

Insights From Śrīmad Bhāgavatam For Mental Wellbeing With Special Reference Of Bhikṣu Gītā & Avadhūta Gītā

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Abstract

In the contemporary era of hyper-connectivity and relentless professional competition, mental health preservation has emerged as a critical global challenge. While modern psychological frameworks provide essential interventions, there is increasing academic interest in the longitudinal wisdom of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). This paper explores the therapeutic potential of two specific philosophical discourses within the eleventh skandha of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: the Bhikṣu Gītā and the Avadhūta Gītā. The research first analyzes the Bhikṣu Gītā, which details the transformation of a miserly Brahmin into a silent ascetic. It emphasizes a cognitive shift from external blame to radical selfaccountability.

By auditing his "internal dialogue," the protagonist identifies that suffering stems not from external circumstances or Karma, but from an undisciplined mind and the dualistic ideologies of "I-ness" (Ahankara) and "My-ness" (Mamata). The paper argues that renouncing these ego-driven constructs serves as a universal remedy for psychological distress, facilitating equanimity even amidst social persecution.

Complementing this internal audit, the Avadhūta Gītā introduces a "universal learning model" through the narrative of Lord Dattatreya. By observing twenty-four "gurus" in nature—such as the patience of the Earth, the non-attachment of the Wind, and the immutability of the Moon—the individual can refine the intellect and optimize the self. This model advocates for humility and the assimilation of wisdom from all sources, regardless of hierarchical status.

By synthesizing these ancient perspectives with Aaron Beck's modern cognitive behavioral theories on "automatic thoughts," this research demonstrates that the IKS offers a sophisticated "psychological technology." The study concludes that integrating the pedagogical lessons of the Avadhūta with the cognitive discipline of the Bhikṣu provides a sustainable framework for maintaining psychological equilibrium and enhancing the overall quality of life in the 21st century.

Keywords

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Bhikṣu Gītā, Avadhūta Gītā, Mental Well-being, Indian Knowledge System (IKS),

Research Methodology adopted

This research paper employs a qualitative, hermeneutic, and comparative methodology to explore psychological resilience through the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The study utilizes textual analysis of two specific philosophical segments of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam—the Bhikṣu Gītā and the Avadhūta Gītā—to extract ontological principles regarding mental health and self-regulation. By adopting a narrative analysis of the Ujjayini Brahmin's transformation, the paper traces the cognitive shift from externalized blame to radical self-accountability. Furthermore, the researcher applies a comparative framework, synthesizing ancient Vedic concepts such as Ahankara (ego) and Vairagya (detachment) with modern Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) principles, specifically Aaron Beck's theories on internal dialogue and automatic thoughts. Ultimately, the methodology

bridges classical scriptural exegesis with contemporary psychological discourse to propose a sustainable "psychological technology" for the modern era.

In the contemporary era, characterized by hyper-connectivity and relentless professional competition, the preservation of mental health has emerged as a critical global challenge. While modern psychological frameworks provide essential clinical interventions, there is an increasing academic interest in the longitudinal wisdom of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, a cornerstone of Purāṇic literature, offers profound ontological and psychological insights that transcend purely religious discourse, providing a robust methodology for emotional resilience and self-regulation.

This paper explores the therapeutic potential of two specific philosophical dialogues within the eleventh skandha: the Bhikṣu Gītā and the Avadhūta Gītā. The Bhikṣu Gītā introduces a cognitive shift from external blame to radical self-accountability, emphasizing the renunciation of "I-ness" (Ahankara) and "My-ness" (Mamata) as a remedy for frustration and ego-driven conflicts. Complementing this, the Avadhūta Gītā advocates for a "universal learning model," where the intellect is refined by observing the virtues of nature—ranging from the patience of the Earth to the non-attachment of the Wind. By synthesizing these ancient perspectives with modern concepts of mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral shifts, this research seeks to demonstrate how these classical texts provide a sustainable framework for maintaining psychological equilibrium and enhancing the overall quality of life.

