

THE BHAGAVAD GITA AND MENTAL HEALTH: AN INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE ON CONTEMPORARY MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the relevance of the Bhagavad Gita in current debates regarding mental well-being from the point of view of Indian Knowledge Systems. In terms of methodology, it adopts a qualitative, interpretative and literature-based approach, making use of selected passages from the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita and appropriate scholarly work on psychology, well-being and Indian Knowledge Systems. Starting with Arjuna's emotional distress, the paper examines the main teachings found in the eighteen chapters, with a focus on self-control, equanimity, detachment, disciplined action, compassion, moderation, devotion and reflective decision-making. The various teachings are then considered in light of modern issues such as stress, anxiety, burnout, emotional instability, overthinking, isolation and a lack of purpose. The analysis suggests that the *Bhagavad Gita* offers a philosophical and culturally rooted framework for understanding dimensions of mental well-being, particularly through its emphasis on emotional regulation, purposeful action, balanced living, and reflective self-understanding. At the same time, the article does not position the *Bhagavad Gita* as a substitute for clinical psychological or psychiatric care, rather, it argues that its philosophical insights may contribute to broader discussions of mental well-being while remaining complementary to professional therapy and evidence-based mental health practices.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Mental Health, Psychological Well-being, Self-Regulation.

INTRODUCTION

The *Bhagavad Gita* is presented as a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in the context of the Kurukshetra war. The dialogue begins with Arjuna's distress before the battle. In Chapter 1, Arjuna describes physical manifestations of his disturbed state: “वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते। गाण्डीवं संसते हस्तात्त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते॥” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 1.29). The verse describes trembling of the body, horripilation, the slipping of the Gandiva bow from his hand, and burning of the skin. The text then develops a dialogue concerning action, knowledge, discipline, attachment, desire, the mind, devotion, selfhood, and liberation.

The *Gītā* contains several teachings concerning conduct and the regulation of one's actions and mind. For example, Chapter 2 states: “कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन। मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.47). In Chapter 6, the *Gītā* states: “यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम्। ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत्॥” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 6.26), describing the repeated bringing back of the wandering and unsteady mind. These statements are presented here according to the text itself and within its philosophical context.

The present paper reviews the Bhagavad Gita from the perspective of Indian Knowledge Systems with special emphasis on the teachings that are discussed in relation to psychological concerns. The purpose is not to interpret the Gita as a modern psychological manual or to offer clinical diagnoses to the experiences narrated in the text. Instead, the paper explores specific verses from all eighteen chapters and considers their possible relevance to contemporary discussions of psychological well-being. Where a relationship is established between a teaching in the Gita and a contemporary psychological concept, that relationship is treated as a conceptual correspondence. This correspondence is not an identity between the Sanskrit concept and the modern psychological construct. The paper does not claim the clinical effectiveness of Bhagavad Gita in treating psychological disorders, since such a claim would require appropriate empirical intervention evidence. The analysis therefore maintains a distinction between the textual statement of the Bhagavad Gita, the interpretations provided by scholars, and the conceptual correspondences that may be identified with contemporary psychological discussions.

Review of Related Literature

Mental health has emerged as an important public health concern in India, with evidence indicating high rate of mental health issues and massive gaps in access to treatment. Gururaj et al. (2016), through the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015–16), documented the commonness of mental health issues across different population groups and highlighted the considerable treatment gap for mental health conditions. Their findings established the scale of mental health needs in the Indian context and indicated limitations in the availability and utilisation of mental health services. Using data from the same national survey, Gautham et al. (2020) examined the prevalence, socio-demographic correlates, and treatment gap of mental morbidity in India. Their findings revealed that mental health issues varied across socio-demographic characteristics and that there are significant treatment gaps. These studies provide the background of the modern mental health scenario in India, against which a discussion about psychological well-being and coping strategies can take place. In Indian philosophical literature, the Bhagavad Gita has been studied for its potential contribution to understanding psychological mechanisms and psychotherapeutic techniques. Reddy (2012), in “Psychotherapy—Insights from Bhagavad Gita,” examined insights from the Gita in relation to psychotherapy. The study represents an interpretation of the Gita's teachings in relation to psychotherapy rather than an empirical intervention study. Bhatia et al. (2013), in “The Bhagavad Gita and contemporary psychotherapies,” examined parallels between teachings of the Gita and contemporary

