Review Article

A COGNITIVE INTERPRETATION OF ARJUNA'S DEPRESSION IN CONTEXT OF MAHABHARATA

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to interpret the Arjuna's state in battlefield of Kurukshetra. Arjuna showed an impression of depression due to approach-avoidance conflict. It has been tried to explain how he feels during the psychological state of depression and how he logically tries to defend his denial for not fighting for the sake of Dharma. The cognitive analysis was used to interpret the symptoms sighted by Arjuna. The article provides a new perspective for the cognitive interpretation of Arjuna Vishad Yoga given in Bhagwat Gita. Lastly, the paper highlighted depression, antecedents, conflict, and the psychological state of Arjuna. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 24 (7) August, 2023; 1-5*

Introduction

The story of Arjuna's depression is unique in many ways. The birth of depression takes place on the battlefield. A warrior who came prepared to fight suddenly decides to flight. A warrior shouldered the responsibility of winning the battle is choosing to escape. A study of Mahabharata explains his strange change in behaviour *i.e.,* from fight to flight. In psychology, we all are well aware of fight or flight response. These two responses live side by side. It is a kind of physiological truth. Physiologically, hypothalamus plays an important role in emotions and our stress reaction. Selye's general adaptation syndrome emphasized reactions towards stressful situations [1].

Literature Review

Approach vs. avoidance

The cognitive appraisal of the stimulus situation can change a positive emotion into a negative emotion. Similarly, negative emotions by cognitive reappraisal can be changed into positive emotions. Freud's emphasized on bipolar nature of human existence in terms of love and hate like fight and flight coexist [2]. Solomon and Corbit opponent-process theory explain the role of information in changing emotional labeling. Many experiments were done after Schachter and Singer reveals meaning can be manipulated cognitively. Anger by the mediation of cognition can turn into an escape. Approach behavior can be turned into avoidance behavior. This cognitive manipulation consists of self-attribution and attribution regarding causes and consequences [3].

Approach-avoidance conflict

Arjuna is in an approach-avoidance conflict. He knows that he has to choose between killing his kith and kins and winning the battle. He can't win the battle without killing. Before coming to the battlefield, the conflict was there in his unconscious. The decision to fight was taken by all his well-wishers and he opted for the positive gains associated with accepting the challenge of a battle. He suppressed the idea that the killing of cousins and relatives would be the logical consequence of this battle. Miller proved that the gradient of avoidance is steeper than that of approach. The emotional fear experience results in a faster escape response as compared to the emotional experience of an approach love response [4].

The stress that Arjuna feels after he has chosen the avoidance response makes him miserable. He calls it a condition of depression or Vishad. The term depression is used here for two reasons. Firstly, in Gita, the emotional state of stress as experienced by Arjuna is called Vishaad or depression and secondly, the term depression is very frequently used by people. It is one of the most popular terms that finds a place in the vocabulary of a common man [5].

concerned about the future purity of his family, when there are evils born out of these Varnasankars, they destroy family and caste virtues or Kul or Jatidharma.

Arjuna represents common folk wisdom. He has firm faith in the existence of heaven and hell. What he says is based on his knowledge as he has heard it from others. He says "Oh! Janardan! Whose family virtue (Kuldharma) is destroyed, such men have to live in hell for an indefinite period. It is what I have heard". Arjuna having spoken about the family values and the desire to uphold them feels that he is behaving as a wise man. As a wise man now it is the duty not to indulge in sinful acts for petty gains like kingdom and pleasures

Arjuna says "Though we are wise we are prepared to commit great sin to the extent that for greed for kingdom and pleasures we are set to kill our own men."

The escape decision has been firmly rationalized. He is now in a self-denial mood. Come what may, he is not going to change his decision. So much so that he is ready to sacrifice his life for this heroic cause *i.e.,* honor of the family Dharma.

Arjuna says, "I am without weapons and shall not face them, if the sons of Dhritrashtra kill me on the battlefield this too would be more beneficial for me".

Saying this Arjuna, left his bow and arrows and in a pensive mood born out of despair sat on the back seat of the chariot.

It is clear that Arjuna advanced two reasons for his depressed state. In a conflict situation once again he is placed. He came to fight but now decides to fight. His repressed love for family and love for mankind is rekindled. He is of the opinion that those standing against him are his own men and for getting a kingdom it is not worthwhile to kill them. The spirit of peaceful coexistence and the pleasure in family bliss is supreme for Arjuna. The idea of purity of his family also forces him to foresee the plight of women in the family and perhaps they're becoming a victim of the lust of males belonging to other Varna or caste groups.

Let us raise a question, was Arjuna afraid that he too might be killed? Though he does not say so the way he offers himself in a weaponless suicide mood, perhaps, it appears that he is sure that as long as he has his Gandiva or weapons, no son of Kaurava could kill him. When he says

that the family would be destroyed he is not worried about himself but for all Kuru family members. He is competent and is capable of winning.

Lord Krishna was very much aware of the competence of Arjuna and also his family values. He understands that Arjuna is suffering from false causal attributions. If by a cognitive re-interpretation he is made to see that his causal scheme is wrong, he can be made to restructure his causal attributions and thereby change his emotions. This family involvement, this fear of killing kith and kins, all could be removed if Arjuna is made to see things from a different rational perspective. The article outlines the causal attribution of Arjuna as perceived by Sri Krishna and counsellor-counselee relationship *i.e.,* relationship between Krishna and Arjuna, where Arjuna as a counsellee expresses his all concern with Krishna.

Conclusion

The current article is highly applicable in understanding mental state of the person who is in conflicting state or state of confusion during a particular situation. The article also emphasized on the applied aspect of method of cognitive interpretation. It is very effective method which can be applied to understand the behavior of the person and situation.

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