spiritual and moral framework. Thus, the Gita offers a model for **responsible action free from egoic obsession with outcomes**, resonating with existential themes but grounded in metaphysical assurance.

### c. Isolation and Surrender: Bhakti as the Antidote to Existential Loneliness

Yalom (1980) describes **existential isolation** as the unbridgeable gap between individuals, even within close relationships. It reflects an ontological solitude that cannot be erased by social contact. Existential therapy encourages individuals to accept this isolation as part of authentic existence.

The *Gita* offers a contrasting view—one that **transcends isolation through divine intimacy**. Krishna promises:

*“sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇam vraja”*  
(Abandon all varieties of dharma and simply surrender unto Me alone;  
*Gita, 18.66*)

This act of **śaraṇāgati (surrender to the Divine)** is not a negation of freedom but its ultimate fulfillment, replacing existential loneliness with **spiritual unity**. In therapeutic terms, this could be conceptualized as **secure attachment to a transcendent ground of being**, facilitating resilience, trust, and emotional regulation. While existentialists argue that individuals must stand alone and embrace their solitude, the *Gita* proposes that **true freedom arises not in isolation, but in devotional alignment with the Divine Self**.

### d. Meaninglessness and Svadharma: Discovering Purpose through Dharma

The existential vacuum, described by Frankl (1959), is the feeling of inner emptiness when life lacks meaning. Existential therapy often aids clients in constructing meaning through self-defined values and goals. The *Gita*, however, does not advocate for constructed meaning but for **discovered meaning**—through the discernment of one's **svadharma** (individual duty in harmony with one's nature and social role).

Krishna tells Arjuna:

“*śreyān sva-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt*”  
(*Better is one's own duty, though imperfect, than the duty of another well-performed; Gita, 3.35*)

This teaching emphasizes **existential authenticity**, not as radical individualism, but as fidelity to one's **innate nature** and role in the moral order. The *Gita* thus transforms the search for meaning from a secular construct into a **sacred realization**—a movement toward self-knowledge and ethical purpose.

As illustrated in the preceding analysis, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* offers structured resolutions to core existential concerns through its integrative psychospiritual framework. The concern of **death and mortality**, which often underlies existential anxiety (Yalom, 1980), is addressed in the *Gita* through the doctrine of *atma jñāna*—the realization that the Self (*ātman*) is eternal and indestructible. This insight reframes death not as annihilation but as a transition, offering transcendence over death anxiety through spiritual understanding (Radhakrishnan, 1948).

The existential burden of **freedom and responsibility**, characterized in psychotherapy by the necessity of making difficult, value-laden choices (May, 1958), is resolved in the *Gita* through the principle of *karma yoga*, or action without attachment to outcomes. This doctrine emphasizes responsible engagement with life while liberating the individual from egoic clinging to success or failure (Aurobindo, 1922).

**Isolation**, a foundational existential concern signifying ontological separateness, is psychospiritually reinterpreted in the *Gita* through the path of *śaraṇāgati* (surrender to the Divine). Rather than fostering despair, surrender enables union with the transcendent, thereby alleviating existential loneliness (Rao, 2005).

Lastly, the experience of **meaninglessness**, described by Frankl (1959) as the existential vacuum, is transformed through the *Gita*'s concept of *svadharma*—the pursuit of one's own innate duty in alignment with moral and spiritual order. This provides a framework for discovering authentic purpose through rightful conduct and inner alignment (Misra, 1994).

These resolutions—*atma jñāna*, *karma yoga*, *śaraṇāgati*, and *svadharma*—demonstrate how the *Gita* not only mirrors but enriches existential therapy by transforming universal human concerns into paths of psychospiritual integration.

## 6. Discussion

The comparative thematic analysis in the previous section revealed significant resonance between the existential concerns addressed by Western existential psychotherapy and the philosophical-psychological teachings of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. However, these resonances are not mere coincidences of terminology or imagery—they reflect two **differently grounded but converging worldviews** on human suffering, transformation, and meaning. The discussion that follows elaborates these convergences and divergences, while exploring the implications of this synthesis for existential psychotherapy in diverse cultural contexts.

### a. Complementarity of Existential and Gita-Based Therapeutics

The existential framework emphasizes the individual's confrontation with the "givens of existence" (Yalom, 1980)—death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness—without presupposing metaphysical answers. The Gita, by contrast, frames these challenges as symptoms of **ignorance of the Self** (*avidyā*) and proposes **atma jñāna (Self-realization)** as the solution (Radhakrishnan, 1948). This metaphysical certainty may seem antithetical to existential ambiguity; however, from a **therapeutic standpoint**, both systems aim to support the client in facing suffering, accepting responsibility, and discovering or constructing meaning.

For example, where existential therapy fosters meaning-making through values clarification and action (Frankl, 1959), the Gita advocates for meaning-realization through the discernment of one's *svadharma*—a personal, moral-spiritual path rooted in one's nature and role. Rather than negating each other, these frameworks can be **mutually enriching**: existential therapy gains metaphysical depth, while Gita psychology gains clinical applicability and cultural universality.