psychotherapies. Their discussion included comparisons between selected Gita teachings and approaches used in contemporary psychotherapy. These comparisons provide a basis for identifying conceptual correspondences, but they do not establish that the Gita itself constitutes a clinically validated psychotherapeutic intervention. Pandurangi et al. (2014) discussed psychotherapy in relation to the Bhagavad Gita. Their work contributes to the scholarly discussion of the Gita as a source that can be examined in relation to psychotherapy. However, it is a scholarly commentary rather than an empirical intervention study demonstrating clinical effectiveness. Lolla (2021) examined the impact of a Bhagavad Gita course on college students using students' feedback. More than 2,000 students had taken the course, while 300 students voluntarily provided written feedback. The reported responses included perceptions concerning clarity, focus, calmness, contentment, leadership, and problem-solving. Because the study was based on voluntary student feedback, its findings should be understood as reported participant perceptions rather than evidence of clinical effectiveness of the Bhagavad Gita as a treatment intervention. Dhillon (2023) reviewed 24 articles published between 2012 and 2022 concerning intersections between the Bhagavad Gita and modern psychology. The review identified three broad themes: comparisons between the Gita and modern psychotherapy, possible precedents for modern psychological concepts, and discussions concerning the potential relationship of the Gita with well-being and resilience. The study therefore demonstrates the range of existing scholarship rather than providing evidence that the Gita is a clinically effective psychological treatment. Agrawal et al. (2026) developed a holistic model of life skills by integrating WHO and NEP 2020 with Bhagavad Gita perspectives. The study is relevant to the present paper because it connects Gita-based concepts with educational and well-being frameworks, while still requiring careful distinction between philosophical interpretation and empirical mental-health evidence.

Taken together, the reviewed literature shows that scholars have examined the Bhagavad Gita in relation to psychotherapy, psychological concepts, well-being, and selfhood. However, the nature of this literature is predominantly interpretive, comparative, review-based, or based on participant feedback. The literature therefore supports examination of conceptual correspondences between selected teachings of the Gita and contemporary psychological discussions, but it does not provide sufficient grounds for making general claims about clinical effectiveness.

The present study builds on this literature by examining the text chapter by chapter. The analysis first states what the relevant Gita verse says, then identifies the interpretation offered by the relevant scholar where such scholarship exists and finally distinguishes any contemporary psychological connection as a conceptual correspondence rather than an established equivalence or clinical effect.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the key teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* related to mental well-being through a chapter-wise analysis of its 18 chapters.
2. To explore the conceptual relationship between these teachings and contemporary psychological challenges such as stress, anxiety, emotional imbalance, burnout, and overthinking.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, literature-based research design. The *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gita*, published by Gita Press, Gorakhpur, serves as the primary textual source. Selected verses from all eighteen chapters are examined according to their meaning, theme and connection to the study's focus on mental well-being. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed literature on the Gita, psychology, well-being, psychotherapy, and Indian Knowledge Systems. The analysis focuses on themes such as mental distress, action, attachment, equanimity, mental discipline, desire, anger, compassion, and selfhood. Scholarly interpretations and reported findings are examined alongside the selected verses, while any relationship with contemporary psychological concepts is presented as conceptual correspondence rather than as evidence of direct equivalence or clinical effectiveness.

Key Teachings of the Bhagavad Gita for Mental Health: A Chapter-Wise Review

The analysis focuses on selected verses from all eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita. Each chapter is examined for its textual teaching, its relevance to psychological well-being, and its possible conceptual correspondence with selected contemporary psychological concerns. These correspondences are not treated as direct equivalences or as evidence of clinical effectiveness.

Chapter 1: Arjuna Vishada Yoga — Recognition of Distress

Primary Problem: Acute distress, grief, panic, and loss of confidence.

Core Teaching: Suffering must first be recognized, named, and expressed rather than denied or prematurely masked.

Sanskrit Verse: [“वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते।](#)

[गाण्डीवं संसते हस्तात्त्वक्चैव परिदहते”॥](#)

([Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 1, Verse 29; Gita Press, Gorakhpur](#))

English Translation: “My body trembles, my hair stands on end, my bow Gandiva slips from my hand, and my skin burns.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 1 establishes the embodied nature of psychological crisis. The text describes the body's response to acute overwhelm through shaking, loss of motor control, and heat. Thus, this verse affirms somatic distress and may be read as conceptually relevant to contemporary discussions of the physical manifestations of mental strain.

