

THE BHAGWAD GITA: A ROADMAP FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING

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“यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत । अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् । धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥“ (Bhagwad Gita: 4.7)

In this shloka, Lord Krishna states that he shall descend whenever there is decline in righteousness and rise of irreligion, in order to destroy evil and establish dharma. The Bhagwat Gita, a part of the epic Mahabharata, is a sermon Krishna delivered to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurekshetra. The treatise unfolds a deep philosophy of the soul's immortal nature, of Karma and right action, Sankhya and Yoga. The knowledge imbued in the Gita is so profound that it has been interpreted by many and needs several readings before one grasps the subtle layers of meanings embedded within the text. The principles enshrined in it are for everyone, irrespective of religion, race, and nationality; for they are life principles that unfold practices of right deeds, right thoughts, humility, righteousness and many more. In a world torn by war, in times when mental health has become a global challenge with loneliness, depression and anxiety impacting lives, the Gita is a refuge, a book that answers many complex questions. It is therefore that it is an integral part of Indian culture. One needs to view it not just as a religious text, but as a handbook that deals with multifarious facets of life.

Keywords: Krishna, Dharma, righteousness, Karma, life principles, mental health.

“The Geeta”, said Mahatma Gandhi, “Is the universal mother”(p. XI).

The Bhagwad Gita (B.G.) has its origins in a very remote past. The sermon Lord Krishnadelivered to Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurekshetra is preceded by an earlier version:

श्रीभगवानुवाच

इमंविस्वतेयोगंप्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम्।

विस्वान्मनवेप्राहमनुरिक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत्॥१॥(BG, 4:1)

The shloka can be understood as follows :Lord Krishna delivered this Yog or relationship to the supreme, to the Sun god Vivasan, who then passed it on to Manu, the father of mankind, who then gave it to his son Iksvaku. The Brahma-samhitā and the Mahabharata both trace the history of the Bhagwad Gita. The version which Krishna delivered to Arjuna is some five thousand years ago while the one given to Vivasan even before the birth of Manu, its estimated date goes back to about two million years ago.

This ancient text permeates Indian life and has impacted yogis, seers, philosophers and laymen alike. The Bhagwad Gita begins with the word Dharma which shouldn't be interpreted as religion. It includes in its ambit duty, just deeds, ethics, and life management.:

धर्मक्षेत्रेकुरुक्षेत्रेसमवेतायुयुत्सवः। (BG 1:1)

It is thus that one needs to go into its many layers to be able to apply its principles to contemporary challenges.

Answers to Mental Health Issues in the Bhagwad Gita

Hamlet, the protagonist in William Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet: The Prince of Denmark, suffers due to his dilemma, to the extent of becoming delusional, unable to perform his duties or to take action to avenge his father's murder, as ordained by the ghost of senior Hamlet. This mental affliction affected Arjuna, the warrior Pandava, who refuses to fight his kinsmen in the battle of Kurukshetra. He lays down his arms when the warring armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas are facing each other in the battlefield. It is Lord Krishna who awakens him from his delusional slumber and inaction, showing him the path of Dharma (righteousness) and Karma (action), manifesting himself in his divine form. Arjuna's fate could have been akin to that of Hamlet's. In the present scenario mental health has become a challenge, especially in the post- Corona times. The penetration of AI and digital technology in human lives has risen manifold, setting in an isolation and individualistic mindset. The Bhagwad Gita has answers.

First, let us look at some factors which become causal in afflicting mental health:

- Procrastination
- Inaction
- Indecisiveness
- Physical health
- Financial problems
- Relationships
- Calamities, both natural and man mad

If we consider these points, and apply them to the Bhagwa Gita and the solutions it offers, we need to begin right at the beginning:

1. Arjuna Builds a Case

Standing between the warring armies, Arjuna loses the desire to confront his kinsmen. He tells Krishna that his body quivers, he cannot hold his bow, that he sees the futility of fighting his clansmen, that it is evil to indulge in the killing of his brothers and teacher and other elders.

