

## Construct description of *Samatva* from the Bhagavad Gita: Implications for Holistic Well-being

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### Abstract

Western models and constructs have dominated research on well-being in India. There is a lacuna of indigenous constructs of well-being developed from our rich archival data and texts. Indigenous constructs are significant as being deeply embedded in the Indian ethos, they can be easily accepted and integrated into therapeutic practice. To fill this lacuna, the construct of *Samatva* (equanimity) as described in the Bhagavad Gita is examined. The analysis of the text resulted in the identification of 41 core verses referring to *Samatva*. The major themes extrapolated are i) *Samatva* as a state of even-mindedness and rising above the dualities ii) The inter-personal dimension of *Samatva* iii) *Samatva* and the understanding of the temporality of experience iv) Associated cognitive-affective cultivation practices of *Samatva* v) Suggested health and spiritual implications of *Samatva* vi) *Samatva* and transcendence of *Triguna*. With the increasing rates of Anxiety and Depression, the cultivation of *Samatva* has been discussed with implications for holistic well-being, leadership and management.

**Keywords:** *Samatva; equanimity; Indian model of well-being; indigenous construct*

### Introduction

Psychology as a discipline has been heavily influenced by Western theories and models as most of the Indian academicians and researchers in the last century were trained and taught within the Western psychological framework. This Western model provided the basis for the teaching and research of Psychology in India for a long period. Our indigenous thought systems and texts which explained the human psyche remained neglected owing to the effects of colonization and questions regarding their scientific status and contemporary relevance. In 1965, Durganand Sinha emphasized the need for not blindly following Western models and focusing on the integration of modern

Psychology with the wisdom and depth of Indian thought traditions (Sinha et al., 2015). Bhawuk (2010) emphasized the nurturance of indigenous research through the exploration of cultural insights from folk wisdom, classical texts and scriptures, for the development of emic-embedded theories. Dalal & Misra (2010) have enumerated the significant contributions from prominent authors such as Paranjpe (1984, 1998), Chakraborty (1995), Rao (1988, 2002), Bhawuk (2003, 2008), Misra, (2004, 2005), and Dalal (1996) that have aimed to make Psychology culturally relevant with indigenous constructs and theories.

The psyche of an individual evolves in the background of culture and society. Cross-cultural

Psychology has consistently made researchers aware of the limits of taking ideas from the West and testing them in other parts of the world (Triandis, 1994). Western models of Psychology carry an implicit worldview that reflects and embodies their cultural context, values and priorities (Sloan, 1996) and may not necessarily explain the psychological processes and features within all cultures. Marsella (1998) emphasized the need to focus on multicultural traditions and the cultural determinants of human behaviour; recommending that many indigenous psychologies are well equipped to deal with varied dimensions of behavioural and societal contexts.

Misra (1996) observed that Western Psychological methods subscribe to an emphasis on individualism, mechanism, and objectivity. Studying non-Western cultures through this lens has a debilitating effect in terms of a pseudo-understanding of the people of non-Western cultures, misconstruing their realities and exoticizing or disregarding psychologies that are non-Western. Cross cultural researchers (Marsella, 1998; Tirandis 1994) have suggested since a long time that in order to come up with robust social science theories, research should be done on populations and cultures other than Western cultures and their world views should be taken into consideration

Psychology in India needs to find its roots in its native wisdom, instead of borrowing knowledge from the West. Indian scriptures dating back thousands of years extensively dealt with the rich and in-depth analysis of states of consciousness and the mind, to help individuals in their pursuit of self-realization. The emphasis of the scriptures was on exploring the 'world within' to alleviate suffering. Indian scriptures have been considered an essential part of *Svadhya* or self-learning and have successfully guided generations of knowledge seekers. They can be viewed as a

knowledge mine to guide the modern person through the ebbs and flows of life (Bhawuk, 2010). Thus, to explore indigenous constructs of well-being, the Indian scriptures constitute a natural place to start, and this paper attempts to make an effort in that direction.

### ***Samatva* or Equanimity**

In Sanskrit, the words *Sama*, *Samata* or *Samatvam* are translated as equanimity. The construct of equanimity is historically rooted in various indigenous schools of thought and ancient scriptures. It has been elaborated as one of the Four Immeasurables (Loving Kindness, Sympathetic Joy, Compassion and Equanimity) in Buddhism; and as one of the key teachings in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. Equanimity is also the central tenet in traditional Yoga systems. While the concept is historically rooted in scriptures and philosophies such as Hinduism and Buddhism, it has often been conflated within the construct of Mindfulness in the Western Psychological literature (Desbordes et al., 2015). In the Indian Psychology context, equanimity has often been studied as subsumed under Karma Yog (Rastogi & Pati, 2015; Mulla & Krishnan, 2014) or in relation to the construct of Anasakti (Singh & Raina, 2015). To address this gap, the paper attempts to explore in-depth the construct of Equanimity as a distinct construct as delineated in the Bhagavad Gita. The paper further attempts to integrate its developed models along with the existing Psychological literature, thereby expanding its scope and making it relevant for global Psychology, Leadership and Management.

### **Recent Conceptualisations of Equanimity in the Psychological Literature**

Hadash et al. (2016) operationalized equanimity as the decoupling of desire from the hedonic tone of experience i.e. in states of equanimity there is reduced longing for pleasant experiences and

reduced avoidance of negative experiences. Desbordes et al. (2015) conceptualized equanimity as an even-minded state consisting of openness, and acceptance. Both the above conceptualizations had Buddhism as its base foundation. Mulla and Krishnan (2014) proposed a model of Karma Yoga in which equanimity was conceptualized as maintaining neutrality in success and failure. Rastogi and Pati (2015) in their conceptual model of Karma Yoga from the Bhagavad Gita, reported that sensory control leads to equanimity which further leads to service consciousness i.e. working for humanity.

