

Significance of ancient Indian wisdom and its relation to professional supervision

Sayee Bhuvanewari, Dr. Vasuki Mathivanan

Tat Tvam Asi – “Thou art that – “You are That” It is the Reality in me, in thee, and everything—therefore, “Tat Tvam Asi – Indian Sacred text - Upanishad

Introduction

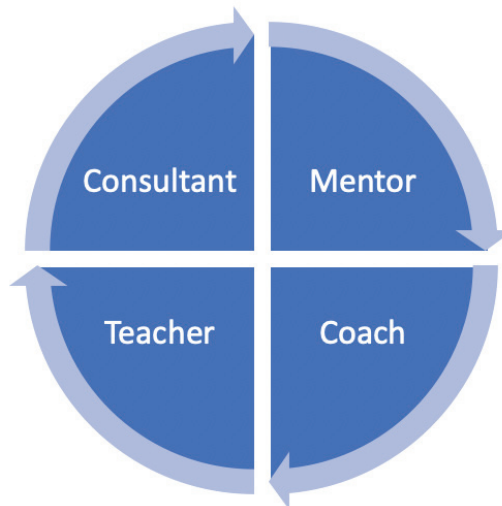
The human race evolved across countries over centuries, across cultures over boundaries. The best of brains led to many inventions and progression in our lifestyle. However, the mind has always remained a mystery and an object of study since the sixth sense came into existence. Every culture carries a vast level of literature from the time of its creation, written and/or narrated by enlightened human minds. These are treasures of ancient wisdom explaining principles and practices not just for religious purposes but for varied subjects like philosophy, science, psychology, etc. The sacred Indian scriptures played a major role in creating a repository of writings and interpretations of Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, etc. These are like modern paintings by great saints who gave us hidden messages that there is more to life than what we just see with our senses. The Perception of those drawings was up to one’s level of consciousness and their level of (in)ability to convey what they saw inwards and outwards.

When it comes to mental health, ancient Indian scriptures encompass deep, empirically derived psychological theories and concepts interlaced with religious principles. There are numerous researches done by wisdom seekers about counselling theories, drawing parallels with mental health practices from Indian Vedic literature and their relevance to modern practices. With the increasing demand for Counselling, not only has the counselling profession progressed, the risk of maintaining standards and effective practice increased too. So, supervision became the key to ensuring the effectiveness of the process. The necessity for supervisory practices has gained momentum over the years and the significance of supervision is being emphasized by every experienced mental health professional. The sacred texts still have untapped areas of wisdom relating to the mind and its wellbeing which is the subject of study for researchers worldwide. This article attempts to take a minuscule drop of wisdom to draw insights into one of those ancient texts called

“Bhagavad Gita “to find the relevance of professional supervision practices. Gita has been studied extensively by scholars across the world for research across diverse areas like psychology, philosophy, business, Management, health, etc. It also combines key concepts written in Vedas and Upanishads and presented in a single complete version.

Supervision and its relevance to mental health

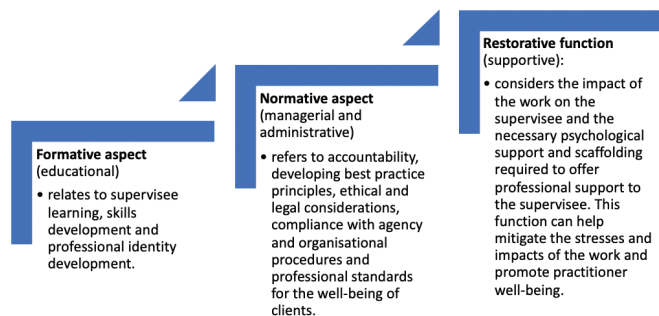
Supervision, as quoted by Inskipp and Proctor (1995) is a working alliance between a supervisor and a counsellor in which the counsellor can offer an account or recording of her work; reflect on it; receive feedback and, where appropriate, guidance. This alliance aims to enable the counsellor to gain ethical competence, confidence, and creativity to give her best possible service to her clients. Supervision is a discipline by itself that focuses primarily on teaching, coaching, mentoring, consulting capabilities, and supervisors’ knowledge. The point to be noted here is that the supervision is to consult for enhancing and supporting the professional competency of the supervisee, not for counselling their personal issues. The personal issues are explored to an extent to see how it is becoming the barrier to their profession, rather than how it affects them personally. The supervisor dons’ multiple hats during the process and it is the supervisor’s competence that determines when to switch between those roles. The roles are.



