

Gyan Yog: A Pathway to Resolve Cognitive Distortions

Dr. Anil Kumar Dangwal¹, Shrishty Manchanda², Dr. Sapna Kashyap³

¹Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Studies, Gurukula Kangri (Deemed to be University), Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India-249404

²Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Gurukula Kangri (Deemed to be University), Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India-249404

³Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Government Degree College, Brahmkhal, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, India-249152

Received: 10th November 2023, **Accepted:** 25th December 2023, **Published:** 15th January 2024

Abstract

In the sacred Hindu text, Bhagwad Gita, the lesson of Gyan Yog is the bridge towards spiritual liberation including self-awareness, discernment, and detachment. On the contrary, the concept of cognitive distortion that is studied in cognitive psychology illustrates the unstructured thought pattern in which an individual amplifies the situation and its experiences and makes it worse this includes overgeneralization, catastrophizing, etc. In this study, the researcher explored the concept of Gyan Yog taught in Bhagwad Gita and put it parallel to the modern psychology concept of cognitive therapy. In conclusion, this research paper depicts the importance of Gyan Yog which contains self-awareness, discernment, and detachment integrating it with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy could be an effective way of handling cognitive distortions, this study also highlights the significant role of ancient scriptures in modern mental health intervention.

Keywords: Gyan Yog, Bhagwad Gita, Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive Distortion.

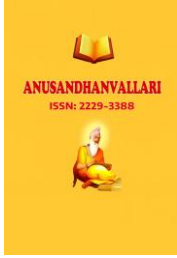
Introduction

The holy text in Hinduism, Bhagwad Gita explains an idea of Gyan Yog that is the doorway towards spiritual liberation. In Gyan Yog, Lord Krishna teaches the lesson of self awareness, discernment and detachment. On the other hand, a concept of cognitive distortion is explained in cognitive psychology that described the unstructured thought pattern, biased and exaggerated by an individual. Gyan Yog unfolds key features to encounter cognitive distortions and simplifying it through self-awareness, discernment and let go of control. In this study, Gyan Yog is mirroring the concept of Cognitive therapy, in both the ways, an individual's faulty cognitive pattern is transmuted to a healthy way of thinking.

Gyan Yog: Philosophy and Practice

The main teaching in the Bhagwad Gita is Gyan Yog, it starts from purifying the mind, thoughts and intellect and then moving towards right actions because right actions come with right knowledge. When the mind is free from attachment then actions are always in the welfare of the self and society. In Chapter 2, Krishna tells Arjuna about Gyan Yog. Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna to go beyond the cycle of happiness and sorrow, life and death, attachment, envy and worry (Bhagavad Gita 2:11-30). The teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna are psychological in nature yet carry a spiritual essence that leads towards freedom. This knowledge of Gyan Yog takes an individual on a journey of self-realization (Atman) (Bhawuk, 2021).

In the third chapter of the Bhagwad Gita, Lord Krishna psychologically explains that right action comes from right knowledge when an individual has a healthy thought pattern that leads to right behavior, right wisdom comes first, similarly, maladaptive behavior is secondary, initially, the therapist works on the cognition of an individual. It has been illustrated in the Bhagwad Gita that both Gyan Yog and Karma Yog complement each other and form a balanced human being (Bhagavad Gita 3:4-5).



Gyan Yog's Alignment with Cognitive Psychology

A homogeneity is found in the preachings of Bhagwad Gita, the concepts of Gyan Yog and contemporary, concepts of cognitive psychology are alike. In Cognitive therapy an individual is taught to rethink, and restructure their thought pattern similarly in Gyan Yog an individual learns the art of Self-awareness, discernment, and detachment that helps in restructuring the faulty pattern (Curtiss, J. E., Levine, D. S., Ander, I., & Baker, A. W. 2021).

Another concept from Gyan Yog, called vairagya, means “detachment” and is important for controlling emotions. Vairagya suggests staying detached from the results of actions and extreme feelings without giving up on life. This is similar to CBT's goal of reducing emotional reactions to negative beliefs. The art of looking at things as it is without involving them, neither falling into happiness nor sorrow, makes an individual emotionally stable and helps in holistic management. This kind of practice often helps in resolving cognitive distortion like overgeneralization and catastrophizing (Gupta, K., & Agrawal, J. 2020).

Viveka, or discrimination, is another key idea in Gyan Yog. It means distinguishing between what is real and what is just an illusion. This is similar to cognitive restructuring in CBT, where people learn to recognize and correct wrong beliefs. One has to develop a conscience or *Vivek*, looking at the materialistic world being temporary maintaining composure, and knowing the right and wrong of every action before it is made. Cognitive therapy and Gyan Yog align the features of self-awareness, discernment, letting go of control, and transforming the negative thought pattern into a positive.

Cognitive Distortions in Modern Psychology

The negative and faulty pattern of thinking and acting is the foundation of cognitive distortion that brings anxiety, stress, and poor mental stability. When thinking is corrupted, behavior is also be affected. A few cognitive distortions are-catastrophizing, overgeneralization, blaming, etc. People are more likely to suffer from distortion and find a lack of clarity (Rnic, K., Dozois, D. J., & Martin, R. A. 2016).