In today's fast-paced era, maintaining mental well-being has become imperative. To achieve this, it is essential for every individual to engage in self-dialogue. A lack of such internal communication increases the risk of deteriorating mental health. Furthermore, mere dialogue is insufficient; it must be conducted in an entirely positive manner.

Individuals who consistently practice self-dialogue tend to maintain superior mental health, which, in turn, enhances the likelihood of sustained physical well-being. Optimal mental health improves the quality of daily functional activities and elevates one's overall standard of living.

Even for individuals suffering from clinical frustration or depression, engaging in self-dialogue facilitates recovery.

Modern psychology has conducted fundamental research on utilizing self-dialogue to improve and sustain mental health. According to the renowned psychologist Aaron Beck, internal dialogue is indispensable for psychological well-being.

In exploring whether the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers guidance on preserving mental health, it is observed that texts such as the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Yoga Vashistha Maharamayana, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads provide profound insights. Beyond these well-known scriptures, several other minor and major texts offer direct or indirect guidance on psychological resilience while discussing their respective subjects.

Upon investigation, two specific segments of the Srimad Bhagavatam—the Bhikshu Gita and the Avadhuta Gita—were found to contain guiding principles for preserving and enhancing the strength of the mind. This research paper aims to trace these principles and highlight how they can be effectively utilized to benefit mental health.

The Bhikshu Gita is situated within the eleventh skandha (canto) of the Srimad Bhagavatam, presented as a dialogue between Lord Krishna and his devotee, Uddhava. The contextual background is as follows: through the narrative of an ancient mendicant (bhikshu), Lord Krishna guides Uddhava on the methodologies of mastering the mind. The core teaching of the Bhikshu Gita emphasizes the critical importance of maintaining equanimity and composure; even when confronted with the distressing behavior of malevolent individuals, one should neither be perturbed nor allow their mental peace to be compromised, but instead, offer complete forgiveness.

The quintessence of this discourse lies in the realization that neither external circumstances nor other individuals are the cause of our joy or sorrow—rather, we are the sole architects of our own internal state.

The objective of the Bhikshu Gita is to provide guidance on achieving the mental stability and purity necessary for a devotee or a seeker of liberation (mumukshu) to attain the Divine.

While this spiritual goal might be disregarded by an atheist, the distinctiveness of the Bhikshu Gita lies in its universal utility; if its teachings are embraced objectively for the sake of mental health preservation, they prove equally beneficial to believers and non-believers alike. Indeed, the primary purpose of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, Patanjali Yoga Darshana, and Ayurveda is God-realization or Brahmaprapti. However, even if one sets aside this primary aim and views these texts as secondary tools for maintaining psychological well-being, they remain profoundly beneficial.

To summarize the narrative Krishna shared with Uddhava: in ancient times, there lived a Brahmin in the city of Ujjayini. Through agriculture and trade, he had amassed vast wealth, yet he was exceptionally miserly, greedy, and the very embodiment of wrath. He never spoke kindly to relatives or guests, and he neither utilized his wealth for virtuous deeds (dharma) nor for personal enjoyment; he merely guarded it. Consequently, his family lived in constant distress, and he suffered a decline in both his social and spiritual standing.

Eventually, his wealth began to deplete through theft, familial disputes, and accidents like fire until he was left with nothing. His relatives abandoned him, and he was consumed by overwhelming anxiety. The sudden loss of wealth he had protected with his life left his heart scorched and his mind filled with grief. However, this profound distress eventually triggered a paradigm shift, leading to a sense of detachment (vairagya) toward worldly affairs.

Instead of succumbing to despair, he began a dialogue with his own mind, reflecting on his wasted life. It is noteworthy that despite losing everything, he maintained mental control and did not allow himself to drift toward extreme thoughts like suicide. Instead, he engaged in rigorous self-examination regarding the root causes of his predicament.

