

# Stress Management Techniques in the Bhagavad Gita

**Author: Dr. K.S.Sivakumar**

Assistant Professor

Department of Sanskrit and Indian Culture

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Viswa Mahavidyalaya

Enathur, Kanchipuram

Tamil Nadu

India

*sivakumar\_ks07@yahoo.co.in*

## Abstract

**Introduction:** The popularity of the Bhagavad Gita may be: (a) due to its dealing with day-today existential issues, (b) it is a scripture for all age groups and for all temperaments, and (c) it appeals irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Stress management may refer to the techniques involved in coping of negative stress/tension, generated by the stressors, that is experienced by individuals.

**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 & Discussion of the paper:** The concept-based paper, in the process of deliberating stress management of the Bhagavad Gita from its spiritual dimension, 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:** Emotional stability is a state of experience/existence wherein a person of stable wisdom has complete control of his/her emotions in all situations. The Bhagavad Gita identifies the four-fold steps to achieve the state of emotional/stable wisdom.

**Key Words:** Stress Management, The Bhagavad Gita, Emotional Stability, Senses Management, Desire Management, Anger Management, Mind Management

## The Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita is a holistic practical manual that offers numerous guidelines for the various dimensions of human existence. The Bhagavad Gita occurs in the *Bhishmaparva* (Chapter 23-40) of the great epic Mahabharata, authored by Sri Veda Vyasa. It consists of 18 Chapters and 700 Verses. Even though a part of Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita is self-contained. It is considered as the Fifth Veda. 'Bhagavad' refers to 'Divine/Lord' and 'Gita' refers to 'song'. Therefore, the 'Bhagavad Gita' may be called as 'the song of the Lord/Divine'.

The Bhagavad Gita contains the essence of eternal spiritual and ethical truths (*SanathanaDharma*). It states that 'man' or 'individual self' (*jivatman*) consists of three dimensions, namely, (a) the physical dimension - physical body and its organs, (b) the psychological/mental dimension - the senses (*gunas*), the mind (*manas*) and the intellect (*buddhi*), and (c) the spiritual dimension - the soul (*atman*). The real/essential nature of man is the spiritual dimension-the pure and eternal soul (*atman*) and not the physical and the psychological dimensions (*Chapter II, Verses 18 - 24*). Further, the sense organs are said to be superior to the body; the mind is superior to

the sense organs; the intellect is superior to the mind; and the Self (*atman*) is superior to the intellect (*Chapter III, Verse 42*).

Liberation lies in the union (*yoga*) of individual consciousness/energy (Self) with the Universal/Cosmic Consciousness/energy. This union is made possible through three paths, namely, (a) The path of Action (*Karma-yoga*), (b) The path of Devotion (*Bhakti-yoga*) and (c) The path of Knowledge (*Jnana-yoga*).

The popularity of the Bhagavad Gita may be: (a) due to its dealing with day-today existential issues, (b) it is a scripture for all age groups and for all temperaments, and (c) it appeals irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

### **Stress Management**

Stress may be described as a state of physical and mental challenge/strain resulting from demanding/adverse circumstances. Stressors, the factors that are responsible for causing stress, may be external or internal. By “external” stressors, we refer to the stressors that emerge outside of an individual. Inter-personal relationship, financial worries, family problems, work-related issues, etc., are examples of external stressors. By “internal” stressors, we refer to the stressors that emerge/operate within an individual. Attitude, thoughts, feelings of fear and anger, etc., are examples of internal stressors.

Stress may be positive or negative. Positive stress motivates individuals for better effort and performance, while negative stress adversely affects individuals, leading to a number of complications like physical discomfort, high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, depression, suicidal tendencies, anger, conflicts, and so on. In short, negative stress affects the entire gamut of an individual’s life. It acts as a major impediment to actualize the inherent potentialities of individuals. Hence, arise the vital need for managing stress.

Stress management may refer to the techniques involved in coping of negative stress/tension, generated by the stressors, that is experienced by individuals. Such being the importance, stress management necessitates a holistic approach from perspectives of different world-views (both western and eastern).