1.1. Inability to Transcend the Individualistic Ego

This is his inaction, going against his ‘Dharma’ for Dharma means that which is one’s true nature. It also shows his individualistic ego consciousness which doesn’t let him see the larger picture of the war being a necessity as both families are upholding their own principles. He has a limited vision created by own ego which causes mental confusion. After having put forth all his points, he makes the ultimate statement that he would not fight.

During this entire monologue, Krishna is silent.

Krishna’s solution:

Krishna delivers to Arjuna a solution that is loaded with wisdom:

अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे |

गतासूनगतासूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः || (BG 2.11)

“You have grieved for those that should not be grieved for; yet, you speak words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead.”

The sense of dejection is born when one views life as being bound with physical limitations. Going beyond these is the way one experiences liberation, as also clinging to sensory perceptions:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।

आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत॥ (BG 2:14)

Overcoming failure or pain is a choice a person can make by coming to realise that nothing can remain the same, all sensory perceptions and experiences are also impermanent. Everything has a beginning and an end.

Krishna adds that only the one to whom pleasure and pain are the same, is not afflicted by these impermanent experiences.

1.2 त्यक्त्वा कर्मफलासङ्गं नित्यतृप्तो निराश्रयः ।

कर्मण्यभिप्रवृत्तोऽपि नैव किञ्चित्करोति सः ॥ २० ॥ (BG 4.20)

2. Life Management Skills:

2.1. Steady Mind:

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाःसुखेषुविगतस्पृहः ।

वीतरागभयक्रोधःस्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते॥(BG 2:56)

Interpreted as : To be ‘ sthitpragya’, a mind and consciousness that is unwavering, contributes to making right decisions which is must for successful business practices

Krishna, in chapter 2, advises Arjuna to have a steady mind. This firm and unwavering mind is a remedy for the indecisiveness we are faced with today. The Flying Officer of the National Cadets Core Air Wing Unit of PMBG Science College opines, “ The Bhagwad Geeta is the ultimate teacher. There is no answer that’s not found in it, no problem for which there is no remedy.”

2.2. Upholding What is Right:

परित्राणायसाधूनांविनाशायचदुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थायसम्भवामियुगेयुगे ॥ (BG 4:8)

This can be interpreted as - Lord Krishna emphasises the annihilation of evil and establishment of Dharma. Following the right path, upholding Dharma in one’s business practices, can build

a strong personality and nation. Here one must focus on the necessity of weeding out evil and upholding what is right. Treading the wrong path for short term gains and selfish interests or for harming others is not the right way. It is bound to have some sort of repercussions.

2.3. Knowledge as the Ultimate Weapon

तस्मादज्ञानसम्भूतं हृत्स्थं ज्ञानासिनात्मनः ।

छित्त्वेन संशयं योगमातिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ भारत ॥ (BG 4.42)

Therefore, the doubts which have arisen in your heart out of ignorance should be slashed by the weapon of knowledge. Armed with yoga, O Bhārata, stand and fight. The darkness of ignorance can be dispelled by the light of knowledge and knowledge is power. This power is the stepping stone to success.

3. Overcoming Conflicts:

3.1 त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥ (16:21)

There are three gates leading to the hell of self-destruction for the soul—lust, anger, and greed. Therefore, one should abandon all three.

Interpreted as: Greed, mentioned in this verse, is the gateway to hell. Consumerism, exploitation, over use of resources are all results of greed which have given rise to health and environmental hazards. The more a person gets enmeshed in greed and lust, the more possibilities of being digressed from the right path. Similarly, unfulfilled desires give rise to anger. In as way it's a trap man creates for himself.

Greed generated by desires becomes obsessive. This creates familial and societal disruption, apart from personal obsessive disorders and conflicts. Practising self-control is the mantra we get here.

3.2 ध्यायतो विषयान्गुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।

सङ्गात्सञ्जायते कामः कामात्क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥ (BG 2: 62)

While contemplating on the objects of the senses, one develops attachment to them. Attachment leads to desire, and from desire arises anger.