Chapter 2: Sankhya Yoga — Decoupling Action from Outcome

Primary Problem: Outcome-dependent anxiety, fear of failure, and paralysis of agency.

Core Teaching: Distinguish responsible action from excessive psychological attachment to results, thereby cultivating inner equanimity.

Sanskrit Verse: || “कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि” ||

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 2, Verse 47; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “You have a right to action alone, never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment be to inaction.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Separating effort from outcome helps address paralysis. The teaching can be interpreted as encouraging attention toward one’s sphere of action rather than excessive preoccupation with outcomes that cannot be fully controlled. This principle may offer a conceptual framework for facing performance anxiety, academic stress, and career uncertainty in professional and academic environments today, shifting attention from unpredictable results to sincere effort.

Chapter 3: Karma Yoga — From Paralysis to Purposeful Action

Primary Problem: Executive dysfunction, avoidance, and helplessness.

Core Teaching: Engage in necessary, ethically grounded duty (svadharma) without entitlement to personal reward.

Sanskrit Verse: || “तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर।

असक्तो ह्याचरन् कर्म परं आप्नोति पूरुषः” ||

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 3, Verse 19; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Therefore, always perform the action that ought to be done without attachment; for by performing action without attachment, one attains the highest.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 3 constructs an antidote to behavioural paralysis. Rather than calling for withdrawal or a complete abdication of responsibility, the text emphasizes disciplined, duty-bound engagement. In modern life, it serves as a conceptual antidote to procrastination and powerlessness, highlighting deliberate action as a way of getting back on track.

Chapter 4: Jnana Karma Sannyasa Yoga — From Doubt to Discernment

Primary Problem: Indecision, cognitive ambiguity, and paralyzing doubt.

Core Teaching: Discriminative knowledge (Viveka) and critical discernment are essential to resolve disabling uncertainty.

Sanskrit Verse: || “अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति” ||

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 4, Verse 40; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “The ignorant, the faithless, and the doubting person go to ruin.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 4 deals with the paralyzing effect of unquestioned doubt. It shows that mental clarity is achieved through active inquiry, understanding, and critical reflection, not through impulsive reactions. The principle can be understood as conceptually related to strategies for dealing with decision fatigue and information overload in hyper-connected environments.

Chapter 5: Karma Sannyasa Yoga — Engaged Detachment

Primary Problem: Psychological entanglement with tasks, societal roles, and outcomes.

Core Teaching: Remain fully active in worldly responsibilities while reducing personal possessiveness over final results.

Sanskrit Verse: || “ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः।

लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्बसा” ||

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 5, Verse 10; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “One who performs actions, dedicating them to the Supreme and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by them, just as a lotus leaf remains untouched by water.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: The metaphor of the lotus leaf describes the manner in which a person can engage in external duties without allowing stress, role pressure, or performance anxiety to overwhelm the core sense of self. This can be interpreted as a conceptual model for thinking about burnout and caregiver fatigue, while not replacing clinical or occupational approaches to these conditions.

Chapter 6: Dhyana Yoga — Training the Mind

Primary Problem: Mental restlessness, digital/environmental distraction, and attentional drift.

Core Teaching: Mind regulation requires patient, continuous practice (abhyasa) combined with balanced lifestyle habits.

Sanskrit Verse: || “उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत्।

आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः” ||

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 6, Verse 5; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Let one raise oneself by oneself and not degrade oneself; for the self alone is the friend of oneself, and the self alone is the enemy of oneself.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 6 introduces attentional regulation as a long-term discipline built by intentional, repeated redirection. Furthermore, verses 6.16–6.17 establish a direct connection between mental stability and a well-balanced daily routine of sleep, diet, recreation, and work schedules.

Chapter 7: Jnana Vijnana Yoga — Understanding Behavioural Drivers

Primary Problem: Lack of awareness regarding underlying psychological patterns and behavioural drivers.

Core Teaching: Human experience is conditioned by underlying natural tendencies (guṇas) that can be observed and managed.