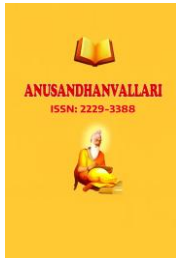
Western psychology emphasizes on the concept of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy that revolves around the triadic cycle, cognition based on thinking, affect is the emotion and feeling experienced by a person, and behavior, the actions taken to lead one life. When this ABC model is detected in an individual from checking the root of the behavior that comes through thinking to the actions, the CBT therapist works on handling and prevention. For instance, someone who tends to catastrophize is taught to think about more balanced outcomes and realistically assess the chances of the worst-case scenario happening. This method of cognitive restructuring helps people change their faulty beliefs and make clearer decisions (Crum J. 2021).

The Bhagavad Gita offers an implicit critique of cognitive distortions through its teachings on discernment (*viveka*) and self-realization (*Atma Gyan*). Krishna's counsel to Arjuna about transcending mental delusions and attachments parallels the objectives of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), as both emphasize the importance of rational thinking and detachment from negative thought patterns that cloud judgment. The alignment between these ancient philosophical insights and modern psychological approaches reflects a complementary integration of Eastern and Western perspectives on mental well-being, offering a holistic approach to cognitive and emotional health (Bhawuk,2021).

Gyan Yog for Resolving Cognitive Distortions

The veil of ignorance and illusion is removed by *vivek* (discernment) and *atma gyan*(self-knowledge) according to the Bhagwad Gita. The in-depth knowledge of self and reality comes through the *Jñāna Yog* or Gyan Yog, the path of knowledge that could be implemented in addressing cognitive distortion. In Chapter 2, verse 47, Krishna advises Arjuna to detach himself from the outcomes of his actions, stating, कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन |

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि || “Karmanye vadhikaraste, Ma phaleshu kadachana,” which emphasizes that one has control over actions, but not over their results (Bhagavad Gita 2:47). When an individual starts to practice *vairagya* or detachment, by not investing much into his/her thoughts rather just looking at it, as prescribed in Gyan Yog, this may reduce the exaggeration and amplifying negative thinking instead detachment from our own thoughts may bring clarity in



understanding the and analyzing the scenario wisely rather than emotionally. Research suggests that integrating such mindful and philosophical practices, such as those found in Yoga-enhanced Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Y-CBT), may help alleviate anxiety and cognitive distortions, as demonstrated by in a pilot study on anxiety management (Khalsa, Greiner-Ferris, Hofmann, & Khalsa, 2015).

Conclusion

The Indian Philosophical concept of Gyan Yog shows the significance of addressing cognitive distortions. In this research paper, the core features of Gyan Yog like self-awareness, discernment, and detachment have been investigated and put parallel to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy in encountering cognitive distortions.

Self-knowledge (atma gyan) develops an awareness of the faulty and irrational belief system. An individual learns to analyze their faulty pattern wisely rather than emotionally. Vivek or Discernment is knowing right and wrong, understanding the nature of this world being temporary, and dealing with life situations wisely. Another powerful technique is Vairagya or detachment, the practice of detachment, not involving in the thinking and dits feelings, not being attached to one's thoughts, letting go of control and simply observing it is one of the powerful ways of dealing with the cognitive distortions.

However, further studies are required to generalize this concept. This research investigates the implication of Gyan Yog in encountering cognitive distortion effectively. By integrating the Eastern and Western concepts of Gyan Yog in Cognitive Behaviour therapy could be a fruitful way of handling faulty patterns, this concept is culturally enriched and adaptable. Gyan Yog has the potential to transmute faulty patterns into healthy thinking that will lead to peace and well-being. The ancient scriptures are abundant in treating psychological issues and can be incorporated into mental health intervention

References

- [1] Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2021). A theory of krodā and cultivation of akrodā: Ancient solutions from the Bhagavadgītā. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 48(2), 3-6.
- [2] Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2022). sAdhu mArga: An Indian model of living and leading. In S. P. Sahni, T. Bhatnagar, & P. Gupta (Eds.), *Spirituality and management: From models to applications* (pp. 139-154). Springer.
- [3] Crum, J. (2021). Understanding mental health and cognitive restructuring with ecological neuroscience. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 697095.
- [4] Curtiss, J. E., Levine, D. S., Ander, I., & Baker, A. W. (2021). Cognitive-behavioral treatments for anxiety and stress-related disorders. *Focus (American Psychiatric Publishing)*, 19(2), 184–189.
- [5] Gertler, B. (2020). Self-knowledge. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition).
- [6] Gupta, K., & Agrawal, J. (2020). Lay meanings and associated experiences of nonattachment (Anasakti): A study from India. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 0(0).
- [7] Khalsa, M. K., Greiner-Ferris, J. M., Hofmann, S. G., & Khalsa, S. B. (2015). Yoga-enhanced cognitive behavioural therapy (Y-CBT) for anxiety management: A pilot study. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 22(4), 364–371.
- [8] Rnic, K., Dozois, D. J., & Martin, R. A. (2016). Cognitive distortions, humor styles, and depression. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 12(3), 348–362.
- [9] Yogeshwar, G. (1994). Swami Vivekananda's concept of jnana yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, and bhakti yoga. *Ancient Science of Life*, 13(3-4), 261–265.