

IMPACT OF THE BHAGWAD GITA ON GLOBAL WELL BEING

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Abstract

The Bhagavad Gita, a timeless spiritual and philosophical text, has profoundly influenced humanity since ancient times, offering guidance on ethical living, personal growth, and universal harmony. Its teachings have not only shaped individual personalities but have also impacted societal structures and global consciousness, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. The Gita's core message revolves around the interplay of action, wisdom, and devotion, providing practical insights into navigating life's challenges while maintaining inner peace and purpose.

This paper explores the multifaceted impact of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita on global well-being, focusing on key areas such as stress management, mental well-being, interpersonal relations, and environmental sustainability. In today's fast-paced world, marked by rising stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, the Gita's principles—such as detachment from outcomes (nishkama karma) and the cultivation of equanimity—offer practical tools to manage stress and attain mental clarity. Its teachings on self-awareness, mindfulness, and emotional balance serve as a foundation for promoting mental health and resilience.

Furthermore, the Gita emphasizes values like empathy, selflessness, and harmony, which are essential for building healthier interpersonal relationships and fostering social cohesion. On a broader scale, the Gita's call to respect and protect nature reflects its relevance to modern environmental concerns, inspiring sustainable living and ecological balance.

By addressing these critical areas, the Bhagavad Gita remains a beacon of timeless wisdom, offering solutions to contemporary challenges. Its universal teachings continue to guide individuals and societies toward a more harmonious, peaceful, and sustainable world, underscoring its enduring relevance in today's global landscape.

Keywords: Bhagwad Gita, ISKON, stress management, mental well – being, interpersonal relationship, environmental sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The development and progress of any nation are intrinsically tied to its education system, which is, in turn, rooted in its knowledge systems. A country's knowledge foundation is often derived from its rich literature and ancient scriptures. India, with its profound cultural heritage and time-honored education system, has historically been a beacon of wisdom and innovation. There was a golden era when the entire world looked up to India as a global hub of knowledge and learning.

Ancient India was home to world-renowned universities like Takshashila and Nalanda, which attracted scholars and learners from distant lands. These institutions were not merely centers of education but cradles of holistic development, focusing on the well-being of individuals and the world at large. Such was the foresight of the nation's visionaries and educators, referred to as Gurus. These Gurus derived their wisdom from India's rich repository of scriptures and literature, written primarily in Sanskrit—the language of education in ancient times. Sanskrit scriptures profoundly shaped the ethos, culture, and societal structure of the Indian subcontinent.

Works like the Charak Samhita, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, and Puranas played pivotal roles in nation-building and influenced the world profoundly. Among these, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita stands out as a timeless repository of knowledge and wisdom. This sacred scripture is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, addressing the latter's moral dilemmas and guiding him toward a righteous path. Comprising 700 verses, the Gita delves deeply into all aspects of life, offering profound insights into ethical living, mental well-being, leadership, stress management, holistic approaches to life, self-actualization, empowerment, and spiritual enlightenment. The enduring relevance of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita lies in its ability to transcend time and context, providing guidance on navigating life's challenges while fostering personal growth and societal harmony. Its teachings are as vital today as they were centuries ago, serving as a source of inspiration and enlightenment for individuals seeking a balanced and meaningful life. The Bhagavad Gita has been translated into an impressive 82 languages, of which 65 are foreign languages. The very first translation of this revered scripture was accomplished by Sir Charles Wilkins in 1785 (Swami Tathagatanda 1).

According to Rajesh and Anjaria, "In 1971 Srila Prabhupad visited Russia for the first time... Though Prabhupada visited Moscow for only Five days, this period of time was enough to initiate and convince Anatoli Federovich Pinyayev to join the Hare Krishna Movement. As a devotee and member of ISKCON, an initiated one, he was given the name Ananta Shanti Dasa. He began by preaching the text Bhagwad Gita – As It Is by Srila Prabhupad to his Russian counterparts. Initially in a highly monitored environment and despite abundant surveillance, Pinyayev began a translation of the Bhagwad Gita into the Russian language and made several handwritten copies of the text in the Russian language and distributed far and wide, which slowly started gaining popularity." (211)

These remarkable statistics stand as undeniable evidence of the profound and far-reaching impact the Gita has had on the world, transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries to inspire generations across the globe.

Lessons of Stress Management in Gita

Technological advancements and modernization have significantly improved the quality of life across the globe. People today enjoy a higher standard of living and greater access to material comforts compared to previous generations and even their ancestors. However, this progress comes with its own set of challenges. Modernization and technological growth have also contributed to an increase in stress levels in people's lives.