Sanskrit Verse: || “दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया।

मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते” ||

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 7, Verse 14; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “This divine illusion of Mine, consisting of the three guṇas, is difficult to overcome. Those who take refuge in Me alone cross beyond it.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: By introducing the framework of nature's modes—sattva (clarity), rajas (restlessness), and tamas (inertia)—Chapter 7 provides a framework for self-observation. It encourages moving away from automatic behavioural reactions toward intentional self-awareness.

Chapter 8: Aksara Brahma Yoga — Sustained Mental Orientation

Primary Problem: Cognitive fragmentation, persistent rumination, and uncontrolled thought streams.

Core Teaching: The continuous orientation of attention shapes one's dominant state of consciousness and character.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥ “यं यं वापि स्मरन् भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कलेवरम्।

तं तमेवैति कौन्तेय सदा तद्भावभावितः”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 8, Verse 6; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Whatever state of being one remembers when leaving the body at the end, to that state alone one goes, being constantly absorbed in that thought.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 8 shows that continual cognitive habits lead to long-term mental tendencies. Deliberate attention can be interpreted as a way of reducing habitual engagement with repetitive thought.

Chapter 9: Raja Vidya Raja Guhya Yoga — Cultivating Grounding and Trust

Primary Problem: Isolation, existential anxiety, and a feeling of unsupported individual burden.

Core Teaching: Devotion and alignment with a higher, interconnected order provide psychological safety and trust.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥ “अनन्याश्चित्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते।

तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम्”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 9, Verse 22; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “To those who are constantly devoted to Me and meditate on Me without straying, I carry what they lack and preserve what they have.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: In this chapter the scope is extended beyond that of simple self-reliance by providing trust and systemic support as counterbalances to feelings of existential loneliness and excessive personal pressure.

Chapter 10: Vibhuti Yoga — Expanding Perspective Beyond the Self

Primary Problem: Narrow self-focus, ego-tunnelling, and catastrophic thinking.

Core Teaching: Recognizing grandeur, excellence, and order in the wider world helps transcend rigid egocentric distress.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥ “यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा।

तत्तदेवागच्छ त्वं मम तेजोऽशसम्भवम्”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 10, Verse 41; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Whatever being is endowed with glory, grace, or power, know that to have arisen from a mere fraction of My splendour.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 10 encourages the individual to look beyond immediate personal dilemmas by connecting with broader patterns of life, fostering awe, humility, and cognitive flexibility.

Chapter 11: Visvarupa Darsana Yoga — Integrating Complexity and Awe

Primary Problem: Existential dread and sensory overwhelm when confronted with vast, uncontrollable reality.

Core Teaching: Profound encounters with the scale and complexity of existence naturally contain elements of both wonder and fear simultaneously.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥ “अदृष्टपूर्वं हृषितोऽस्मि दृष्ट्वा भयेन च प्रव्यथितं मनो मे”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 11, Verse 45; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Having seen what was never seen before, I am delighted, yet my mind is distressed with fear.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Arjuna's response to the revelation of the Cosmic Form demonstrates that awe and fear frequently coexist during transformative experiences. The text illustrates that real emotional integration requires holding complex, dual-valence states without psychological collapse.

Chapter 12: Bhakti Yoga — Relational Well-Being and Prosocial Virtues

Primary Problem: Interpersonal friction, emotional hostility, possessiveness, and social isolation.

Core Teaching: Cultivate prosocial capacities—friendliness, compassion, forgiveness, and emotional balance—to support relational well-being.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥ “अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च।

निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 12, Verse 13; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “One who harbours no hatred toward any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from possessiveness and ego, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving...”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 12 turns attention toward social existence, establishing that inner maturity is demonstrated through prosocial conduct, empathy, and relational stability.

Chapter 13: Ksetra-Ksetrajna Vibhaga Yoga — Metacognitive Separation

Primary Problem: Identity fusion; mistaking transient emotional and physical states for the totality of the self.

Core Teaching: Distinguish the "Field" of changing experience (ksetra) from the observing awareness (ksetrajña).

Sanskrit Verse: ॥ “क्षेत्रज्ञं चापि मां विद्धि सर्वक्षेत्रेषु भारत।

क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञयोर्ज्ञानं यत्तज्ज्ञानं मतं मम”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 13, Verse 2; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Know Me also as the Knower of the Field in all fields, O Bharata. Knowledge of the Field and the Knower—that I consider to be true knowledge.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: This metaphysical distinction provides a powerful psychological model: thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions occur within the field of experience, but they do not constitute the fundamental identity of the observer.