As seen above, there have been few conceptualizations of equanimity with Buddhism as the base; and few studies describing Equanimity as part of the framework of Karma Yoga. This study aims to take it further by exploring *Samatva* as a distinct core construct as emphasized in the Bhagavad Gita.

### **Need to explore *Samatva* as discussed in the Bhagavad Gita:**

With the increasing prevalence of Anxiety and Depression, there is an urgent need for emphasis on the cultivation of equanimity. Given the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) situation the world is passing through, learning to cope with and regulate our emotional responses could be the key to successful adaptation. Also, with the advent of Positive Psychology, the recent emphasis has been on promoting and sustaining happiness and well-being rather than coping with pain or discomfort. As human life consists of both pain and pleasure, this one-sided approach may not have a strong base or foundation to endure in the long-run. The cultivation of *Samatva*, which focuses on both pain and pleasure would significantly contribute to holistic well-being and help adapt to the complex challenges and the ebbs and flows of life.

The Gita is a popular source of knowledge and wisdom for the global community and translation of this text is available in 80 languages of the world (Bhawuk, 2020). Scriptures such as the Gita constitute of archival knowledge and provide the deepest cultural roots of a construct. *Samatva* is the core of ancient scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita. Hence, to understand it in its truest essence and origin, this paper will trace the construct of *Samatva* from the text of the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is a narrative that is told through a dialogue between Arjuna, a warrior, and his charioteer, Lord Krishna. The Gita begins with an ethical problem set against the background of a fratricide battle and in resolving this problem, the philosophy is illustrated across 18 chapters consisting of around 700 verses.

### **Method**

The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita was primarily read in the translations and commentaries by Swami Tapasyananda (1984). This text was chosen as the writing of the author is lucid and free from ambiguity, and has been cited in scholastic works related to Psychology (Singh et al., 2015; Adhia et al., 2010), and is much appreciated for its interpretation of *Vijnana* (Maharaj, 2015). Swami Tapasyananda is a prolific writer and has also translated classics like Shri Vishnu Sahasranama, Adyatma Ramayana and Sri Lalita Sahasranama.

The process for construct definition and model building was primarily referred from the work of Prof. Bhawuk spanning across one decade (Bhawuk, 2010, 2017, 2019 & 2020). Prof. Dharm Bhawuk's work is regarded as one of the major contributions to Indian Psychology (Dalal & Misra, 2010). Bhawuk (2010) has provided a methodological approach to mine models from the scriptures. Using variations of these methods, he has developed various indigenous constructs such

as *Lajja, Shraddha and Lokasamgraha* (Bhawuk, 2017, 2020 & 2019). The first author attended a one-day workshop by Prof Bhawuk on *Construct building in Indian Psychology* held in 2018. In the construct development of *Samatva* from the Bhagavad Gita, all the above references were referred to and the learnings from the workshop were amalgamated. The method followed is as below:

#### *i) Linguistic Analysis*

Austin (1964) suggested that words can be tools that sharpen our awareness and understanding of phenomena in this world. *Samatva* or Equanimity is examined linguistically in Sanskrit, Pali and English; along with analysis of its allied words and synonyms. The synonyms of a construct provide the basic framework to begin the search in the scriptures and provide the necessary depth to appreciate a construct.

#### *ii) Content Analysis*

A Content Analysis of the verses highlighting *Samatva* was carried out across the 700 verses in the 18 chapters of the Bhagavad Gita and 41 verses were identified which referred to *Samatva*.

#### *iii) Analysing the context*

To explore the construct in its fullest depth, the background and framework of the core 41 verses identified above was examined by reading the entire Bhagavad Gita and understanding the context in which the 41 verses were described.

#### *iv) Analysis of the themes and mining models*

From the analysis of the verses and their context, six themes were derived. Raw Models were mined from some of the verses. This entire process led to the development of emic-embedded models. The

emic perspective focuses on insights from and theoretical positions grounded in indigenous native culture, texts and folk wisdom.

#### *v) Synthesizing of the emic- embedded models*

The emic or 'inside' perspective follows in the tradition of psychological studies of folk beliefs and in cultural scientists' striving to understand culture from the native's point of view (Morris et al., 1999). In the next step, wherever possible, we attempt to synthesize the emic embedded models with existing Psychological data and constructs to have more global outreach. Doing so enables the development of universal theories within cultural contexts.

#### *vi) Triangulation in the research process*

To maintain rigor, the research followed two types of triangulation recommended for qualitative research by Patton (1999): Analyst triangulation and Theory triangulation.

Analyst triangulation is the process of utilizing two or more analysts. It is used to review the findings in order to converge multiple ways of selecting and interpreting the data and for keeping a check on selective bias and blind spots in the analysis (Patton, 1999). Two of the primary authors of this paper are Academicians in Psychology and the third author is an academician in Sanskrit with expertise in Bhagavad Gita. The expert in Sanskrit verified the selection of verses from the Bhagavad Gita and their correct interpretation carried out by the first author. The two primary authors reviewed themes and models to provide a check on selective perception and blind spots in the interpretive analysis.

Theory/perspective triangulation is using multiple theoretical perspectives to examine and interpret the data (Patton, 1999). The raw models mined

from the scriptures were synthesized with various theoretical perspectives from the field of Social Psychology and Cognitive Psychology.

The findings of the above six steps followed in the methodology of the construct definition of *Samatva* are presented below.

## Findings

Following the above-described methodology, resulted in a rich and thick description of *Samatva* as elaborated below.