Corresponding Authors: Sayee Bhuvanewari – Coach/Psychologist & Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr. Vasuki Mathivanan – Certified Professional Supervisor & Counselling Psychologist
Email: sayee@dheemahi.life

- **Supervisor as a teacher** identifies effective interventions demonstrates models and multicultural issues.
- **Supervisor as a Coach** works with the supervisee to explore their feelings, helps them to define their growth areas, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and work on them
- **Supervisor as a Consultant** provides and receives systematic feedback and does professional gatekeeping of their competency and discipline.
- **Supervisor as a mentor** teaches supervisees various alternative approaches, facilitates overall development, and helps to establish/emphasize the sense of identity.

This can also be viewed in a different aspect of their supervisory functions.



More than being a mandatory requirement in many countries, counsellors themselves, irrespective of their level of experience, look for supervision for the betterment of their practice and see this as an opportunity for self-development. The key here is about who they chose as a supervisor, as the choice we take in life always make or break us.

Background

The Bhagavad Gita is India’s best-known scripture – sometimes called “song of the Lord” is magnificent poetry couched as a dialogue between a warrior prince named Arjuna and his charioteer and teacher, Sri Krishna, an avatar of God – that is, God in human form. This is part of an Indian epic called “Mahabharata”.

This dialogue happens in a war field called “Kuruksheetra” and it happens in the setting of war between two tribes of the royal family dispute over the power to put in simple words. One side was kurus led by Duryodhana, and another side was Pandavas, led by five princes, which had Arjuna, who was the best warrior prince at that time. It is a deep ingenious metaphor illustrated on every human mind – the fight between evil and good, between darkness and light. While Kurus are supported by renowned war-chiefs in their families, Pandavas are supported by the supreme Lord himself Krishna, who is a relative, friend, Mentor of Arjun. Though Arjun was the chief strategist of the war, on the day of the war, when he sees his own family on both sides wanting to kill each other, he loses his mind and starts to give in to the thought of losing his kinsmen. Krishna then helps Arjun to see the absolute point of view, the fairness of war, the Duties of a warrior, the need for attached detachment, and the ultimate realization of the connection between mind and soul. This was done in 700 verses of poetry called “Bhagavad Gita” which gave Arjun choices and reasons for those choices than commands.

Supervisee Background:

Arjuna is a warrior prince who was a master Archer, fought, and won many battles. He is a master in his field with so many victories to his credit and a well-experienced warrior. He was always clear about his strategies and hardly lost any battles. He was the key person who planned all strategies and done preparation for the Kuruksheetra war. As a prince, he had so many struggles in the war field and personal life, but he never gave in to any pressure. Arjuna was the person any mother, wife, friend, the brother would cherish and be proud of. He had a great acumen in his profession, he was so dutiful, ethical, and loyal. In psychological terms, he was a great practitioner and never showed any psychosomatic symptoms due to his profession.

Supervisor Background:

Sri Krishna born as a cowherd was the world’s renowned master of consciousness. He was one of the incarnations of Hindu God Lord Vishnu. He has played many roles throughout his life: warrior, Coach, Mentor, Strategist, go-getter, Charioteer. He celebrated life, always lived in the present, and treated darkness and light equally. He was respected by everyone equally. He was a scholar and a skilful master of many fields but a remarkable learner.

Arjuna’s as a Supervisee and his view of Krishna as a Supervisor

Counsellors are exposed to situations that impose a great amount of stress. It’s not possible to be objective about their agenda, practice, or ability during such times. Arjuna was in that kind of situation many times before, however, the battlefield now was completely different where he had confusion about the choice of duty vs values, and it was also about his inner conflict. E.g.,

Conflict 1: if he goes fighting in the war, he will be killing his kith and kin.

