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Stress Management Through the Teachings of the Bhagavad Gita: A Perspective on Value Education

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The Battlefield Within - Understanding Stress

Stress is a response of the body to an external cause. A person encounters many occasions when life gives a bundle of tasks; those tasks may differ from person to person. A school student may have difficulty completing homework, and, as a result, the homework triggers stress for that student. If the homework is not turned in on time, the child may dread a scolding from the teacher. A working person has their own stress to accomplish their tasks. A leader may experience stress when supervising their team. A family person, on the other hand, has the stress of managing their family; divorce is also extremely common in daily life. Stress can also be for a very short duration, which is actually very beneficial for one's health. Your body responds to stress by releasing hormones that increase your heart and breathing rates and ready your muscles to respond. However, if stress is elevated for an extended period, it may be harmful to your health. (***National Institute of Mental Health [2022]***)

Stress is not a new issue in today's world; it has existed for generations. A prominent example of physiological stress could be seen in the Bhagavad Gita. When Arjuna was under the urge to fight with the Kauravas on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, he was devastated as he was fighting against his loved ones, relatives, friends, and mentors. He was stressed with intense feelings of sadness, confusion, and moral conflict. Because of this stress, he was killed before the battle even began.

Arjuna's stress demonstrates that stress is not a part of the modern world. It has been there for generations. The Bhagavad Gita also describes that his psychological stress was clearly shown physically; his mouth and throat were becoming dry, his legs and arms were trembling, and the famous bow, made by Lord Brahma, the Gandiva, was slipping from his hands. His morals were shouting from his conscience for not battling against his loved ones. However, his dharma, or his duty, was forcing him to defeat the Kauravas. The stress he was having made his mind clouded, and he couldn't come up with a rational decision.

At this important moment, Arjuna's charioteer and mentor, Shri Krishna, who was also considered to be a human form of Lord Vishnu, played an important role in helping Arjuna make a rational decision. Shri Krishna addressed his concerns instead of dismissing them. He explained to him the importance of duty (dharma), selfless action (karma yoga), emotional balance, and control over the mind. He further added that the body is temporary and the soul is immortal, so he should perform his duties rather than predicting the outcome, which is attached to the body only, and not the soul, as the soul is not attached to anyone emotionally. (***Easwaran, 2007, Bhagavad Gita 2.47–2.48***)

In a world filled with academic pressure, workplace challenges, and personal responsibilities, Krishna's message encourages individuals to remain calm and focused while facing life's

difficulties. Inspired by these timeless teachings, the present research seeks to explore how the principles of the *Bhagavad Gita* can contribute to stress management in the modern world. It aims to examine the relevance of Lord Krishna's guidance in addressing challenges regarding physiological stress and promoting emotional well-being.

Mind, Body, and Soul – The Bhagavad Gita's Holistic Framework

The *Bhagavad Gita* presents a holistic understanding of human well-being by explaining the relationship between the **mind (Manas)**, **body (Sharira)**, and **soul (Atman)**. According to the Gita, stress is triggered in the mind due to various external factors. Whether it be your fear of something, attachment to someone, or uncontrollable deep thinking and thoughts. When a person goes through physiological challenges like stress, it is clearly visible in the body physically. Your body reacts to it with fatigue, dizziness, and tension. However, the soul (atman) always remains immortal, and it is never affected by stress. Hence, in any situation, your soul or your inner self is the best friend who can assist you.

Lord Krishna further provides practical principles to overcome stress and lead a balanced life. One of the most important teachings is **Karma Yoga**, the path of selfless action. In (*Bhagavad Gita 2.47*), Krishna says, "*You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but not to the fruits of your actions.*" Through this teaching, he wanted to explain to Arjuna that we have no control over the outcomes of our actions. So it is better to focus sincerely on the actions we are doing today rather than stressing about the outcomes. If our present actions contain hard work, empathy, and dedication. Then certainly the outcomes will be fruitful.