Interpreted as: Excessive attachment to objects gives birth to desires. Desires make a vicious cycle in which one loses discretion of right and wrong which leads to corrupt practices. This makes the social order collapse in the long run. Desires never end, chasing them is an endless marathon. There is one thing after another, then dissatisfaction and frustration and mental chaos.

The obsession resulting from greed is akin to the obsession with sense generated desires, which in turn lead to crimes. Humans have this hubris-nemesis syndrome.

3.3. तस्मादज्ञानसम्भूतं हृत्स्थं ज्ञानासिनात्मनः |

छित्त्वेनं संशयं योगमातिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ भारत || (BG 4:42)

Therefore, with the sword of knowledge, cut asunder the doubts that have arisen in your heart. O scion of Bharat, establish yourself in *karmyog*. Arise, stand up, and take action!

Interpreted as: Knowledge has the capacity to destroy doubts. For an unwavering mind, karma(action) is important and therefore vanquishing doubts that assail us with the potent weapon of knowledge, an individual needs to keep his attention on his karma or actions.

4. Humility as the Ultimate Gift

ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः |

लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा || (BG 5:10)

Those who dedicate their actions to God, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin, just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.

These are deep philosophical viewpoints. Krishna has encapsulated in this philosophy some very potent remedies which in a way are the guiding principles of life. The thing is that man has sort of lost track of these. It is time to find one's way back to the fundamentals. Everything begins with the kind of thoughts we nurture. Our thoughts make us. Krishna's philosophy works on thoughts and if reinforced time and again these can be great learnings.

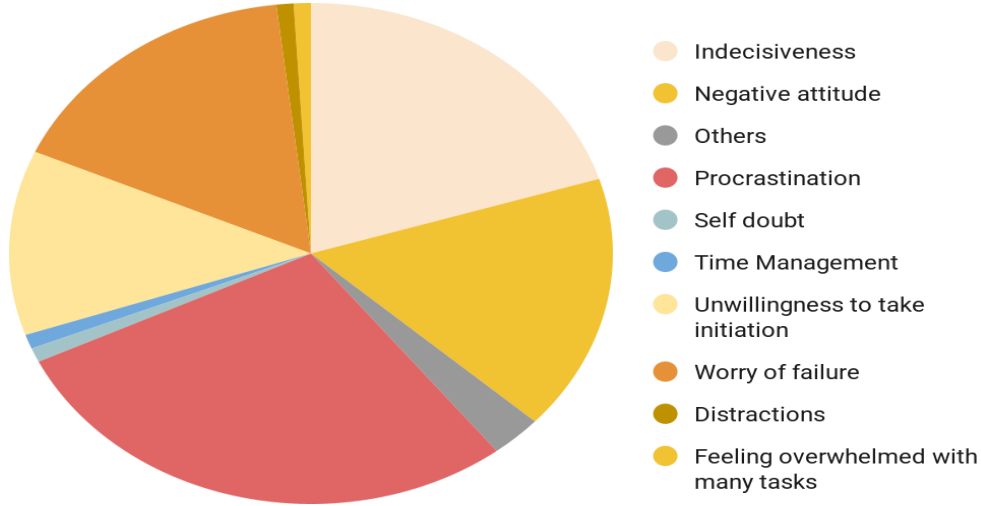
5. Dealing with Procrastination:

