

Listening types as delineated in Business Communication: A re-reading in the light of Srimad Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract:

From time immemorial listening and the art of listening has been emphasized as one of the major mediums of learning. In the ancient ages, *shruti* had been one of the major techniques of passing down the legacy of vedic hymns to the future generations. The etymological origin of the word 'listen' from 'hlysnan' (Northumbrian 'lysna') means 'to attend to' originates from the IE root *kleu which is also the source of the Sanskrit word 'srnoti' meaning 'to hear'. The archetypal importance given to the art of effective listening and its benefits is also evident in the preaching of *The Mahabharata*:

क्षिप्रं विजानाति चिरं शृणोति विज्ञाय चार्थं भजते न कामात्।

नासंपृष्टो व्यपयुंक्ते परार्थं तत् प्रज्ञानं प्रथमं पण्डितस्य॥

(He who listens patiently and comprehends quickly and acts accordingly and not by his own sweet will; and does not meddle with others' business unless asked to, is truly a wise person.)

Listening is the first of the four major pillars of language acquisition and is one of the predominating areas of study and research even in the modern times. A typical study as mentioned by B. Balaji Reddy in his research paper "*Effective Listening: A very important skill to acquire in today's high-speed world*" shows that most of us spend 70 to 80 percent of our waking time by communicating in some form. The papers aims to delve into the nuances of effective listening techniques in the light of Srimad Bhagavad Gita

Keywords: Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Effective Listening Techniques, Types of Listening, Dialogues between Krishna and Arjun.

Introduction:

From time immemorial listening and the art of listening has been emphasized as one of the major mediums of learning. In the ancient ages, *shruti* had been one of the major techniques of passing down the legacy of vedic hymns to the future generations. The etymological origin of the word 'listen' from '*hlysnan*' (Northumbrian '*lysna*') means 'to attend to' originates from the IE root **kleu* which is also the source of the Sanskrit word '*srnoti*' meaning 'to hear'. The archetypal importance given to the art of effective listening and its benefits is also evident in the preaching of *The Mahabharata*:

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Srimad Bhagavad Gita is essentially a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, the third progeny among the Pandava Princes. It not only is an integral part of the famous epic *The Mahabharata*, but more largely is a proponent of Indian Ethics and human values. Although the Bhagavad Gita is one of the basic books of Hinduism, it has been interpreted as the way to lead life at large. Interpretations and researches on the Bhagavad Gita has been extensive and interdisciplinary studies have resulted in lending of Gita principles in various doctrines and disciplines. The dialogic discussion in the form of questions and solutions in the battlefield of Kurukshetra between Lord Krishna and Arjuna sets the perfect context of mutual listening and response. In the prolonged discussion Lord Krishna does not only discuss about the way to lead life but also preaches about the importance of listening and its nuances in his sermons. The entire setting of the Mahabharata creates the perfect ambience where listening takes place at different levels through different listeners and ultimately through the sayings of Lord Krishna mankind gains the wisdom of knowledge and the types of listening that facilitates learning.

Listening is the first of the four major pillars of language acquisition and is one of the predominating areas of study and research even in the modern times. A typical study as mentioned by B. Balaji Reddy in his research paper "*Effective Listening: A very important skill to acquire in today's high-speed world*" shows that most of us spend 70 to 80 percent of our waking time by communicating in some form. Out of this, approximate 9 percent of the time is utilized for writing, 16 percent for reading purposes, 30 percent of the time is involved in speaking while the rest 45 percent of the time is consumed in listening to others. Various similar studies reveal that listening is the major skill that is required for the proper comprehension of knowledge and communication. Although it is often conjectured that listening is the first and the only involuntary activity performed by human beings even before realizing the importance of language, it needs to be clarified that there is a basic distinction between 'hearing' and listening'. While hearing is receiving the sound on the eardrums and merely a physiological involuntary act, listening involves several levels of conscious efforts towards semantic understanding of the sounds received on the eardrum and hence turns out to be a psychosomatic activity. Roland Barthes in his seminal text *The Responsibility of Forms* (1985) aptly distinguished between hearing and listening as "*Hearing is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act.*"