### b. Psychospiritual Reinterpretation of Existential Givens

The *Gita* reframes existential suffering not as a confrontation with absurdity, but as an opportunity for **inner transformation**. Arjuna's crisis is not eliminated but **transmuted into wisdom** through Krishna's dialogue. The existential givens, when viewed through the Gita's lens, become catalysts for spiritual awakening:

- Death is not an end, but a doorway to recognizing the soul's eternity.
- Freedom is not radical individualism, but **alignment with dharma**.
- Isolation is not existential abandonment, but an illusion dispelled by surrender to the Divine (*śaraṅgati*).

- Meaninglessness is not a void to be feared, but a misdirection of purpose—a condition rectified through *karma yoga*.

This **spiritual reframing of existential concerns** holds transformative power, particularly in cultural contexts where metaphysical or spiritual worldviews are normative.

### c. Clinical and Cultural Implications

#### i. Culturally Integrated Therapy in Indian Contexts

In India and other spiritually-oriented societies, clients often arrive with a worldview informed by concepts such as *karma*, *atma*, *dharmā*, and *bhakti*. Western existential psychotherapy, if presented in purely secular or individualistic terms, may seem incongruent or limited. The Gita's psychospiritual model offers a culturally resonant alternative or supplement, helping clients process existential distress in alignment with their beliefs. Therapists familiar with both traditions may be better equipped to facilitate **meaning-centered interventions** that honor the client's cultural identity.

#### ii. Implications for Transpersonal and Spiritual Therapies

The integration of the *Gita* into existential psychotherapy aligns well with the goals of **transpersonal psychology**, which emphasizes spiritual growth, self-transcendence, and non-ordinary states of consciousness (Grof, 1976; Maslow, 1968). Therapists working within transpersonal or integrative frameworks can draw upon Gita-based concepts such as *atma jñāna*, *karma yoga*, and *stithaprajñatā* to support clients navigating crises of identity, purpose, or mortality.

#### iii. Existential Authenticity and Moral Grounding

One notable contribution of the Gita is its **moral-ethical grounding of authenticity**. While existentialism values authenticity as fidelity to one's choices, the Gita anchors authenticity in **cosmic order and duty**. Arjuna's transformation is not toward self-expression but toward **self-alignment**—the realization that his true Self is not the ego but the eternal witness (*sākṣin*). In this sense, the Gita offers a **mature vision of selfhood** that integrates autonomy with humility, and choice with surrender.

### d. Limitations and Cautions

Despite its richness, the integration of the *Gita* into psychotherapy must be approached with caution:

- **Ontological Differences:** The Gita's theistic and metaphysical claims may not align with all clients' belief systems, especially in secular or Western contexts.
- **Risk of Dogmatism:** Therapists must guard against interpreting spiritual teachings in rigid or prescriptive ways.
- **Training and Competence:** Psychotherapists seeking to apply Gita-based principles must have sufficient training in both Indic philosophy and clinical psychology to avoid misapplication or reductionism.

Thus, while the Gita offers profound psychospiritual resources, its therapeutic use must be **adapted sensitively and ethically**, respecting the client's autonomy and worldview.

## 7. Conclusion

The present study set out to explore the intersections between **existential psychotherapy** and the **psychospiritual teachings of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita***. Through a detailed theoretical and thematic analysis, it became evident that the existential crises outlined in contemporary Western psychotherapy—namely, anxiety related to death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness—find profound and culturally resonant analogues in the Gita's philosophical discourse. Arjuna's existential despair on the battlefield, and Krishna's layered response through teachings on *atma jñāna*, *karma yoga*, *svadharma*, and *śaraṇāgati*, demonstrate a psychotherapeutic process deeply aligned with existential goals but rooted in metaphysical certainty and spiritual transcendence.

While existential psychotherapy calls individuals to face an uncertain and often absurd universe with courage and authenticity, the Gita offers a framework that does not eliminate existential concerns but transforms them through a spiritually grounded ontology. This shift—from despair to dharma, from ego to Self, from suffering to surrender—enables a more holistic form of healing that integrates ethics, identity, and transcendence.

The implications of this integration are particularly relevant for culturally diverse clinical settings, where clients may seek therapeutic interventions that align with their spiritual or metaphysical beliefs. The *Gita*-inspired existential approach offers a **non-pathologizing, meaning-centered model** for addressing crises of identity, responsibility, loss, and transformation. Such a model also contributes to the broader movement in psychology that seeks to decolonize mental health practices by

**recognizing indigenous philosophical systems** as legitimate sources of psychological insight (Rao, 2005).

Future work in this area could involve the empirical validation of *Gita*-based interventions, qualitative studies on client responses to psychospiritual existential therapy, and interdisciplinary collaborations between psychologists, philosophers, and spiritual practitioners. Such efforts will not only enrich the field of psychotherapy but also honor the timeless wisdom traditions that have long addressed the human condition in all its existential depth.

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