Stress has become an almost inescapable part of daily life, manifesting in various domains such as personal relationships, workplace dynamics, financial pressures, health concerns, and even in coping with global events like natural disasters or worldwide crises. This pervasive stress has taken a toll on mental health, leading to a rise in psychological issues and mental illnesses. The growing prevalence of mental health challenges underscores the need for a balanced approach to progress—one that prioritizes emotional well-being alongside material and technological advancements. In severe cases, stress can lead to suicide. In today's fast-paced world, life has become an exhausting and relentless race filled with endless unmet expectations, unfulfilled aspirations, and unattained goals. (Boora and Singh 1)

One of the major reasons behind this rising stress is the highly competitive nature of the modern world. As the most advanced species in the hierarchy of life, humans inherently strive for superiority and success, often seeking to outshine others within their own species. However, when individuals face setbacks or fail to meet expectations in any aspect of life—be it personal, professional, or social—it creates a significant obstacle in their pursuit of this goal.

This persistent drive for achievement, coupled with the fear of failure, has become a dominant source of anxiety and distress. The pressure to succeed at all costs, whether fueled by societal expectations or self-imposed benchmarks, continues to intensify. Consequently, the fear of failure has emerged as a pervasive concern, impacting people across all age groups and walks of life.

Shri Krishna in Gita states in Chapter 2, verse 48;

"योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय। सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते॥"

This shloka offers profound guidance to Arjuna, urging him to fulfill his responsibilities without being swayed by either the fear of failure or the allure of success. It emphasizes the significance of cultivating detachment from the results of one's actions, advocating for a mindset rooted in focus and discipline rather than obsession with outcomes.

The underlying lesson is the value of maintaining mental equilibrium in the face of life's uncertainties. By detaching oneself from the emotional highs and lows associated with success and failure, one can perform their duties with sincerity, dedication, and clarity of purpose. This perspective not only fosters inner peace but also encourages individuals to act ethically and diligently, irrespective of the eventual results. The shloka serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of aligning one's efforts with principles of duty and balance, rather than being driven by external rewards or fears.

This is just one example among the many verses in the **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita** that provide profound insights on combating mental stress. The Gita, with its timeless wisdom, offers numerous shlokas that guide individuals on how to attain mental clarity, equanimity, and emotional resilience. Through its teachings, it encourages cultivating inner peace and maintaining a balanced state of mind, especially in the face of challenges and adversity. Each verse serves as a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of modern life, making the Bhagavad Gita a significant resource for managing mental stress and promoting overall well-being.

Influence of the Gita on Mental Health and Relationships

It is crucial to maintain both physical and mental well-being for a balanced and fulfilling life. In recent years, there has been growing awareness about the importance of physical fitness, with more people adopting healthier lifestyles. However, when it comes to mental health, many still hesitate to acknowledge or openly discuss the challenges they face. This reluctance often stems from societal stigma and a lack of understanding, leading individuals to suppress their struggles. Unfortunately, such avoidance can intensify their issues, eventually resulting in severe complications, including mental breakdowns. Mental disorders affect people of all ages, socioeconomic statuses, and regions, touching individuals from diverse backgrounds. These conditions result in personal distress, hinder daily activities, and impose significant societal costs. (Meghrajani et al 1)

It is to be noted that, in India, the prevalence of mental health disorders has been steadily increasing, intensifying the public health crisis. It is estimated that around 15% of the Indian population struggles with some form of mental health issue. (Meghrajani et al 1) One of the significant factors contributing to the rise in mental health issues in India is the shift in family dynamics from joint families to nuclear families. Traditionally, joint families provided a strong support system, offering emotional security, shared responsibilities, and a sense of belonging. However, with the increasing prevalence of nuclear households, individuals often face a lack of communal support, heightened isolation, and added pressures to manage challenges independently. This shift has disrupted the traditional safety net, leaving many more vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. The theory of family nuclearisation finds its origins in the Industrial Revolution, which marked the beginning of modernization. Numerous sociologists argue that factors such as industrialization, urbanization, increased spatial and social mobility, an emphasis on individualism, and the advancement of women's education and status have brought about significant transformations in family structures. These shifts have led to a transition from traditional, extended family systems to smaller, nuclear households. (Priya 28)

These mental crises, arising from distant interpersonal relationships, were not prevalent in ancient India, as the traditional Indian society was deeply rooted in the teachings and values of our scriptures. The emphasis on community, familial bonds, and spiritual connection helped foster close-knit relationships and emotional support systems. However, such crises were observed at the global level, where societies did not necessarily have the same emphasis on spiritual and communal teachings. The traditional Indian way of life, grounded in practices like mindfulness, meditation, and the pursuit of dharma, provided a framework that helped individuals navigate interpersonal challenges with resilience and wisdom. In contrast, other societies, due to varying cultural constructs, may not have had such integrated systems to address emotional well-being and relational difficulties, leading to the emergence of mental stress in these contexts.