### **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 concept-based paper, in the process of deliberating stress management of the Bhagavad Gita from its spiritual dimension, 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 Bhagavad Gita presents the characteristic features of an individual possessing emotionally-stable wisdom (or) individuals attaining the state of emotional stability. This correlates with the concept of stress management. Let us now proceed to discuss the state of emotional stability, as perceived in the Bhagavad Gita.

### **Characteristic features of a person in the state of Emotional Stability**

According to the Bhagavad Gita, a person of emotional stability is one who has casts off all the hankerings of the mind (*Chapter II, Verse 55*), not shaken by adversity & duality, free from attachment and fear (*Chapter II,*

Verse 56) and has complete control over attachment or detachment (*Chapter II, Verse 57*). In short, a person of stable wisdom has complete control of his/her emotions in all situations. The Bhagavad Gita proclaims that the state of emotional stability is characterized by experiencing immortality (*Chapter II, Verse 15*), Self-realization (*Chapter II, Verse 53*), tranquility (*Chapter II, Verses 64-65*), peace (*Chapter II, Verses 70- 71*), and oneness with Brahman (*Chapter II, Verse 72*).

### **Path-way 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. From delusion emerges loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of discriminative power, and from the ruin of discrimination, the person perishes” (*Chapter II, Verses 62- 63*).

### **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:

1. Step I: Control of the Senses (*gunas*) - Senses Management
2. Step II: Control of Desires (*Kama*) - Desire Management
3. Step III: Control of Anger (*Krodha*) - Anger Management, and
4. Step IV: Control 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 discuss the four steps.

#### **1. Control of the Senses (*gunas*) - Senses Management:**

The senses of a person consists of three vital elements/traits, namely, *sattva* (representing knowledge and calmness), *rajas* (representing activity and desire) and *tamas* (representing laziness and ignorance) (*Chapter XIV, Verses 5 &17*). According to the Bhagavad Gita, senses-control/senses-purification is an inner journey of individuals from a pre-dominantly *tamasic* state of existence to the *rajasic* state, and in turn, from a pre-dominantly *rajasic* state to the *sattvic* state of existence (*Chapter XIV, Verse18*). This process lies in performing action/work motivated by one's own duty and not by the consequences/results of the action/work (*Chapter II, Verses 47-49*).

#### **2. Control of Desires (*Kama*) - Desire Management:**

It must be stated here that Indian tradition recognizes two types of desires, namely, desires regulated by ethics (*dharma*) and desires not regulated by ethics. While the former refers to the positive desires of individuals, the latter refers to the negative desires of individuals. When the Bhagavad Gita talks about desire-control and management, it refers to the negative desires of individuals.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the negative desires of individuals are the greatest impediments towards progress (*Chapter III, Verse 39*) and these can be mitigated by the control of the senses (*Chapter III, Verse 41*).

#### **3. Control of Anger (*Krodha*) - Anger Management:**

It is common knowledge that anger causes emotional disturbances in individuals. The Bhagavad Gita states that anger leads to the ruin of individuals through lack of discriminative power (*Chapter II, Verse 63*). The real

cause for anger is due to unfulfilled desires (*Chapter II, Verse 62*). Therefore, with the control of desires, anger is automatically controlled in individuals.

#### **4. Control of Mind (Manas) - Mind Management:**

Mind is an important component of individuals. According to the Bhagavad Gita, mind is very unstable and is constantly acted upon by two powerful forces, namely, attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dvesa*), thereby hampering individuals to realize peace and tranquility (*Chapter II, Verse 64*).

The Bhagavad Gita proclaims that the restless mind of individuals may be controlled through a spirit of discrimination by renouncing (*vairagya*) the unwanted and holding-on to the important factors as well as the constant practice (*abhyasa*) of the same (*Chapter VI, Verse 35*).

#### **Conclusion**

From the forgone deliberations, we are able to understand that stress management is referred as emotional stability in the Bhagavad Gita. Emotional stability is a state of experience/existence wherein a person of stable wisdom has complete control of his/her emotions in all situations. The Bhagavad Gita identifies four-fold steps, namely, the control of the senses, desire, anger and the mind, to achieve the state of emotional/stable wisdom.

#### **Reference**

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