Another important principle is **Samatvam**, or equanimity. In (*Bhagavad Gita 2.48*), Krishna teaches Arjuna another important life lesson that we should be ready for our failure as well as our success. A person who can accept failure the way he/she accepts his/her success, then the person has understood true Yoga. This principle promotes emotional balance by accepting life's uncertainty. Contemporary stress management approaches, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), where one can speak to a trained psychologist and can feel relief, also highlight the importance of balanced thinking and emotional regulation in coping with stressful situations. The Bhagavad Gita also talks about Dhyana (Meditation), which is directly related to controlling one's mind. It is described in the (*Bhagavad Gita 6.26*). Krishna says that whenever one's mind becomes unsteady, one should practice meditation to control one's mind. Through meditation, a person gets his focus sharpened, the awareness of the self is elevated, and the mental peace is enhanced as distractions fade away. Even today, scientists around the globe explain that meditation lowers stress levels and anxiety.

Thus, the lessons of the Bhagavad Gita can help people cope with stress as well by learning to act consciously, stay calm, and perform their actions with balance. These ancient scriptures address the real issues of human life, offering solutions for achieving inner peace regardless of social, political, and financial problems, as well as family and work-related worries.

Applying Ancient Wisdom to Modern Life

The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented technological and pedagogical advances. However, these developments have created new challenges for students, who now have to balance their academic and professional careers, social life, and personal growth while being under constant pressure to perform better than others. Stress is an inevitable part of contemporary student life, which should be managed effectively and efficiently.

First of all, the Bhagavad Gita offers valuable guidance to students in dealing with the stress caused by the constant need to learn and compete with other students. In addition, the pressures of choosing the right career path and managing family/social expectations can also be overwhelming. Moreover, social media and the need to be constantly connected with others add to the students' stress levels. According to the Bhagavad Gita, when one is faced with the need to assess oneself in comparison with others, to understand oneself and improve, one should avoid keeping score and instead concentrate on performing better than one's past performance (*Baghurst and Kelley (2014)*). This advice helps to remain concentrated on one's own needs and goals, rather than comparing oneself with others and losing confidence.

The Bhagavad Gita also advises remaining fearless and strong to navigate the challenges and doubts associated with career decision-making and planning, while also becoming flexible and resilient enough to adapt to constantly changing external conditions (*Cohen et al., 2007*). Similarly, the social pressures and expectations from family and friends can affect one's perception of what one wants and does not want. Therefore, in order to avoid disappointment and unnecessary stress, it is useful to focus on one's own goals and potential, rather than trying to live up to the expectations of others or comparing oneself to others, which is in line with the advice from the Bhagavad Gita.

Practically, when dealing with the stress caused by social pressures such as the desire to become successful, to achieve high grades, to complete all tasks faster than others, and to be always right, students should make sure to plan their activities in line with their own capabilities and aspirations, and avoid overestimating their abilities while underestimating those of others. It is necessary to devote time and attention to the actual process of learning rather than to the pursuit of high grades. In addition, students should try to minimize the time spent on social media, as these platforms serve to increase visibility and popularity and therefore keep people comparing themselves with others. It might also be helpful to focus on the positive things in life and to appreciate small victories, and to spend time analyzing and improving one's own behavior and actions. Furthermore, a little bit of stress management, such as regular breathing exercises or meditation, can make a great difference in terms of one's ability to control stress and manage it efficiently. During difficult times, it is important to remember that there are always people who are ready to help, such as teachers, parents, or psychologists, who can provide emotional support and useful guidance, similarly to how Lord Krishna spoke with Arjuna at the battlefield of Kurukshetra (*Goyal et al. 2014*).

Interestingly, most of the advice from the Bhagavad Gita corresponds to the recommendations made by modern social psychologists. Thus, the ability to focus, mindfulness, meditation, and positive attitude toward life in general help to reduce stress and build sustainable positive relationships. The contemporary understanding of mental health highlights the usefulness of such approaches in order to ensure psychological well-being. Therefore, it can be argued that the relevance of the Bhagavad Gita has not diminished over time, and that its practical advice can help students manage their stress and achieve sustainable positive change.

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