In his introspection, the mendicant observes:

Just as a minor skin ailment can destroy the beauty of the entire body, so too can a small amount of greed negate a successful life and all inherent virtues.

He identifies fifteen evils—theft, violence, falsehood, hypocrisy, lust, anger, pride, ego, divisiveness, enmity, distrust, competition, debauchery, gambling, and intoxication—that people mistakenly associate with the pursuit of wealth. For one seeking true well-being, these are not means to an end but are "evils" disguised as "wealth" (artha). He realizes that even the closest kin can turn into enemies over greed. Ultimately, he laments the loss of his vital years, strength, and intellect, realizing he had discarded the very tools that the wise use to attain liberation.

In the Brahmin's reflections, there is a distinct absence of overarching negativity. Where resentment does appear, it is directed solely toward his own past improper conduct; such self-reproach serves a constructive purpose, acting as a catalyst for rigorous self-examination and subsequent behavioral transformation. His entire contemplative process functions as a comprehensive "scanning" of his past actions, from which he derives critical life lessons.

The zenith of his positive psychological shift is evident in his concluding remarks. The mendicant reasons that his dire circumstances are, in fact, a manifestation of divine grace. He posits that had he not reached this nadir, he would have remained oblivious to his systemic failures.

He observes:

"It is only through this predicament that I am able to evaluate my entire existence. This situation has granted me the realization of the inherent suffering within worldly life and bestowed upon me the gift of detachment (vairagya). To navigate the ocean of worldly existence without being overwhelmed by its tribulations, detachment is the only viable vessel. I have now reached a state where I must live the remainder of my life with utmost mindfulness."

Concluding this narrative, Lord Krishna explains to Uddhava that, having fortified his resolve through such internal dialogue, the Brahmin relinquished the dualistic ideologies of "I" and

"mine." Consequently, he attained a state of profound tranquility and transitioned into a silent ascetic (muni). He liberated himself from previous attachments to places, objects, and individuals, achieving total mastery over his mind and senses.

It is argued here that the relinquishment of the dual ideologies of "I" and "mine" serves as a universal remedy for nearly all forms of psychological distress. Mental instability often originates from two core perceptions: the feeling of not being heard and the feeling of not being loved. It is crucial to recognize that mental ill-health manifests not only as an inferiority complex or a lack of self-confidence but also through intense anger, arrogance, the belittling of others, and an obsession with exerting dominance.

The sense of being unloved leads to a deep inferiority complex, culminating in frustration and, eventually, clinical depression. Conversely, the feeling of being unheard breeds extreme anger and egoism, causing a loss of self-control and resulting in irrational behavior that invites self-destruction. To prevent this chain of misfortune, the abandonment of "I-ness" (Ahankara) and "My-ness" (Mamata) is essential. The mendicant's example illustrates this clearly; it was only after renouncing these sentiments that he attained profound peace.

His subsequent equanimity was so absolute that his behavior became a complete inversion of his former self. Having destroyed all attachments to place, object, and person, he began wandering through cities and villages. The Bhikshu Gita describes the severe tribulations he faced from malevolent individuals: some would seize his staff or water-pot, others would steal his robes. While he sat by the river to eat the alms he had gathered, people would harass him—labeling him a thief, physically assaulting him, or binding him with ropes. Those who knew his past accused him of religious hypocrisy, claiming he had only turned to asceticism because his wealth was gone and his kin had cast him out. In addition to these social persecutions, he endured physical ailments such as fever and cold.

Despite reaching the upper limits of physical and mental suffering, his mind remained unperturbed. He maintained the conviction that his situation was the result of his own past actions (Karma). However, the Bhikshu Gita elevates the discourse on mental health to a higher plane by offering a nuanced interpretation of the Law of Karma. While the conventional theory suggests we must inevitably reap what we sow, the Bhikshu Gita draws attention to a more fundamental element: the mind as the primary driver of action.

