

## A Study on Bhagavad Gita's Approach to Stress Management

K. S. Sivakumar<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Rajini G.<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Focus on stress management and the Bhagavad Gita has attracted the interest of the academic world. We may observe two dominant approaches to the topic, namely, (1) the psychology approach, and (2) the management science approach. **Objective:** The paper expounds on stress management from the spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita. This approach would enable us to understand the Bhagavad Gita's perception of stress management. **Method and Discussion:** The conceptual paper, by exploring the Bhagavad Gita's approach to stress management from its spiritual angle, identifies and presents (a) the state of emotional stability (Sthitaprajna), and (b) the four vital steps involved in achieving emotional stability, namely, the control of the senses (gunas), desires (kama), anger (krodha) and the mind (manas). **Conclusion:** Comparing emotional stability with emotional intelligence would be a fertile field of study. Emotional stability is a state of existence/experience, while emotional intelligence is a vital competency/ability to be acquired. Both the world-views are required to combat stress and its effect in the present pandemic and the future post-pandemic world order.

**Keywords:** *Stress Management, The Bhagavad Gita, Emotional Stability, Four-fold Steps, Emotional Intelligence*

The new normal world, in the midst of uncertainty, has affected all walks of an individual's life which includes physical, mental, social, cultural and economic domain. The pandemic and its resultant consequences add to the existing levels of stress in individuals. Stress and its effect have emerged as an important issue threatening the well-being of individuals and society in the post-pandemic world order.

Stress may be perceived as a state of physical and psychological challenges brought out by difficult situations. Stressors, the factors that are responsible for causing stress, may be external or internal. By "external" stressors, we mean the stressors affecting an individual from outside. Personal relationship, financial problems, work-life balance issues, etc., are some of the external stressors. By "internal" stressors, we mean the stressors affecting an individual from within. Mental attitude, thinking, feelings of hatred, anger, etc., are some of the internal stressors.

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, VELS University, Pallavaram, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

<sup>2</sup>Professor & Head/MBA (General), Director-MOUs, School of Management Studies, VELS University, Pallavaram, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

\*Corresponding Author

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Stress may have positive or negative impact. Positive stress induces an individual for better actualization of potentialities, while negative stress has adversely affect on an individual. Hence, arise the need for stress management.

Stress management may be defined as managing the negative stress of individuals. It calls for a comprehensive approach that may include the perspectives of different world-views (both western and eastern).

### STRESS MANAGEMENT AND THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Focus on stress management and the Bhagavad Gita has attracted the interest of the academic world, especially in recent times. We may observe two dominant approaches to the topic, namely, (1) the psychology approach, and (2) the management science approach. Let us now expound these two approaches.

#### (1) The Psychology Approach

Under the psychology approach, we find attempts made to develop psychotherapy models of stress management from the perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita and subjecting it to clinical validities. This approach is predominantly a clinical/prescriptive approach, as reflected in the studies of Pattabiram B.V. and Balaji Deekshitulu P.V. (2017), Sushama Bhosale (2015), Neha Sharma (2014), Pandurangi A.K. et al (2014), Bhatia S.C. et al (2013), Reddy M.S. (2012), and Balodhi J.P. and Keshvan M.S. (2011).

#### (2) The Management Science Approach

Under the management science approach, we find important concepts/variables from the perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita being deduced and described for a better understanding of stress and its management. This approach is a conceptual/descriptive approach involving empirical studies of collection and analysis of data on identified variables. This approach includes the studies of Saptarsi Ganguly & Mriganka Gope (2020) highlighting the variables of self-restraint and ethical consciousness, Sonia Malik (2020) dealings with the variables of faith in God, integration of body and mind, proper exercise, sleep and positive emotions, Namita Tayal (2019) expounding the variables of detachment, faith, coordinating mind and body, moderate living and altruistic services, Bharati Kalra et al (2018) deliberating on the variables of acceptance of situation, anger management, focus on action, physical activity, positive attitude, confidence, trust and respect, Sonal Sharma and Mohd. Shakir (2017) discussing on the variables of stress, distress, worries, sorrow, proud, jealousy and fear, Kallave Maheshwar Gangadharrao (2014) elaborating on the variables of goal setting, firmness (making effort), self-respect and self-esteem, and Nidhi Verma and Ajay Singh (2014) elucidating on the variables of *karmayoga*, work-life balance, devotion to God, positive values and self-surrender.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

The paper expounds stress management from the spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita. This approach would enable us to understand the Bhagavad Gita's perception of stress management.