Listening is a highly complex process by which spoken language is converted into meaning in the mind of the listener. Hence, listening can be said to be the process of receiving, interpreting and reacting to the message received from the speaker. Egan Gerard (1988) once said, “*You do not listen with just ears: you listen with your eyes and your sense of touch, you listen by becoming aware of the feelings and emotions that arise within yourself because of this contact with others. You listen with your mind, your heart, your imagination*”. The complex process of this listening is ideally what Lord Krishna speaks of when he summons mankind to listen to his sermons with utmost loyalty and devotion. He proclaims that only when the world receives His divine message by focusing all the sensory organs towards the comprehension of the inherent wisdom; they would realize the transcendental knowledge that would render ethereal bliss in their lives.

श्रद्धावाल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः।

ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शांतिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति॥

shraddhaavaanllabhate gyaanan tatparah sanyatendriyah.

gyaanan labdhva paraan shaantimachirenaadhigachchhati.

- Srimad Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 4, Verse 39)

(The faithful one, attentively focused, who has conquered the senses, achieves transcendental knowledge and having achieved transcendental knowledge, quickly attains supreme peace.)

The art of listening is a dynamic process that has various levels and types. The detailed understanding of these levels of listening is necessary to realize the ultimate form of listening (often known as Active Listening) that Lord Krishna expects us to perform. The first form of listening can be said to be Discriminative Listening. Discriminative Listening helps us to identify between the sounds received. It is the subliminal functioning of our brain that helps us to identify the gender or tone or age of the voice even before we start comprehending the meaning of the spoken words. The next level of listening is known as Comprehensive Listening where a conscious effort on behalf of the receiver is made towards the semantic comprehension of the message received. When the listener evaluates the content of the message after comprehension of its meaning, he or she performs what is called Evaluative Listening. Evaluative Listening might either lead towards Appreciative Listening where the listener not only accepts but also appreciates the message or lead towards Critical Listening where the listener is skeptical about the content and message received from the sender. A higher level of Appreciative Listening would lead us towards Empathetic Listening where the receiver not only understands and accepts the message but also provides necessary emotional response and retort to the speaker. Empathetic Listening involves contextual understanding and requires the comprehension of spoken and even unspoken words on the basis of decoding non-verbal, emotional and cultural nuances as expressed by the speaker. The highest level of desired listening can be said to be Therapeutic or Dialogic Listening where the listener not only facilitates listening through the use of positive verbal or non-verbal cues but also endeavours to provide verbal response often in the form a dialogue so as to render a elucidation of the issue if any.

The Bhagavad Gita appears in the *Bhisma Parva*, Book 6 of *The Mahabharata* and contains about 700 verses, split into 18 chapters. The setting of Mahabharata gives us a perfect understanding of these different types of listening. In compliance with the request of Dhritarastra, Sanjaya delineates the happenings of the Great War to the blind king of the Kuru clan. In the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Arjuna

shuns his bow and arrow and recoils from the battle. The steadfast archer suffers from the ethical dilemma as how could he kill his own cousins for the sake of power and territory. Arjuna seeks the advice of Lord Krishna in order to resolve his quandary:

निहत्य धार्तराष्ट्रान्नः का प्रीतिः स्याज्जनार्दन ।

पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान्हत्वैतानाततायिनः ॥

तस्मान्नार्हा वयं हन्तुं धार्तराष्ट्रान्स्वबान्धवान् ।

स्वजनं हि कथं हत्वा सुखिनः स्याम माधव ॥

*nihatya dhartarashtraan nah ka pratih syaj janardana
papam evaashrayed asman hatvaitan aatatayinah
tasman narha vayah hantum dhartarashtran sa-bandhavan
sva-janam hi katham hatva sukhinah syama madhava*

- Srimad Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 1, Verse 36-37)

(What pleasure will we derive from killing the sons of Dhritarashtra? Sin will certainly come upon us for killing our cousins. How can we hope to be happy by killing our own kinsmen?)