अयुक्तः प्राकृतः स्तब्धः शठो नैष्कृतिकोऽलसः |

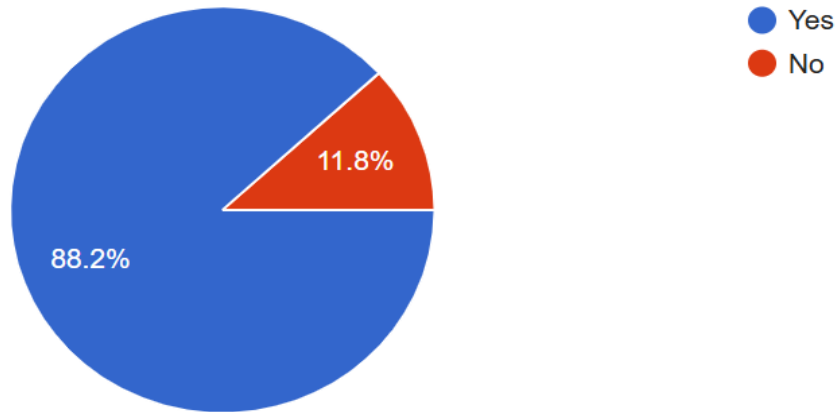
विषादी दीर्घसूत्री च कर्ता तामस उच्यते || (BG 18:28)

Ignorance is a tamsic trait, one that leads to sloth, deceit and procrastination. The word ‘ dirghsutri’ deserves attention because it has been interpreted as been akin to procrastination.

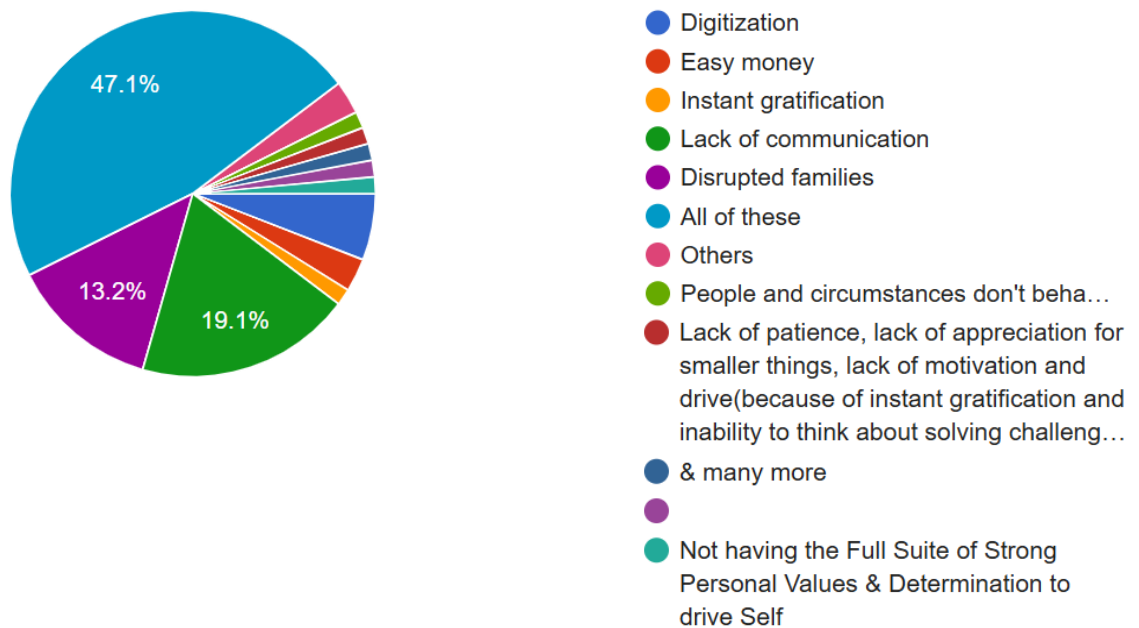
A questionnaire based on questions related to the Bhagwad Gita and its relevance and its relation to mental health was floated among students from various colleges as well as working professionals. The graphical representation of the questions gives an insight into mindsets, problems most people face and the embeddedness of the Gita into the Indian way of life.