### METHOD OF THE PAPER

The conceptual paper, by exploring the Bhagavad Gita's approach to stress management from its spiritual angle, identifies and presents (a) the state of emotional stability (*Sthitaprajna*), and (b) the four vital steps involved in achieving emotional stability, namely, the control of the senses (*gunas*), desires (*kama*), anger (*krodha*) and the mind (*manas*).

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT/EMOTIONAL STABILITY OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA**

The core meaning of 'stress management' may find a near equivalent in the Bhagavad Gita's perception of 'emotional stability' (*Sthitaprajna*). The characteristic features of an individual possessing emotional stability is clearly described in the Bhagavad Gita. This correlates with the concept of stress management. Further, the Bhagavad Gita deliberates on the hurdles and the method to overcome the same to achieve the state of emotional stability. This aligns with the coping of stress management. Let us now discuss the Bhagavad Gita's perception of the emotional stability.

### ***Characteristics of a person in the state of Emotional Stability***

An emotionally stable person is one who has no desire (*Chapter II, Verse 55, Volume 1, 214*), not affected by positives or negatives, free from fear (*Chapter II, Verse 56, Volume 1, 221*) and not influenced by attachment or detachment (*Chapter II, Verse 57, Volume 1, 225*). In other words, an individual of stable wisdom has full control over emotions under all conditions. According to the Bhagavad Gita, an emotionally stable person experience immortality (*Chapter II, Verse 15, Volume 1, 118*), liberation (*Chapter II, Verse 53, Volume 1, 210*), tranquility (*Chapter II, Verses 64-65, Volume 1, 236*), peace (*Chapter II, Verses 70-71, Volume 1, 245-246*), and oneness with Brahman (*Chapter II, Verse 72, Volume 1, 247*).

### ***Steps towards Emotional Stability***

According to the Bhagavad Gita, even though all individuals can attain the state of emotional stability, a chain of intra-personal factors, acting as impediments, limits the capabilities of individuals. Identifying this chain, the Bhagavad Gita proclaims:

“Thinking of sense objects, attachment to them is formed. From attachment rises desire to possess. From desire emerges anger. From anger comes delusion and loss of memory. This results in the loss of discriminative power, and from the loss of discrimination, the person perishes” (*Chapter II, Verses 62- 63, Volume 1, 234*).

### ***Four-fold Steps***

The Bhagavad Gita states that the above chain of intra-personal factors can be effectively broken and individuals may experience the state of emotional stability if they adhere to the following four steps, namely:

Step I: Managing of the Senses (*gunas*) - Senses Management

Step II: Managing of Desires (*Kama*) - Desire Management

Step III: Managing of Anger (*Krodha*) - Anger Management, and

Step IV: Managing of the Mind (*Manas*) - Mind Management

It must be pointed out here that the term 'control' refers to the sublimation of a lower/negative value-system to a higher/positive value-system.

Let us now explore each step, as envisaged by the Bhagavad Gita.

### **Step I. Managing of the Senses (*gunas*) - Senses Management**

The Bhagavad Gita states the turbulent senses violently snatch away the mind of even a wise man who is striving after perfection (*Chapter II, Verse 60, Volume 1, 229*). The senses are being carried away by the sense objects just like a ship being carried away by powerful wind (*Chapter II, Verse 67, Volume 1, 240*). Now, what is the way out? The Bhagavad Gita states that one should completely withdraw the senses from their sense objects just like a tortoise drawing its limbs (*Chapter II, Verse 58 & 68, Volume 1, 225 & 243*). Therefore, controlling the senses is the first step towards emotional stability (*Chapter III, Verse 41, Volume 1, 331*). Now, what is the process of control?

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The senses is characterized by three vital elements/traits, namely, (a) knowledge and calmness (*sattva*), (b) activity and desire(*rajas*) and (c) laziness and ignorance(*tamas*) (*Chapter XIV, Verses 5 & 17, Volume 3, 105 & 114*). The three traits, that constantly act upon one another, are present in every individual in varying proportions. In fact, the personality traits of individuals may be traced to the three traits (*Chapter XIV, Verses 11-13, Volume 3, 109-111*). It logically follows that as the senses get purified, it automatically leads to the personality of individuals getting developed.

The Bhagavad Gita states that senses-control/senses-purification is an individual's inner journey from a dominantly *tamasic* state to the *rajasic* state and from a dominantly *rajasic* state to the *sattvic* state of existence (*Chapter XIV, Verse 18, Volume 3, 115*). This process lies in performing actions as *Karmayoga* (*Chapter V, Verses 11, Volume 2, 37*).

Thus, we observe that the Bhagavad Gita points out senses purification as the first step towards achieving the state of emotional stability. Further, it clearly elucidates the technique involved in purification of the senses.