Lord Krishna in his long sermon provides Arjuna with the bliss of the cosmic knowledge and convinces him to follow the path of *dharma* and engage in the battle of Mahabharata. Interestingly, in this process of dialogic discussion we get to find several levels of listening. Sanjaya listens and re-tells the words of Lord Krishna, Arjuna too listens to the words of his *Shakha*, Dhritarastra listens to Sanjaya, Krishna listens to the anguish of Arjuna and in the final stage it is the common masses like us who listen to the orator of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. A keen analysis of this process of inter-sectional listening will lead us towards the different styles and types of listening and help us to realize the ultimate and desired form of listening that leads towards wisdom. Although Sanjaya utters the verbatim of what he hears, he only performs the act of listening merely to convey the information to his master. The art of listening performed by Sanjaya is not for gaining wisdom but rather is confined within the execution of his responsibilities. As a listener, he performs Discriminative and Comprehensive styles of listening. Although he comprehends the superficial meaning of the words, Sanjaya unfortunately restricts himself from comprehending the inherent wisdom of the divine message disseminated by Lord Krishna. Dhritarastra, however, possess the knowledge required to comprehend the inherent meaning of the pearls of wisdom as ushered by Lord Krishna. Although he has the learning and understanding to evaluate and appreciate the message of Krishna, his personal bias and prejudiced notions abstain him from gaining the eternal truth of life. Dhirtarastra's Evaluative Listening skills, thus, ultimately ends in becoming Critical Listening due to his skepticism and pre-conceived bias about the speaker. Arjuna on the contrary rises from the level of an Evaluative Listener to that of an Appreciative Listener. He seeks to understand the meaning of the words spoken by the Lord. He not only accepts the message received from Lord Krishna but also enquires and promotes further speaking. The celebrated portrait of *Krishnarjuna* picturesquely delineates the positive non-verbal skills of Arjuna that facilitates communication. Listening styles associated to the characters is also symbolical. A parallelism of the attitudinal temperaments and personality can be drawn on the basis of their styles of listening. It may be conjectured that perhaps such characterizations hint towards the universal fact that in order to gain

acceptability and respect, we need to practice the right style of listening. Krishna - the master sophist, the divine orator epitomizes the personality of the desired listener. He commiserates with Arjuna and endeavours to provide solace and solution to Arjuna's dilemma. Krishna not only empathizes with Arjuna but rather analyses the cause of Arjuna's mental turmoil and seeks to render solution through discussion and dialogue. He, therefore, emerges as the role model of an Active Listener by practicing Empathetic and Therapeutic styles of listening. Through His actions he proves to the entire world that a true friend, a good leader, a successful diplomat, or a great ruler needs to practice the art of Active Listening. It is only through the art of listening we can gain the glory of enlightened wisdom, wisdom that is transcendental, eternal and universal.

Even in the present scenario of predominating digitalization of information, Srimad Bhagavad Gita remains the spring-well of knowledge and enlightenment. Unfortunately, the techniques of learning and listening as propounded in our ancient texts have long lost its essence and the cultural predominance of western learning styles have reduced our learning skills. The educated techno-scientific successful man of today is completely oblivious of the treasure-trove of classical knowledge lost in antiquity. A renaissance of the Bhagavad learning will help mankind to realize the quintessence of the great saying of Sri Shankaryacharya:

भगवद् गीता किञ्चिदधीता गङ्गा जललव कणिकापीता ।

सकृदपि येन मुरारि समर्चा क्रियते तस्य यमेन न चर्चा ॥

*bhagavad gita kichidadhita ganga jalalava kanikaapiita
sakridapi yena murari samarcha kriyate tasya yamena na charcha*

- Bhaja Govindam (Verse – 20)

(One who has even a little knowledge of Bhagavad Gita, one who has sipped a few drops of the Ganges, one who has worshipped Lord Krishna; need not think of Yama)

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