In his internal dialogue, the mendicant asserts that neither other humans, nor deities, nor celestial bodies (planets), nor even "Action" (Karma) itself is the root cause of his predicament.

This last point—that Karma is not the cause—is a sophisticated philosophical claim that requires careful unpacking to avoid contradicting the Law of Karma. The intended meaning appears to be that the "evil actions" which led to his downfall were themselves prompted by an undisciplined mind. Because he lacked mastery over his mind, he committed those actions. The implication is significant: had he gained control over his mind and senses earlier, as he did after losing his wealth, the adverse circumstances would never have manifested in the first place.

Within the eleventh skandha of the Srimad Bhagavatam, another profound discourse exists known as the Avadhuta Gita. Notably, this is also a segment of the Krishna-Uddhava dialogue. Here, Lord Dattatreya (the Avadhuta) describes to King Yadu his twenty-four gurus and the specific lessons he internalized from each. This dialogue was recounted in detail by Lord Krishna to his friend Uddhava.

The Avadhuta Gita offers an invaluable message: while working on mental health using the principles of the Bhikshu Gita, one can also refine the intellect by observing and learning from the elements of nature and surrounding living beings. This serves as an excellent methodology for "self-optimization" or creating a better version of oneself. This research paper prioritizes several key gurus selected by the Avadhuta.

Preliminary Guidance on Non-Dualism (Advaita)

Before recounting the Avadhuta's story, Lord Krishna provides foundational guidance to Uddhava, utilizing Advaita Vedanta as a psychological tool. Krishna asserts that a man with an unbridled and

restless mind perceives the world solely through the binary of "merits" and "demerits," viewing this transient world as eternal. The chain of suffering begins with the failure to realize the impermanence of creation. Krishna advises:

Maintain absolute control over the senses and the mind.

Contemplate the ephemeral nature of the world.

Identify the true self not with the body, senses, or intellect, but as an eternal, pure, and liberated fragment of the Supreme Reality (Paramatman).

Recognize that the entire universe is contained within this Supreme Reality (the Self), transcending the notions of "I" and "mine."

While these instructions are rooted in Vedanta, their psychological application is clear: they provide a cognitive framework to maintain mental stability by detaching the Self from external fluctuations.

Lessons from the Gurus of Nature

The direct dialogue between King Yadu and the Avadhuta reveals practical principles for mental fortitude:

The Earth (Patience and Forgiveness): The Earth is the first guru. Despite the constant strikes and mistreatment it endures from living beings, it never complains, remaining in a state of equanimity (sthitaprajna). A person who learns patience from the Earth remains unperturbed by the distress caused by others. A vital principle for mental health is refusing to surrender the control of one's internal state to the actions of others.

Mountains and Trees (Altruism): From these, the Avadhuta learned that every action should be dedicated to the welfare of others. Empirical evidence suggests that a philanthropic person—striving for the common good through thought, word, and deed—remains perpetually satisfied and joyful. Such a state is foundational for mental well-being.

The Wind (Non-Attachment): The wind carries scents (the properties of the earth) without becoming permanently attached to them. Similarly, an individual must interact with various people—including the wicked—without allowing their negative traits or "vibrations" to influence their own character. This lesson emphasizes maintaining one's integrity despite social contact with negative influences.

Water (Purity and Grace): Just as water is naturally transparent, soothing, and purifying, an individual should remain pure, possess sweet speech, and exert a sanctifying influence on others.

The Moon (Immutability): The phases of the moon create an illusion of growth and decay, yet the moon itself remains constant. Similarly, while the body undergoes various stages (birth, aging, etc.), the individual should remain conscious that the core Self is detached from these physical transitions. This perspective ensures that neither favorable nor unfavorable circumstances disrupt one's mental health.