### Step II. Managing of Desires (*Kama*) - Desire Management

According to Indian culture and tradition, desires are of two types (ie.) ethics regulated desires and desires not regulated by ethics. While desires regulated by ethics are considered as positive desires, desires not regulated by ethics are termed as negative desires of individuals. It is often stated that a desire is not quenched by the satisfying of the desire, it only gets inflamed like fire aided by butter.

The Bhagavad Gita states that individual's desires are the greatest hurdles towards emotional stability (*Chapter II, Verse 55, Volume 1, 214*) and spiritual realization (*Chapter III, Verse 39 & 43, Volume 1, 319 & 352*). The locus of desire lies in the sense organs, the mind and the intellect. Through these the desire deludes the embodied soul (*Chapter III, Verse 40, Volume 1, 326*).

Desires arise from the attachment to the senses (*Chapter II, Verses 62, Volume 1, 234*). Since desires emerge from the senses, the Bhagavad Gita states that controlling the senses first, kill this desire, the destroyer of knowledge and realization (*Chapter III, Verse 41, Volume 1, 331*).

Thus, we observe that the Bhagavad Gita points out senses purification leads to desire control, the second step towards achieving the state of emotional stability.

### Step III. Managing of Anger (*Krodha*) - Anger Management

Anger causes emotional problems in individuals. According to the Bhagavad Gita, anger causes delusion and thereby, the fall of individuals through loss of discriminative power (*Chapter II, Verse 63, Volume 1, 234*). Since anger is one of the three gateway to the destruction of the self, it must be abandoned (*Chapter XVI, Verse 21, Volume 3, 191*).

The Bhagavad Gita points out that unfulfilled desires are the primary cause for anger (*Chapter II, Verses 62, Volume 1, 234*). Therefore, anger may be automatically controlled with the control of desires in individuals.

Thus, we observe that the Bhagavad Gita points out desire control leads to the control of anger, the third step towards achieving the state of emotional stability.

### Step IV. Managing of the Mind (*Manas*) - Mind Management

Mind is considered as the internal sense organ of individuals. The Bhagavad Gita states that the two powerful forces, namely, attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dvesa*) constantly act upon the mind, making the mind very unstable. thereby limiting individuals to realize peace (*Chapter II, Verse 64, Volume 1, 236*). One becomes one's friend when one's mind is controlled and one becomes one's enemy, when one's mind is not controlled (*Chapter VI, Verse 6, Volume 2, 118*). Now, how is one's mind to be controlled?

According to the Bhagavad Gita, a spirit of discriminating dispassion/detachment (*vairagya*) and its repeated practice (*abhyasa*) can control the restless mind of individuals (*Chapter VI, Verse 35, Volume 2, 159*). While 'discrimination' refers to a clarity regarding eternal and non-eternal, and thereby, holding on to the eternal, 'dispassion/detachment' refers to the dispassion/detachment from the senses (i.e.) control/purification of the senses. The Bhagavad Gita points out a close correlation between the senses and the mind. It warns that the mind of even a wise man who is striving after perfection is affected by the powerful senses (*Chapter II, Verse 60, Volume 1, 229*).

Thus, we understand that the Bhagavad Gita points out detachment from the senses/ senses control and its repeated practice leads to the control of the mind. We have already observed that senses control leads to desire control, and desire control leads to anger control. Therefore, we may state that the control of senses, desire and anger leads to the control of the mind, the fourth step towards achieving the state of emotional stability.

### CONCLUSION

From the above elucidation, we observe two dominant approaches to the topic of stress management and the Bhagavad Gita, namely, (1) the psychology approach, and (2) the management science approach.

Approaching stress management from the spiritual dimension of the Bhagavad Gita enable us to understand the features of emotional stability as well as its resultant positives. In addition, this approach explores the steps and its factors thereof to achieve the state of emotional stability.

#### *Emotional Stability and Emotional Intelligence*

It would be interesting to compare the state of emotional stability with the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional stability is a state of existence/experience involving complete control of emotions in all situations. Emotional intelligence may be understood as the talent of an individual to recognize, know and control one's own emotions as well as that of others and take decisions that results in positive results. According to Mayer, J. & Salovey, P. (1990), the talent to understand one's own and others' emotions, and as well as to channelize them effectively is emotional intelligence. Goleman, D. (1995) has recognized five important dimensions of emotional intelligence, namely, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. While the first three dimensions describe the personal competencies related to knowing and managing one's own emotions, the last two dimensions describe the social competencies related to knowing and managing emotions of others.

Thus, we observe that emotional stability is a state of existence/experience, while emotional intelligence is a vital ability/competency to be acquired.

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Let us conclude by stating that both world-views are required to combat stress and its effect that has emerged as an important issue threatening the well-being of individuals and society in the present pandemic and the future post-pandemic world order.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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