### *Linguistic Analysis of Samatva*

In the Monier-Williams dictionary, the Sanskrit words *Sama*, *Samata* or *Samatva* are translated as equanimity. The root *Sam* (*union/equal*) is used as a prefix in various synonyms, for example, *Samabuddhi* is translated as esteeming all things alike; *Samabhava* refers to the equability of feelings; *Samadrishti* denotes even vision, and *Samadarshita*- denotes impartiality. In the sister

language of Sanskrit, the Pāli language, and the word for equanimity is *Upekkhā*, which is translated as gazing upon or observing without interference. In the English language, the origin of the word equanimity is from Latin *aequanimitas*: *aequus* 'equal' + *animus* 'mind'; that is translated as equal mind denoting a sense of fairness or impartiality.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines equanimity as i) evenness of mind especially under stress and as ii) balance. The synonyms of Equanimity listed are composure, collectedness and equilibrium while antonyms listed were agitation, discomposure and perturbation (Webster, 2006). In summary, the connotations of equanimity in various languages are analogous. The major related concepts have been identified as evenness, neutrality and balance.

*Content analysis of Samatva in the Bhagavad Gita:* The Bhagavad Gita text consists of 700 verses spread out across 18 chapters. The Content Analysis presented 41 verses referring to *Samatva* in 12 of the chapters as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Content Analysis of *Samatva* in the Bhagavad Gita**

Chapter		Chapter		Chapter		Chapter		Chapter		Chapter	
II		III		IV		V		VI		X	
2.14	2.15	3.26	3.30	4.22		5.3	5.18	6.3	6.7	10.5	
2.38	2.45	3.34				5.19	5.20	6.8	6.9		
2.48	2.49							6.29	6.33		
2.50	2.51										
2.53	2.56										
2.57	2.64										
2.70											
Chapter		Chapter		Chapter		Chapter		Chapter		Chapter	
XII		XIII		XIV		XV		XVII		XVIII	
12.13		13.9		14.22		15.5		17.17		18.23	
12.15				14.23						18.26	
12.17											
12.18											

Thus, as we can see from the above content analysis, *Samatva* has been referred to around 41 times in the Bhagavad Gita which highlights its significance as a central tenet of the Bhagavad Gita.

### Themes

From the analysis of the verses and their context, seven themes were derived which presented a thick description of *Samatva* as presented below:

1. *Samatva* as a state of even-mindedness and rising above the dualities
2. The inter-personal dimension of *Samatva*
3. *Samatva* and the understanding of the temporality of experience
4. Associated cognitive-affective cultivation practices of *Samatva*
5. Suggested health and spiritual implications of *Samatva*
6. *Samatva* and transcendence of *Trigunas*

Each of the themes is elaborated in detail below.

#### 1) *Samatva: Even-mindedness and rising above the dualities*

Analysis of the 41 verses revealed that *Samatva* has been described in the context of even-mindedness and remaining steady in the dualities. The Bhagavad Gita elaborated on even-mindedness towards:

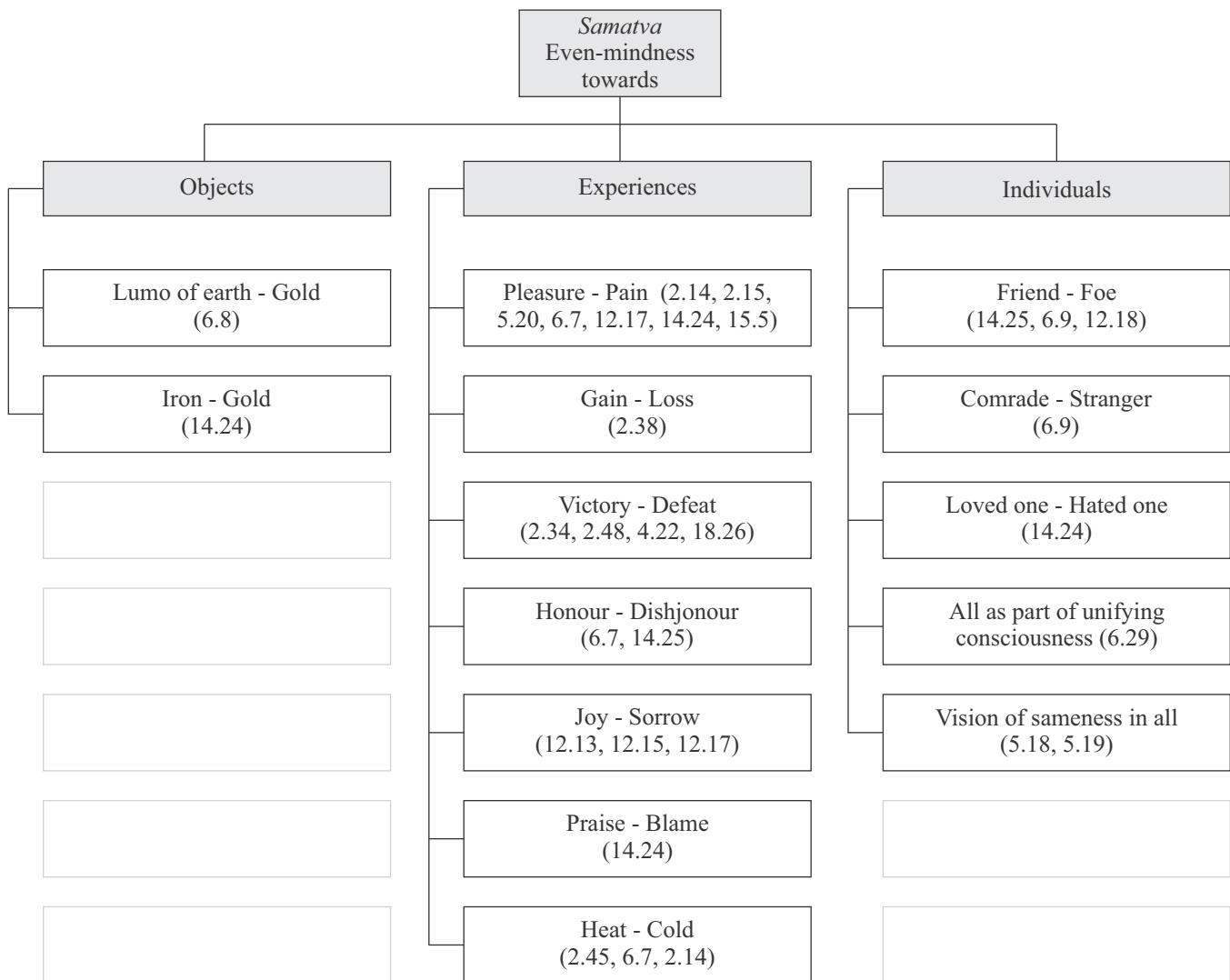
- Objects/things
- Experiences and
- Individuals