Moreover, an increasing number of individuals are choosing to remain single and opting out of marriage, a trend that has significantly contributed to a growing sense of loneliness in modern society. This shift can be attributed to various factors, including a desire for personal freedom, career prioritization, financial independence, and apprehensions about long-term commitments. While this lifestyle choice offers certain benefits, such as greater autonomy, it often leads to reduced social interaction and a lack of emotional companionship, leaving many individuals feeling more isolated than ever before. According to the U.S. Census data from 2020, 49% of women and 48% of men are unmarried. However, a 2019 Pew Research Center survey reveals that only 31% of Americans are truly single. Similarly, in Europe, the trend of singlehood has been on the rise, with single-person households increasing from 31% in 2010 to 34% in 2017. In India, data from the National Statistical Office (NSO) highlights a 23% rise in the number of young people aged 15 to 29 who have never been married compared to 2011. Census data further indicates that India now has at least 74.1 million single women—including those who are never-married, divorced, or widowed—marking a 39% increase between 2001 and 2011. (Chaudhary and Kumari 1) Additionally, the growing influence of social media has shifted the way people build and maintain friendships, with many preferring online interactions over face-to-face connections. While digital platforms offer convenience and the ability to connect with others across distances, they often lack the depth and emotional intimacy of in-person relationships. This over-reliance on virtual friendships has led to a decline in genuine human interaction, leaving individuals feeling disconnected and unsupported in real-life situations. As a result, this trend has contributed to a rise in mental health issues, such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression, as people struggle to find meaningful social connections in an increasingly digital world.

As a result, psychologists and psychiatrists today are significantly busier than those of the previous generation, owing to the rising prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. One of the primary and most effective approaches they employ to treat these conditions is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT is a structured, evidence-based therapeutic technique that helps individuals identify and challenge negative thought patterns and behaviors, replacing them with healthier and more constructive ones. This method not only addresses the immediate symptoms of anxiety and depression but also equips individuals with practical coping skills to manage future challenges, making it a cornerstone of modern mental health treatment.

In fact, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita can be regarded as one of the earliest known examples of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in the world. The profound dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna embodies many principles that align with the foundations of CBT. Through rational discourse and guided introspection, Krishna helps Arjuna identify and challenge his distorted thoughts, overwhelming doubts, and emotional turmoil, which stem from guilt, attachment, and fear. Krishna encourages Arjuna to adopt a more balanced and pragmatic perspective, emphasizing the importance of duty, self-control, and detachment from the outcomes of one's actions. By addressing Arjuna's inner conflicts and empowering him to shift his mindset, the Gita serves as a timeless example of how cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation can lead to clarity, resilience, and purposeful action. The Bhagavad Gita serves as a prelude to the Kurukshetra war, set against the backdrop of the skilled and insightful archer Arjuna, who finds himself on a chariot steered by Lord Krishna, his guide and charioteer. Preparing to confront a vast army composed of his own relatives, teachers, and mentors, Arjuna, despite being a formidable warrior, becomes hesitant. Overwhelmed by the fear of destroying his loved ones and burdened by guilt, doubt, and emotional attachment, he contemplates abandoning the battlefield. In response,

Lord Krishna delivers a profound discourse, guiding Arjuna toward the path of righteousness and encouraging him to fulfill his duty in the war—a battle symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. This dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna embodies several principles of psychotherapy and inner transformation. (Bhatia et al 316)

Gita and Environment Sustainability

In its natural order, the world was created with perfect balance, ensuring harmony between all living and non-living elements. However, the unchecked greed and relentless ambition of humankind have disrupted this equilibrium, raising critical questions about the sustainability of the environment. Human activities, driven by overexploitation of resources, deforestation, industrialization, and pollution, have severely tampered with the natural balance, triggering a cascade of environmental consequences. As a result, humanity now faces the harsh repercussions of these actions, manifested through increasingly frequent and devastating natural calamities such as floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes. These disasters, which can be seen as nature's attempt to restore the balance, have claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, underscoring the urgent need for collective responsibility and sustainable practices to safeguard the planet for future generations.