This can be compared conceptually with non-reactive self-observation, although the Gītā's metaphysical framework should not be equated directly with a modern clinical construct.

Chapter 14: Gunatraya Vibhaga Yoga — Tracking Fluctuating Psychological States

Primary Problem: Dynamic, unpredictable swings between clarity, restless agitation, and apathy.

Core Teaching: Human psychological states fluctuate dynamically across three primary modes (sattva, rajas, tamas).

Sanskrit Verse: ॥“सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 14, Verse 5; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Sattva (clarity), rajas (restlessness/activity), and tamas (inertia) are the modes born of nature.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 14 frames mental states as fluid conditions rather than permanent personal flaws. Identifying whether the mind is currently dominated by inertia (tamas), hyperactivity (rajas), or clarity (sattva) allows for calibrated self-correction and energy management.

Chapter 15: Purushottam Yoga — Cultivating Unattached Independence

Primary Problem: Over-entanglement with status, societal approval, and transient attachments.

Core Teaching: Use the "weapon of non-attachment" (asaṅga-śāstra) to loosen binding psychological dependencies.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥“न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते नान्तो न चादिर्न च सम्प्रतिष्ठा।

अश्वत्थमेनं सुविरूढमूलमसङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्त्वाः”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 15, Verse 3; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Its form is not perceived here as such, neither its end nor its beginning nor its foundation. Having cut down this deeply rooted Aśvattha tree with the strong weapon of non-attachment...”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Using the metaphor of an inverted tree representing worldly entanglement, Chapter 15 emphasizes healthy boundary-setting and psychological differentiation from social comparison and superficial metrics.

Chapter 16: Daivasura Sampad Vibhaga Yoga — Emotional Hygiene and Impulse Control

Primary Problem: Destructive reactive patterns—specifically unchecked desire, anger, and greed.

Core Teaching: Unchecked emotional impulses ruin rational judgment; early identification prevents destructive reactions.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥“त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः।

कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत्”॥(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 16, Verse 21; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “There are three gates destructive of the self: desire, anger, and greed; therefore, one should abandon these three.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 16 provides an explicit warning regarding emotional reactivity. Unchecked craving may contribute to frustration, frustration generates anger, and anger degrades critical judgment. This offers a conceptual framework for understanding impulse control and emotional regulation.

Chapter 17: Sraddhatraya Vibhaga Yoga — Inner Discipline and Serenity

Primary Problem: Internal chaos, mental agitation, and undisciplined speech or reflection.

Core Teaching: True mental discipline (manasa-tapah) consists of calm clarity, gentleness, quiet reflection, and self-restraint.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥“मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनमात्मविनिग्रहः।

भावसंशुद्धिरित्येतत्तपो मानसमुच्यते”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 17, Verse 16; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-control, and purity of inner intent—this is called discipline of the mind.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: Chapter 17 defines mental discipline not as harsh suppression, but as the intentional cultivation of a gentle, quiet, and clear internal baseline.

Chapter 18: Mokṣa Sannyasa Yoga — Critical Reflection and Autonomous Choice

Primary Problem: Uncertainty regarding how to take ownership of action after acquiring knowledge.

Core Teaching: Knowledge must be critically examined through personal reflection, culminating in autonomous, value-aligned choice.

Sanskrit Verse: ॥“इति ते ज्ञानमाख्यातं गुह्याद्गुह्यतरं मया।

विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु”॥

(Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 18, Verse 63; Gita Press, Gorakhpur)

English Translation: “Thus, the knowledge that is more secret than secret has been declared to you by Me. Reflect upon this fully and then act as you choose.”

Analysis and Contemporary Application: The narrative arc of the Gita resolves with an explicit endorsement of human agency. After eighteen chapters of dialogue, Krishna instructs Arjuna to reflect upon the teachings in their entirety (vimṛśya) and make his own choice (yathechhasi tathā kuru). The passage can be interpreted as emphasizing informed, self-directed agency.