As shown in Figure 1 below, the Bhagavad Gita talks about being steady and indiscriminative

towards objects of vastly different value, such as a lump of earth and gold, iron and gold. Verse 6.8<sup>1</sup> elaborates on the processes behind it. The Yogi is not to just mechanically read the scriptures (*Jnana*) but needs to intuitively experience and gain wisdom from the same (*Vijyana*). Equipped with wisdom (*Vijyana*), the senses come under control, desires reduce and the Yogi does not differentiate between objects based on their attractiveness to the Self.

The most elaborated conceptualization of *Samatva* is related to being steady in the various experiences that we have in life such as Pleasure-Pain, Joy-Sorrow, Honour-Disgrace, Gain-Loss, and Victory-Defeat. This equipoise that enables us to be steady in dualities is so valued that Shree Krishna calls it *Yog*, or union with the Supreme in Verse 2.48<sup>2</sup>. This verse is one of the most prominent verses referring to *Samatva* and is to be understood in the context of its previous verses. Which elaborate that we should concern ourselves with doing our duty and not get affected by our expectation of focus on the outcome.

Shri Krishna elaborates on the evenness of vision and treating everyone without prejudice, bias or discrimination. He emphasizes that the one with even vision will treat alike - a friend and foe, a comrade and a stranger. Verse 6.29<sup>3</sup> illustrates that evenness of vision is facilitated by the knowledge and insight that all sentient beings irrespective of their form, shape, color are fragments of the underlying unifying consciousness and therefore divine. Hence, with this insight and understanding, a person with *Samatva* goes beyond the superficial outer appearances, does not discriminate, and sees all beings as part of a unifying consciousness.

**Fig 1: Tripartite conceptualisation of *Samatva* in the Bhagavad Gita**

## 2) *The inter-personal dimension of Samatva*

Shri Krishna emphasizes that the one with wisdom and even vision will treat alike - a friend and foe, a comrade and a stranger. A raw model has been mined from verses 5.19<sup>5</sup>, 6.9<sup>6</sup> and 6.29<sup>7</sup> to explain this progression as illustrated in Figure 2 below. With the insight and understanding that all sentient beings irrespective of their form, shape, color are fragments of the underlying unifying consciousness, a person has an unbiased and even vision towards all. Thus, in behaviour, he will be

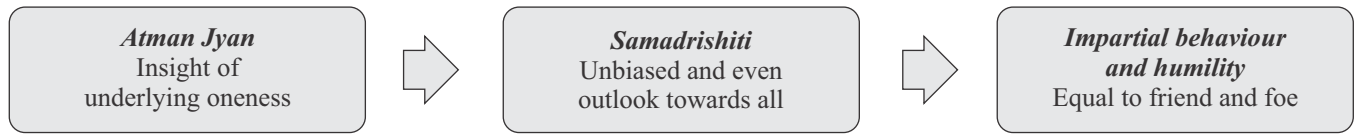
equal and unbiased towards friend and foe and treat every person with humility. This raw model has been polished with Psychological concepts as illustrated in the lower part of Figure 2 below. When one has an insight into the oneness underlying all sentient beings, one realizes that fundamentally we all are the same, sharing the same basic needs and concerns. With this understanding, the divisive borders between 'them' and 'us' reduce. It is proposed that at the cognitive level, in-group and out-group biases may reduce the process of othering (seeing others as different

from one self / own kin and clan) and using different standards for explaining others behaviour will reduce. At the affective level, prejudices, antagonism, and bigotry may reduce, further leading to reduced discriminatory behaviour across different level of social structure and categories. This is particularly very helpful for the organizational climate, as there may be a strong

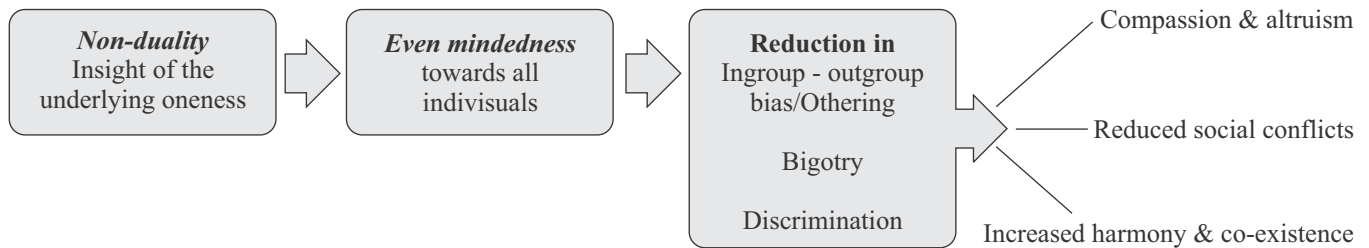
bonding among the employees as part of one organization. Also, alleviating the cognitive discrimination in practice and action, will enhance the employee engagement and commitment. Consequently, compassion and altruism for others may increase leading to reduced social conflicts and increased coexistence and harmony.