The Sun (Restraint and Non-Accumulation): The sun draws moisture from the earth only to return it as rain when needed. From this, one learns to accept sensory enjoyments only according to necessity and to avoid the accumulation of excess. This aligns with the adage that "excessive desire is the root of anxiety." The essence of this teaching is the renunciation of greed.

In this manner, the Avadhuta internalized diverse lessons from twenty-four sources, including fire, a pigeon, a python, the ocean, a honeybee, and an elephant. While only a selection of these is included in this research paper, a significant observation is that many of these "gurus" are from the animal kingdom. This highlights a profound principle advocated by the Avadhuta: virtue should be embraced wherever it is found.

The status or perceived hierarchy of the source—whether human, animal, or inanimate— should be irrelevant to the acquisition of wisdom. In contemporary professional and social contexts, we often observe a resistance among seniors or those in higher positions to accept guidance or insight from their subordinates. Even when a junior possesses the necessary competence, ego-driven hierarchical barriers often prevent the assimilation of their advice, which frequently serves as a catalyst for interpersonal conflict.

The Avadhuta's approach aligns with the well-known Sanskrit maxim, *Bālādapi subhāṣitaṃ grāhyam* ("One should accept wise words even from a child"). By adopting the guiding principles of the Avadhuta Gita—specifically the humility to learn from all facets of existence—the very root of many modern conflicts could be effectively eliminated.

The exploration of the Bhikṣu Gītā and the Avadhūta Gītā reveals that mental well-being is not a passive state of being, but an active, cognitive process of internal regulation. While the Avadhūta Gītā provides a "universal learning model" by encouraging the intellect to internalize the virtues of nature—such as the patience of the Earth and the non-attachment of the Wind—the Bhikṣu Gītā offers the specific clinical roadmap for restructuring one's internal narrative. This ancient approach finds a profound modern resonance in the work of Aaron T. Beck, who revolutionized psychology by identifying the power of "automatic thoughts." Beck observes:

"The person's internal communication is a stream of consciousness that includes not only what he says to himself but also the images and 'automatic thoughts' that appear in his mind."

(Beck, 1976).

The Ujjayini Brahmin's transition from a state of acute frustration to one of unshakable equanimity was achieved precisely by auditing this "stream of consciousness." By identifying his greed and ego not as inherent traits, but as "faulty self-signals," he was able to apply what Beck defines as the core of cognitive health:

"To be of greater use, the rules need to be remolded so that they are more precise and accurate, less egocentric, and more elastic." (Beck, 1976).

This research illustrates that the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a sophisticated "psychological technology" for the modern era. By "remolding" the rigid, egocentric rules of "I and Mine" into more "elastic" spiritual truths, the individual achieves a state of resilience that remains unburdened by external adversity. Ultimately, whether viewed through the lens of ancient Bhāgavata philosophy or contemporary Cognitive Therapy, the conclusion remains the same: the quality of our life is determined by the quality of our internal dialogue. By integrating the pedagogical lessons of the Avadhūta with a disciplined cognitive audit of our self-talk, we can navigate the complexities of the 21st century with the same tranquility as the Bhikṣu of old.

Major Findings

This paper demonstrates that ancient Indian scriptures, specifically the Bhikṣu Gītā and Avadhūta Gītā from the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, offer a sophisticated "psychological technology" that mirrors modern cognitive-behavioral principles. The core finding is that mental resilience is achieved through a radical shift in internal dialogue: the Bhikṣu Gītā provides a roadmap for "auditing" one's thoughts to dismantle the ego-driven constructs of "I-ness" (Ahankara) and "Myness" (Mamata), while the Avadhūta Gītā establishes a "universal learning model" that uses nature as a guide for emotional regulation. By synthesizing these texts with Aaron Beck's theories on automatic thoughts, your research argues that psychological equilibrium is not dependent on external circumstances, but on the disciplined refinement of the intellect and the humility to internalize virtues from all facets of existence.

Referencing

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