Synthesis of the Teachings Across the Eighteen Chapters

Across its eighteen chapters, the Bhagavad Gītā presents a gradual movement from psychological distress toward inner steadiness. The text begins with Arjuna's grief, fear, confusion, and physical disturbance, and then develops a path grounded in knowledge, equanimity, disciplined action, non-attachment, self-mastery, devotion, ethical conduct, and reflective choice. Together, these teachings suggest that mental well-being is not achieved through a single technique, but through an integrated process of self-awareness, right action, emotional regulation, moderation, compassion, and discernment.

This framework can be applied to contemporary mental-health concerns such as academic stress, emotional instability, burnout, loneliness, anger, overthinking, and confusion. The following table summarises selected modern challenges alongside relevant teachings from the Bhagavad Gītā and their possible mental-health applications.

Table 1: Contemporary Mental Health Problems and Bhagavad Gita-Based Responses

Contemporary Mental Health Problem	Relevant Bhagavad Gita Teaching	Verse Reference	Mental Health Application
Academic stress and fear of failure	Focus on action without attachment to results	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 2.47	Reduces anxiety by shifting focus from results to sincere effort.
Emotional instability	Equanimity in success and failure	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 2.48; 2.56	Encourages emotional balance without emotional suppression.
Mental restlessness and overthinking	Control and discipline of the mind	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 6.5–6.6; 6.26	Supports self-regulation and repeated redirection of attention.
Burnout and lifestyle imbalance	Moderation in food, sleep, recreation, and work	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 6.16–6.17	Promotes balanced living and prevents extremes.
Anger, desire, and greed	Desire, anger, and greed as destructive tendencies	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 2.62–2.63; 16.21	Explains emotional disturbance and impulsive behaviour.
Loneliness and relationship problems	Compassion, friendliness, forgiveness, and devotion	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 12.13–12.14	Supports interpersonal well-being and social connectedness.
Confusion and indecision	Reflection, discernment, and responsible choice	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , 18.63	Encourages thoughtful decision-making instead of impulsive reaction.

The table shows that the Bhagavad Gita offers a multidimensional approach to inner well-being through disciplined action, emotional balance, self-regulation, moderation, compassion, devotion, and reflective decision-making ([Bhagavad Gita](#), 2.47; 2.48; 6.5–6.6; 6.16–6.17; 12.13–12.14; 18.63). Contemporary scholarship has examined similar intersections between the Gita, psychology, psychotherapy, education, and well-being (Bhatia et al., [2013](#); Dhillon, [2023](#); Lolla, [2021](#)).

CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS OF MENTAL WELL-BEING IN THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Self-Regulation and Mastery of the Mind

The Bhagavad Gita places strong emphasis on self-regulation. Chapter 6 states that the self may become either a friend or an enemy depending on whether the mind is disciplined or uncontrolled ([Bhagavad Gītā](#), 6.5–6.6). It also teaches that the wandering mind should be repeatedly brought back under guidance (Bhagavad Gita, 6.26). Mental discipline is therefore presented as a continuing practice rather than a single act of willpower.

Equanimity and non-attachment

Equanimity is another central principle. The Gita describes yoga as steadiness in success and failure and presents balance in pleasure and pain as a quality of the ideal devotee ([Bhagavad Gītā](#), 2.48; 12.13–12.14). This does not imply emotional suppression; rather, it refers to the ability to remain inwardly steady amid changing circumstances.

Closely connected to equanimity is non-attachment. The Gita repeatedly teaches that one should act sincerely while avoiding excessive dependence on outcomes ([Bhagavad Gītā](#), 2.47; 3.19; 5.10). Non-attachment, in this sense, is not indifference; it is disciplined engagement without psychological bondage to success, failure, praise, or disappointment.

Emotional Regulation and Balanced Living

The Gita also addresses emotions such as desire, anger, fear, and greed. Bhagavad Gita 2.62–2.63 explains how repeated fixation may lead to attachment, desire, anger, delusion, and loss of judgment, while Chapter 16 identifies desire, anger, and greed as destructive tendencies ([Bhagavad Gītā](#), 2.62–2.63; 16.21). Emotional regulation is therefore linked with ethical conduct and disciplined awareness.

Balanced living is also essential. Chapter 6 recommends moderation in food, recreation, work, sleep, and waking, suggesting that mental steadiness depends not only on thought but also on daily habits and lifestyle ([Bhagavad Gītā](#), 6.16–6.17). Related discussions in Ayurveda similarly connect mental well-being with balanced conduct and regulated habits ([Behere et al., 2013](#)).