**Fig 2: The interpersonal dimension of Samatva**

**Raw Model from B.G. (5.19, 6.9, 6.29)**



**Model synthesized with Psychological concepts**

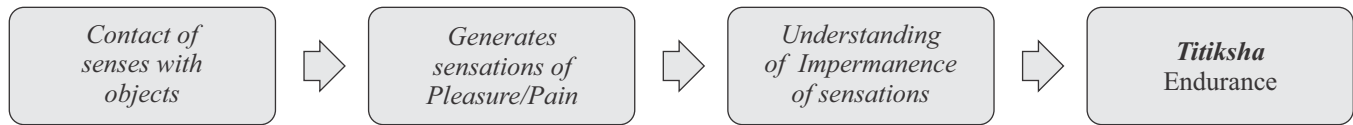
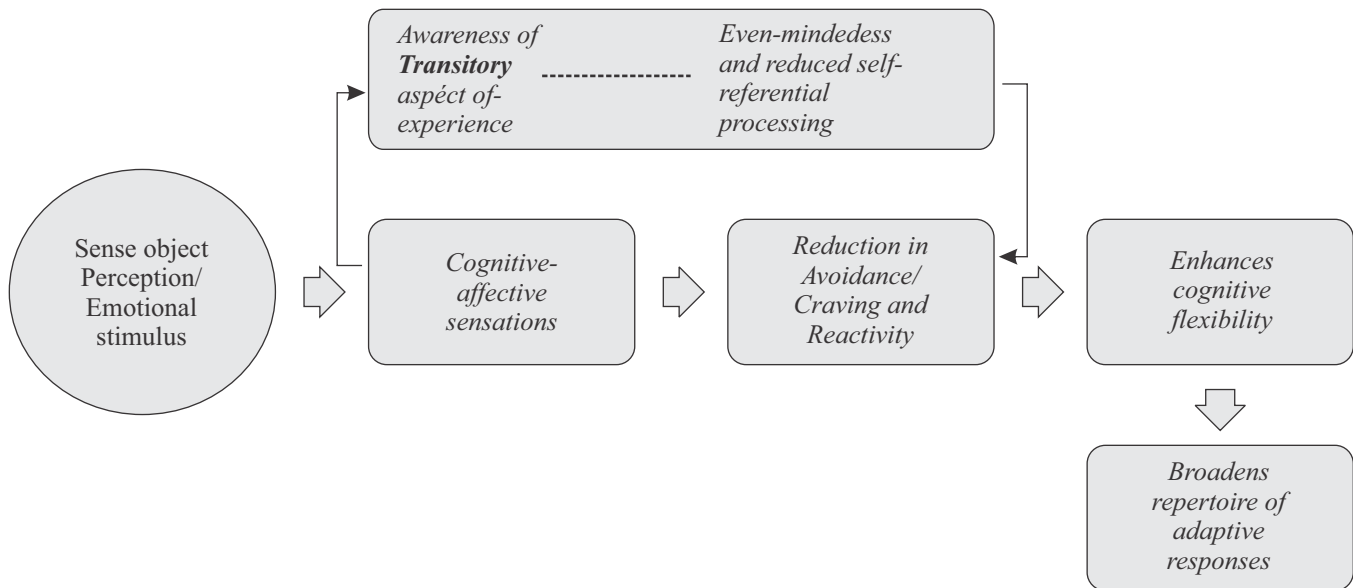


3) *Samatva: Understanding of temporality of experience*

In Verse 2.14<sup>4</sup>, *Samatva* is illustrated with the word *Titiksha* which means the ability to endure the dualities. In this verse, the temporality and impermanence of sensations are highlighted. The human body has five primary senses. When these senses, perceive various objects, it gives rise to

sensations of happiness or distress. Krishna emphasizes that the sensations of happiness/distress experienced through the senses are transitory and impermanent, and hence one should not become too attached to them. For example, Chilled water provides pleasure in summer, the same water gives distress in the winter. Illustrated in Figure 3 below is the raw model mined from Verse 2.14<sup>4</sup>.



**Fig 3: The understanding of the temporality of sensations and its relation to *Samatva*****Raw model from the Bhagavad Gita (2.1)****Model Synthesized with Psychological literature**

The raw model has been synthesized with the Psychological literature in the lower part of Figure 3. In response to an emotionally triggering stimulus, when we perceive it with equanimity, we may become aware of the transitory nature of the stimulus. With this awareness, the relevance of the stimulus for oneself becomes less and the ruminative self-referential processing reduces. This further diminishes reactivity and instead may enhance one's cognitive flexibility and broaden the possibility of an adaptive behavioural response (Desbordes et al, 2015). To illustrate, let us suppose one morning at work, Nisha is criticized by her manager harshly. Initially, Nisha is hurt, but gradually Nisha becomes aware that this criticism is not fixed and permanent and understands that her manager had also praised her a few times earlier.

With this understanding, Nisha may not attach the criticism to her own ego very rigidly and ruminate over it endlessly. Instead of being defensive about the criticism, she may reflect on the intention behind the criticism and try to improve. Thus, the awareness of transience and impermanence is highlighted in the Bhagavad Gita.