A similar situation is described to have existed at the time when the verses of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita were spoken by Shri Krishna, addressing Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. In the midst of a war-centric environment, Lord Krishna explained to Arjuna the necessity of engaging in battle to uphold dharma (righteousness and moral duty). During his discourse, Krishna revealed that the universe is a manifestation of His divine power and that He governs the cycle of life and death for all living beings. He emphasized that He is the supreme ruler of the universe, and everything operates under His direction. Krishna described Himself as the creator of both nature and all living beings, highlighting that His creations are nurtured within the embrace of nature. Furthermore, He established the fundamental laws that govern the relationship between living beings and nature, ensuring harmony and balance within His creation. (Pramanik and Sarkar 252)

Shri Krishna in Gita states in Chapter 13, verse 17;

“अविभक्तं च भूतेषु विभक्तमिव च स्थितम् । भूतभर्तृ च तज्ज्ञेयं यसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च ॥ १३-१७॥”

In this verse, Lord Krishna describes the nature of the Jñeya (the knowable element, or Supreme Reality). Here, the qualities of the **Paramātmā** (Supreme Soul) are mentioned, who, while residing in all beings, appears to be both **undivided** and **divided** at the same time. This verse reveals the **omnipresence** and mysterious nature of the **Supreme Being** (Paramātmā). He is unique and indivisible, yet appears divided because of His presence in all of creation. He is the **creator** (the one who brings forth creation), the **sustainer** (the one who preserves it), and the **destroyer** (the one who brings about its dissolution).

In this verse of the **Bhagavad Gita**, the profound secret of the **non-dualistic philosophy** (Advaita) and the all-encompassing nature of the Supreme Being is revealed.

Having witnessed the devastating consequences of humanity's relentless acts of selfishness, the world is now striving to restore nature's harmony through initiatives such as the creation of man-made forests using the **Miyawaki method**, tree plantations in urban areas, and the conservation of various species of animals, birds, insects, and plants that are on the brink of extinction. Humanity has begun to recognize the intricate **interdependence** of all elements of nature, which is essential for the survival of life on Earth. This profound concept of interdependence is eloquently expressed in **Verse 10 of Chapter 9 of the Bhagavad Gita**, emphasizing that material nature functions under divine supervision to create and sustain all living and non-living entities. The shloka is;

"मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः स्यूते सचराचरम्".

"Under my supervision, Prakriti generates this universe of moving and motionless (beings)". "This material nature, operating under My supervision, is one of My energies, O son of Kunti. It brings forth all living and non-living beings, continuously creating and dissolving this manifestation. This verse highlights the interdependence of all components in the natural world and underscores the significance of preserving ecological harmony."

CONCLUSION

Therefore, it can be confidently asserted that, the **Bhagavad Gita** continues to hold immense relevance and significance in today's world, offering timeless wisdom that addresses both individual and collective challenges. Its teachings, rooted in **universal truths**, transcend cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries, providing guidance for people across diverse walks of life. The Gita serves as a **holistic manual for life**, promoting mental clarity, emotional resilience, ethical conduct, and spiritual growth.

At an individual level, the Gita equips us with practical tools for managing **stress, anxiety, and emotional turmoil** by teaching the importance of **detachment from outcomes** and focusing on righteous action (karma yoga). Its message of maintaining **equanimity**—whether in success or failure—helps cultivate a balanced and peaceful state of mind. This is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced and demanding world, where mental well-being is a growing concern.

On a societal level, the Gita encourages values such as **empathy, selflessness, and harmony**, which are essential for fostering healthy interpersonal relationships and promoting social cohesion. Its emphasis on **duty and moral responsibility** (dharma) inspires individuals to act with integrity and compassion, contributing to the betterment of society as a whole.

Furthermore, the Gita's reverence for nature and its recognition of the **interdependence of all life forms** underscore its relevance to **environmental sustainability**. By advocating for balance and stewardship, it provides a philosophical framework for addressing ecological crises.

In conclusion, the Bhagavad Gita is not merely a spiritual text but a **comprehensive guide** for achieving personal growth, social harmony, and global well-being. Its enduring wisdom empowers humanity to navigate contemporary challenges with resilience, purpose, and a sense of interconnectedness, ultimately paving the way for a more peaceful, sustainable, and harmonious world.

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