Compassion, Devotion, and Discernment

The Gita's understanding of mental well-being extends beyond the individual mind. Chapter 12 describes the ideal devotee as friendly, compassionate, forgiving, balanced, and free from hatred ([Bhagavad Gītā](#), 12.13–12.14). These qualities show that psychological steadiness is connected with ethical relationships, social harmony, and a sense of belonging.

Finally, the Gita presents knowledge and discernment as necessary for overcoming confusion. Chapter 4 emphasises the removal of doubt, while Chapter 18 asks Arjuna to reflect fully before acting ([Bhagavad Gītā, 4.40; 18.63](#)). Mental clarity is therefore achieved through understanding, reflection, and responsible choice rather than impulsive reaction.

Implications for Indian Knowledge Systems

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the texts examined within discussions of Indian philosophical and knowledge traditions. The literature reviewed in this paper has examined selected Gita concepts in relation to psychology and psychotherapy (Reddy, [2012](#); Bhatia et al., [2013](#); Pandurangi et al., [2014](#); Dhillon, [2023](#); Agrawal et al., [2026](#)).

Accordingly, the reviewed literature demonstrates differences between the philosophical concepts contained in the Gita and terminology used in contemporary psychology. Agrawal et al. ([2026](#)), in particular, connect Gita-based ideas with educational and well-being frameworks, while the present paper retains the distinction between traditional philosophical concepts and modern psychological constructs.

Accordingly, the present analysis retains the Sanskrit terminology and the textual context of the selected verses. Relationships between these concepts and contemporary psychological concepts are described as conceptual correspondences rather than as direct equivalences.

Limitations

This paper has several limitations. First, the analysis is textual and interpretive and does not include primary data collection or measurement of psychological outcomes. Second, the psychological relationships discussed in the paper are conceptual correspondences drawn from the selected literature. They do not constitute evidence that the Bhagavad Gita clinically treats or prevents anxiety, depression, burnout, trauma, or other mental disorders. Third, the analysis uses selected verses from the Bhagavad Gita rather than examining every verse in detail. Different translations and commentaries may provide different interpretations of particular Sanskrit terms and verses. Fourth, Sanskrit philosophical concepts such as *ātman*, *dharma*, *karma*, *guṇa*, *yoga*, and *bhakti* have specific meanings within the Gita's philosophical context. These concepts should not automatically be treated as direct equivalents of contemporary psychological constructs.

Future Research Directions

Future research on the relationship between the Bhagavad Gita and psychology may examine specific Gita teachings and defined psychological outcomes through empirical research. Qualitative studies may examine how participants understand concepts such as *karma yoga*, *śamatva*, *bhakti*, and *dharma*. Quantitative, mixed-method, or longitudinal studies may examine specific Gita-based educational or intervention programmes using defined outcome measures. Controlled intervention studies may also be used where the research design and ethical requirements permit. Such studies would provide empirical evidence concerning particular practices or programmes rather than treating the Bhagavad Gita as a whole as a psychological intervention.

Conclusion

The Bhagavad Gita offers a rich Indian Knowledge System perspective on mental well-being by beginning with Arjuna's distress and developing themes of self-knowledge, emotional balance, disciplined action, devotion, non-attachment, compassion, and discernment. These teachings provide a philosophical framework for reflecting on contemporary concerns such as academic stress, burnout, emotional instability, overthinking, loneliness, and loss of meaning. Their contemporary relevance should be understood primarily as conceptual and cultural rather than as evidence of clinical treatment effectiveness. The Gītā may therefore contribute to interdisciplinary discussions of mental well-being and meaning while remaining complementary to professional counselling, psychiatric care, and other evidence-based interventions when clinical support is required.

AI Use Disclosure

Artificial intelligence (AI) was used as a language-support tool in the preparation of this manuscript. Its use was limited to correcting grammar, improving sentence structure and flow, and assisting with the typing and formatting of the Sanskrit verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Sanskrit verses were checked against the cited primary text of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Gita Press, Gorakhpur). The selection of sources, interpretation of the text, analysis, scholarly discussion, and conclusions are the responsibility of the author.

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