Reference: Bhagavad Gita Verse: 1:34 – 35:

“Teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, grandsons, fathers-in-law, grand-nephews, brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen are present here, staking their lives and riches. O Madhusudan, I do not wish to slay them, even if they attack me. If we kill the sons of Dhritarashtra, what satisfaction will we derive from the dominion over the three worlds, what to speak of this Earth?”

Conflict 2: If he withdraws from the war, he is going to fail his duty and bring dishonour not only to his profession but to his lineage

Though he was so experienced, he couldn’t be firm on which side to pick, and he goes to Krishna for guidance (Supervision). Krishna as a supervisor decided not only to counsel but to play all roles of a supervisor for the wholesome development of Arjuna than solving one of the issues. He spends 18 sessions (18 Chapters of Gita) to observe, mentor, coach, evaluate, inspire, Arjuna and though the environment (War) Wasn’t very conducive, he gives such comfort to his supervisee that promotes self-motivation, learning, and professional development in a short span of time as time is of the essence here.

It is the supervisor who can be objective in such situations to help supervisees to learn and grow. In The battlefield of Kuruksheetra, Arjuna was the victim of the situation whereas Krishna was the master of the situation. He was able to guide

Arjuna to identify and handle his countertransference.

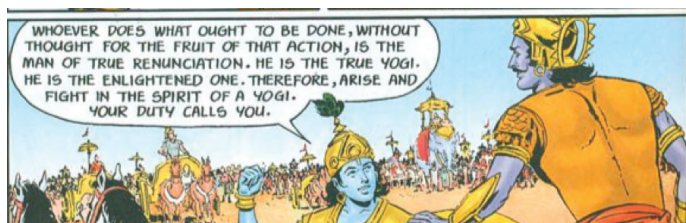
Let us now see how Krishna played all roles of a supervisor in such a situation. When Arjuna (Supervisee) came to him with a confusing thought and with the physical symptoms reported such as Body Shivers, Weakness of limbs, Goosebumps, Dry Mouth, Dropping the bow, Skin Burning Sensation, Krishna quietly listened to all his rantings, and he becomes quite objective in his approach as Krishna knows Arjuna's skills and immediately understands that it is not a question of competency but conflict. He immediately can see that Arjuna is in the level 2 stage of Supervisee one who is more focussed on process, Confused, lacks integration into the practical approach however highly ethical. Hence Krishna knows as a highly-skilled supervisor that his supervisee needed more suggestions for introspection, Alternative views/ approaches, deeper understanding of dynamics

Supervisor as a Coach



Knowing well of the background and skilled at war field, Krishna starts to coach by asking him a question "My dear Arjun, how has this delusion overcome you in this hour of peril? ". This makes Arjuna more objective about his problem; he talks about his confusion about duty and the perceived consequences of his action. Krishna then starts to observe and explore Arjuna's total behavior of his thoughts, feelings/emotions, and actions. This helps Krishna to understand Supervisee's problem to plan for development, interventions, and corrections.

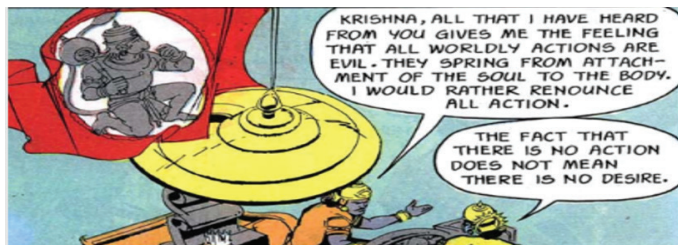
Supervisor as a teacher



After understanding the presenting problem in detail, Krishna decides his approach to supervision, and he picked up a treatment-based approach primarily relying on psychotherapy-based models modelling the behaviour of the supervisee. He starts to educate Arjuna about Karma Yoga, which he says to him that never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction. He clearly teaches that "you are your choices." "He uses intervention client-focused techniques like Reality therapy where he asks a lot of questions

which leads to greater introspection thus leading to realization. He uses metaphors effectively to tell him that like the ocean undisturbed by the streams coming in, one should know how to treat all life experiences equally. He also gets philosophical explaining the fight is the duty of a warrior and killing only harms the body of his family not the soul as the soul is immortal. He goes deeper educating him on soul and lifecycle, thus imparting knowledge on deeper theories.