1. Which among these are challenges that concern you most?



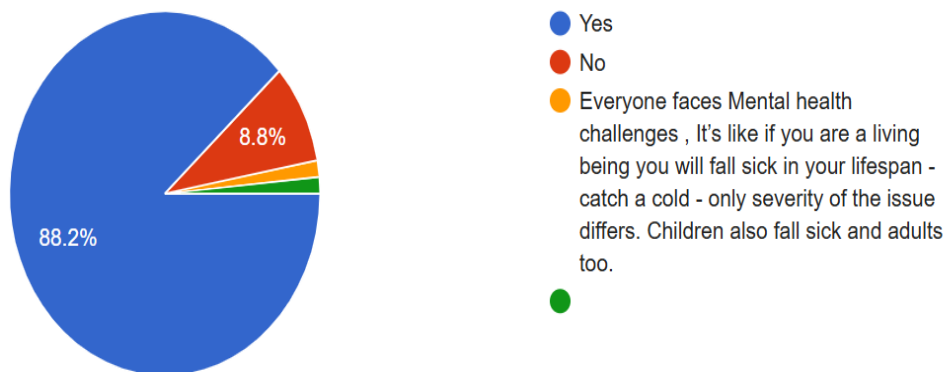
2. Have you read any sholka/ chapter of the Bhagwad Geeta?



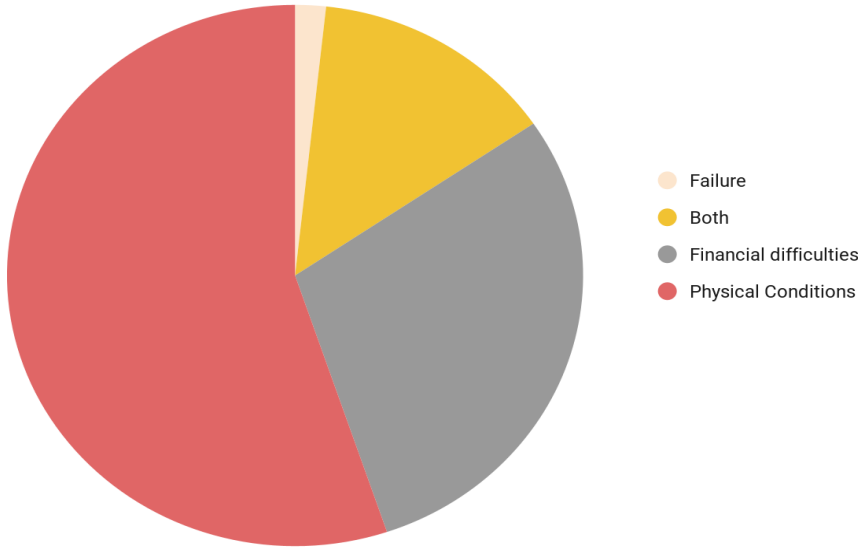
3. Which are the major factors contributing to mental health issues?



4. Have you felt depressed in the recent past or experienced moods swings for long periods of time?



5. Are youngsters facing mental health challenges in the present scenario?



6. Which do you think is a greater problem, financial difficulties or physical conditions?
7. This question was related to a Shloka from the Gita and the answers received were analytical ones which have been summarised as follows:

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः

आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत

BG 2.14: O son of Kunti, the contact between the senses and the sense objects gives rise to fleeting perceptions of happiness and distress. These are non-permanent, and come and go like the winter and summer seasons. O descendent of Bharat, one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed.

What is your understanding of this shloka?

BE CALM WHILE DEALING WITH ANY SITUATION.

This shloka from the Bhagavad Gita (BG 2.14) is a profound teaching on equanimity and resilience in the face of life's inevitable ups and downs. It inspires us to develop resilience

and equanimity, understanding that life's dualities are natural and temporary. By tolerating these fluctuations with a calm and composed mind,

Suggestions:

- Some shlokas of the Bhagwad Gita can be included in the syllabus at school level right at an early age.
- They should be interpreted for the benefit of students and projects or field works can be included for practical enforcement of these learnings.
- The purpose is building healthy minds and strong characters. If our youngsters can be channelised right from an early age, a number of complexities arising from social media, drug abuse, anger and depression can be curbed.

Even Albert Einstein was inspired by the Gita and he strongly believed in the power of spiritualism. For him religion and science coexist. So even in this world of rapidly revolving technology and scientific discoveries, uplifting the spiritual quotient can serve as a panacea for many ills societies are suffering from.

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