#### 4) *Cognitive-affective cultivation practices associated with Samatva*

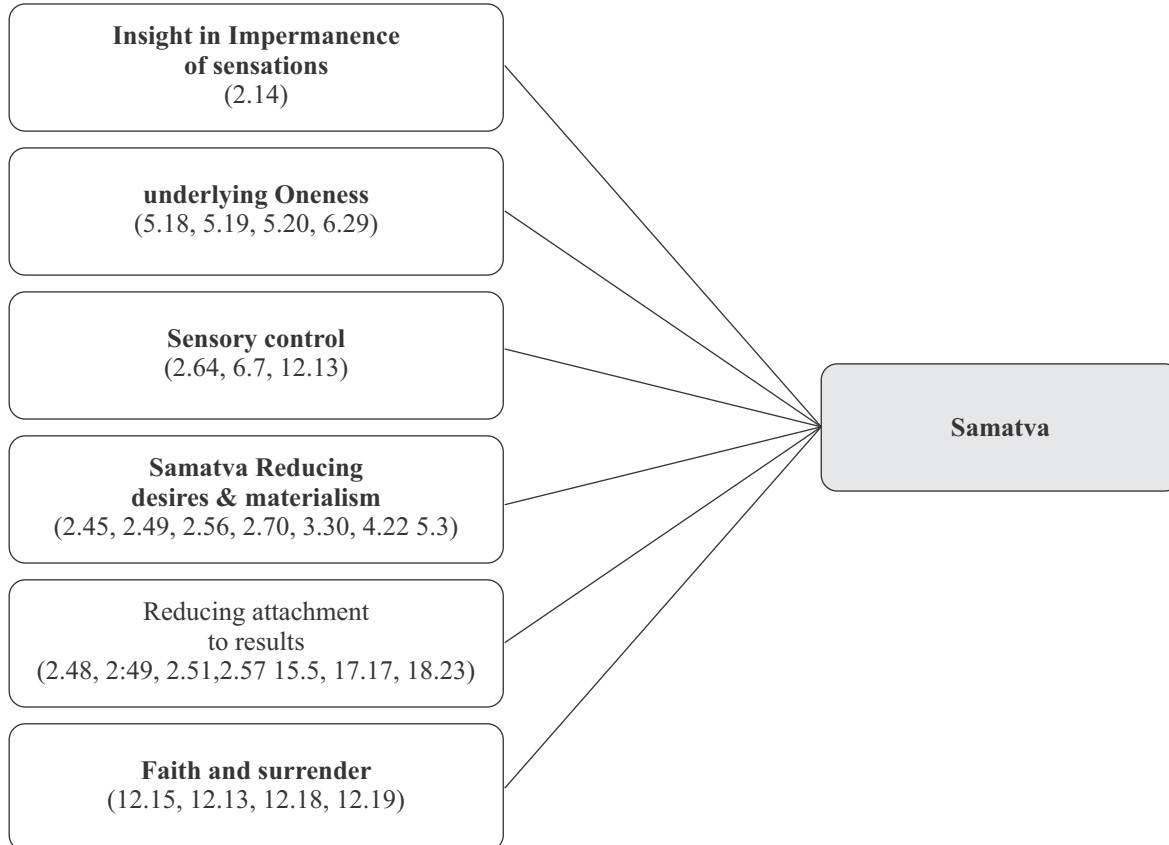
The Bhagavad Gita has elaborated on many cognitive-affective cultivation practices associated with *Samatva*. In chapter 2, the belief in Impermanence is highlighted. When one realizes the transient nature of experiences, one is not very attached and can endure both happiness and

distress with equanimity. The belief in impermanence may function as an anchor, to help us remain steady in the ebbs and flows of life. Another cognitive anchor that has been elaborated is the insight (*Vigyana*) in the underlying unity of consciousness. This insight enables us to develop an equal vision towards all being irrespective of their color, nationality, gender, and race. At the affective level, reducing desires and materialism has been strongly emphasized along with reducing attachments to the outcome or results of our actions. Shri Krishna suggests that we have right on the action but not on the fruit of the action. This is linked with carrying out our work in a detached manner and reducing the sense of agency or ego involvement in our actions. And lastly, Shri Krishna emphasizes sensory control. In today's world of hyper-stimulation, over-load of information and internet addiction, it is relevant

that we control the incoming information to our senses and can delay gratification to be in a state of equipoise.

Faith and surrender are other indirect pathways towards *Samatva* that have been highlighted in chapter 12. An ideal devotee is delineated as one who is equipoised in both happiness and sadness (Verse 12.13<sup>13</sup>), and in pleasure and pain (12.15<sup>10</sup>). Verses 12.18-19<sup>14</sup> state that an ideal Bhakta is equal and unbiased towards all, alike to both a friend and an enemy, equipoised in honour-dishonour and favourable-unfavourable circumstances. A true devotee has deep conviction and faith and has surrendered his actions and their outcomes to a higher power. Hence, they are equipoised in any condition. Shri Krishna states that such devotees are very dear to Him. These practices are elaborated in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Cognitive-affective cultivation practices associated with *Samatva***



### 5) Suggested health and spiritual implications of *Samatva*

Various health and spiritual implications of cultivating *Samatva* have been specified. Verse 2.70<sup>7</sup> highlights the peace, tranquillity and mental ease one may attain with *Samatva* with the metaphor of the ocean. The rivers and its tributaries constantly empty themselves into the ocean but it maintains its undisturbed state, despite being inundated by the flow of rivers into it. Likewise, the individual who is steady despite the flow of desirable objects all around him attains peace. The individual with equanimity abandons attachment to the fruits of actions and reduces the desire for selfish gains. By working in such consciousness, they have reduced suffering or transcend the state of suffering (Verse 2.51<sup>8</sup>). Arjun had expressed his fear that by participating in the fratricidal battle he would incur sin. In response, Shree Krishna advises Arjun to do his duty, without attachment to his actions and by doing so with equanimity would free him from any karmic reactions (verse 2.38<sup>9</sup>). The equanimity that enables us to accept all circumstances with calmness is so significant that in verse 2.48<sup>2</sup> Shree Krishna calls it *Yog*, or union with the Divine which may also be interpreted as Self-realisation. Many verses (2.15<sup>10</sup>, 2.51<sup>8</sup>, 5.3<sup>11</sup> and 5.19<sup>5</sup>, 15.5<sup>12</sup>), suggest that the person with equanimity may attain immortality i.e. liberation from the bondage of life and death. This is one of the highest spiritual aims of any aspirant which highlights the significance of *Samatva*. To summarize, the major implications of *Samatva* in the Bhagavad Gita have been enumerated as peace, reduced suffering, self-realization freedom from karmic reactions and liberation from bondage.