Supervisor as a Consultant



Krishna now moves to a stage of giving feedback about Arjuna, which is given for him to review the process, improve the supervisee's competency, and impart clarity of thoughts. He carries this process by allowing Arjuna to evaluate his actions and will enable him to question. The point to note here is that Supervisor is not an authoritative figure but a support system/ enabler for the supervisee and the dialogue should be healthy, two-way, and should be given freedom of confrontation and disagreement.

He also does the professional gatekeeping by explaining the qualities (Virtues) needed to develop competency with 360-degree development.

Bhagavad Gita: Chapter – 13 Verse 7-11

Humility, sincerity, violence, patience, simplicity, reverence for one's teacher, purity, firmness or stability, self-control; renunciation of the objects of sense gratification, absence of ego, perception of the evil of birth, death, old age and disease, non-attachment to children, wife, home, evenness of the mind in fulfillment and frustration of the mind; devotion to the service of the Lord, is called knowledge, and whatever remains is ignorance.

Supervisor as a Mentor



Though Arjuna now is clear about his duties and understands that he should go ahead fighting as it is his karma

yog, he still clarifies that you have talked not only about Karma yog, but you also educated me on Bhakti Yog, divine principles which teach that leading life with detachment through devotion as attachment leads to desire, and from desire arises anger. And you also talked about jnana Yog (knowledge) which is about the path of knowledge that leads to the absolute truth and the purest way of attaining absolute consciousness. So, if you consider knowledge superior to action, why do you ask me to indulge in this terrible war? This is where Krishna decides to coach his supervisee to enable him to see right through wrong, choose wisely, and give him more alternative ways to approach for success. He informs Arjun that you must understand the nature of all three—recommended action, wrong action, and inaction. Therefore, with the sword of knowledge, cut asunder the doubts that have arisen in your heart, Establish yourself in karm yog. Arise, stand up, and act. It is important to understand that action doesn't mean any activity, it means the righteous activity according to one's skill, position, and stature in society.

Throughout the sessions, Krishna uses stories, metaphors, shared self, humor given that the environment is not so conducive, and he ensures that his supervisee is not affected by physical setup but at the same time understands complex theories in a much simpler way. As a supervisor, it is your duty also to ensure that you don't intimidate the supervisee but be a friendly Coach with whom the supervisee can be himself without the fear of acceptance or being inferior. Krishna even goes to the threadbare detail of teaching techniques to keep the focus and the ways to reach absolute consciousness through meditation and mindfulness practices.

Conclusion

With the growing need for counselling and people are suffering from problems of different magnitude, it become mandatory to have a monitoring mechanism as counsellors are dealing with people who come to us during their vulnerable times. Because the field of counselling itself is a very slippery slope irrespective of age and experience of the counsellor, doing supervised practice or having a supervisor is one of the ways to mitigate the potential risks in the practice. This article is an attempt to show the practice of supervision is fruitful anytime even on the battlefield where a person like Arjuna who is been considered one of the best warriors in Indian culture, known for his Archery skills to become illusioned and directionless and needed guidance and clarity from Krishna, who used his wisdom to teach Arjuna to discover and gain Self-knowledge about the whole situation. Further, it is an acceptable practice in many cultures to be guided and mentored by a person with rich life experiences and uses his wisdom to guide the other person during such trying times and be a great example and a role model for them to follow and learn.

In Gita, Krishna also shares the same thought about how a supervisor should be in

Chapter 3 verse 20-21: perform your work to set an example for the good of the world. Whatever actions great persons perform, common people follow. Whatever standards they set; all the world pursues.

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