### 6) *Samatva* and transcendence of *Trigunas*

There are three forms through which *Prakriti* (*nature*) manifests itself in matter, known as *Trigunas* or three qualities of Nature. They are

*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Sattvic* state characteristics are wisdom, spirituality, calmness, compassion, and selflessness. *Rajas Guna* is known for activity and characteristics are desire, anxiety, excitement, ambition, chaos, and restlessness. *Tamas* is lowest in *trigunas* and signifies ignorance, dullness, laziness, greed, attachment, and heaviness.

Arjun asks Shri Krishna in chapter 14, what are the characteristics of a person who has transcended these three *gunas*? Being even-minded is emphasized as a quality of a *Trigunatita* (person who has transcended the three *Gunas*). Sri Krishna responds that a person who has transcended the *Gunas* is neither disturbed when they see the *gunas* functioning and their effects manifesting nor are they disturbed in their absence in people (Verse 14.22-23<sup>15</sup>). In bodily consciousness, we identify strongly with the pain and pleasures of the body and oscillate between joy and sorrow. But those who have transcended the *gunas*, do perceive the dualities of the world but remain unaffected by them. Thus, they are poised alike in pleasure pain, praise-blame and have an equal vision towards friend and foe alike. (Verse 14.24-25<sup>16</sup>).

### Discussion

This article aimed to explore and define the construct of *Samatva* as explicated in the Bhagavad Gita text. In the Monier-Williams dictionary, the Sanskrit words *Sama*, *Samata* or *Samatva* are translated as equanimity. The connotations of equanimity in the English language have been identified as evenness, neutrality and balance. *Samatva* has been referred 41 times in the content analysis of Bhagavad Gita text which highlights its significance. From the analysis of the verses and their context, six themes were derived which have provided a thick and rich description. *Samatva* was proposed as a state of even-mindedness and rising above the dualities. A tripartite conceptualization

of *Samatva* was proposed wherein it has been described as even-mindedness towards i) objects, ii) experiences of life iii) and individuals.

*Samatva* towards objects/ things is elaborated in the context of reducing our endless desires, craving and materialism. Desire is intimately connected to pleasure and pain- we desire what is pleasurable and avoid what is painful. Our desires evolved to promote our survival and reproduction. Today, survival is no longer the most pressing issue, and yet our desires are stronger than ever. Once the desire is attained, people stop taking pleasure in its fulfilment and instead formulate new desires, because, in the course of evolution, contentedness did not promote survival (Burton, 2014). Thus, one is caught in the vicious cycle of endless desires.

Verse 2.62<sup>18</sup> of the Bhagavad Gita, suggests that if desires are fulfilled, it leads to greed for more desires and if unfulfilled, leads to frustration and anger. Thus, all desires become the cause of unhappiness, even though they may bring some happiness early on (Bhawuk, 2008). To control our desires, regulating and controlling the incoming stimulus to our sense organs has been emphasized in the Bhagavad Gita. This is very relevant in today's context and we discuss it in the context of addiction, information overload and its implications on Mindfulness.

With the advancement of technology and consumerism, our craving for constant stimulation and excitement, pleasure experiences are also rising. Many a time, it could lead to addictive behaviours causing cognitive, psychological, and interpersonal disturbances. A review study by Eppler & Mengis (2004), reported that due to information over-load an individual may feel stressed, confused, cognitively strained, and decision effectiveness is lowered. Hence, nowadays, from time to time a digital detox from all social media and gadgets is suggested.

Most studies have reported that Mindfulness is the first stage of learning equanimity, in which one can focus attention upon the flow of experience in the present moment without distraction (Machada & Costa, 2015; Weber, 2017; Shoham et al., 2019). Being constantly distracted with mobile phones, computers, social media reduces our awareness and ability to be mindful which in turn has a bearing on equanimity. Hence, the need for moderating our exposure to the information overflow is very crucial.

In relation to experiences, *Samatva* has been emphasized as being steady in the dualities such as pleasure-pain, joy sorrow. We can understand equanimity in the context of emotional regulation as hedonic neutrality. In the emotional regulation processes related to equanimity there is increased acceptance, openness and our tolerance to distress increases, and with this unhealthy emotional processing such as avoidance, repression and suppression decreases (Hadash et al., 2016; Desbordes et al., 2015; Chambers et al., 2009). Thus, in states of equanimity, habitual maladaptive re-activity decreases (Shapiro et al., 2006).

The Bhagavat Gita also emphasizes even-mindedness towards not just individuals but all sentient beings. In verse 5.18<sup>17</sup> Krishna emphasizes that a wise man will be even-minded to a human being, a cow, an elephant and a dog; these are contrasting species and life forms. However, a learned person goes beyond the outer forms and recognizes the similar underlying consciousness of all these beings. A raw model has been mined from the verses 5.19, 6.9, 6.29 elaborating this process. Further synthesis of the raw model is proposed that when one is even-minded towards others, prejudices, bigotry and discrimination reduces. Simultaneously compassion and altruism can increase. On a personal level, it can lead to more harmonious relationships and at the societal level,

it may lead to reduced social conflicts and more harmonious co-existence. Thus, we see that equanimity is a form of Emotional Intelligence or EQ (Emotional Quotient) which when cultivated may lead to benefits at the personal as well as societal level.

Drawing a parallel, it should be noted that the ideal form of equanimity embraced in Buddhism also includes having an equal attitude towards all dualities, experiences and sentient beings, and as a state of mind that cannot be swayed by biases and preferences (Desbordes et al. 2015; Bodhi, 2000). There are specific techniques in Buddhism for cultivating an impartial attitude of equanimity such as reflecting on the mind's automatic classification of 'other' people as friends, enemies and strangers and realizing that these categories are transient and based on superficial, self-serving attitudes (Desbordes et al., 2015).

Krishna emphasizes that the sensations of happiness/distress experienced through the senses are transitory and impermanent, and awareness of this leads to *Titiksha*. A raw model showcasing this has been mined from Verse 2.14<sup>4</sup>. and further synthesized with the Psychological literature. Desborders et al.(2015) suggests that when we become aware of the transient nature of sensations and experiences then the importance of the stimulus in relation to the self reduces. This in turn, may lead to a different perspective and increase one's cognitive flexibility in perceiving the situation.

To draw a parallel, the technique of *Vipassanā* meditation, in Buddhism which is one of the prominent methods for cultivating equanimity, also focuses on Impermanence. One of the most important practice of *Vipassana* meditation is *Anicca* (principle of impermanence) in which meditators reflect on impermanence, realizing that they don't have any control over this phenomenon

and that any attempt to manipulate it creates suffering.

A key cultivation practice associated with *Samatva* which has been strongly emphasized is reducing our attachments to the outcome or results of our actions. Shri Krishna suggests that we should focus on the work and not on the results/outcome of work. We can understand this in the context of emotional regulation. When one is not very attached to the outcome, the intensity of the emotions related to the outcome (pleasant or unpleasant) go down, and avoidance and clinging to the outcome reduces. Even if the outcome is not up to one's expectations, one may become more open and, acceptance increases. Few studies have been carried out showing the inter-relationships between equanimity, attachment and duty orientation. Mulla and Krishnan (2014) proposed a model of Karma Yoga in which duty orientation was emphasized as a pre-cursor to developing equanimity. Another study by Banthand Talwar (2010) delineated the characteristics of *Anasakti* (non-attachment) as consisting of emotional equipoise in the face of success and failure, weak concern for extrinsic rewards and efforts to achieve excellence.

Another pathway which has been elaborated for the cultivation of *Samatva* is through faith, devotion and surrender. Devotees are equipped with the wisdom of the scriptures and have immense faith. They are aware that pleasure and pain are both inevitable in life and perceive the grace of God in any situation which increases their acceptance. Pargament et al. (2000) conceptualized surrender into two types: active surrender and passive surrender. Active surrender is an individual's attempt to manage what is possible, and the relinquish remaining control to a higher power. On the other hand, passive surrender is submissively waiting for a higher power to control the situation and pleading for intervention.

Research with cancer populations indicates that active religious surrender is associated with decrease in emotional distress and higher well-being, whereas passive surrender is associated with more distress and less active coping (McLaughlin et al., 2013; Gall et al., 2009). Thus, the major techniques elaborated in Bhagavad Gita to cultivate equanimity are through knowledge and insight into impermanence, the underlying unity of consciousness, regulating the information to one's senses, reducing attachments and desires and lastly through devotion, faith and surrender.

Various health and spiritual implications of cultivating *Samatva* have been enumerated in theme five, such as *peace, reduced suffering, self-realization freedom from karmic reactions and liberation from bondage*. Shri Krishna states that if one gives up all selfish motives and works merely for the sake of duty, such work does not create any karmic reactions. To illustrate, if a soldier kills an enemy in battle, he is not punished for it, as his action is performed as a matter of duty to the country and is not motivated by any personal gain. Equanimity has also been studied in therapeutic and meditation settings and has shown improvements in eudemonic well-being and insights into the perception of reality (Ekici et al., 2018); reduction in strong emotions such as anger, sadness and passion (Pagis, 2015) and perceiving emotional stimuli as more neutral instead of positive or negative (Machada & Costa, 2015) and experiencing a reduction in loneliness (Lindsay et al., 2018).

The last theme pertained to equanimity as a quality of a *Trigunatita* (person who has transcended the three Gunas). A *Trigunatita* ceases to identify himself with the movements of Prakriti and its gunas and instead identifies with the divine Consciousness. In this process, the sense of agency reduces and the self becomes a Witness to all that is happening without being severely affected. In

Western terminology, there is a parallel concept to 'Witnessing' known as Psychological Distancing or Decentring and is a crucial component of Cognitive Therapies. Alford and Beck (1997) describe distancing as the ability to view one's thoughts as constructions of 'reality' rather than as reality itself. Psychological distancing has been shown to decrease emotional and physiological reactivity, and reduce rumination over time (Kross & Ayduk, 2008) and developing decentring skills leads to greater equanimity in the presence of negative qualia (Lomas et al., 2015).

This paper is a contribution to the Indian ethos of well-being. The implications of equanimity for leadership, management and holistic well-being are elaborated below.

### ***Samatva* in the context of Leadership, Management & Holistic Well-being**

Over the years, the construct of equanimity has been conflated within Mindfulness and the terms have been used interchangeably by academicians and trainers who have been conducting trainings to promote holistic well-being, team-work and functionality in organizations (Zeng et al., 2015; Desbordes et al., 2015).

Dane and Brummel (2013) have examined the impact of work-place mindfulness and its positive relations to job performance and negative effect on turnover intention. Hunter and McCormic (2008) suggest that persons who practice mindfulness may be more accepting of their work situation and more adaptable; less concerned with material acquisition and wealth, more likely to derive meaning in life from more sources than just work and to experience work difficulties as challenges than threats, better able to cope and remain calm in difficult work situations and thus; have more positive interpersonal relations at work.

However, recently researchers have been more sensitive to the conceptual differences between equanimity and mindfulness. The various definitions of mindfulness have a common component corresponding to 'an attitude of openness and acceptance'. Desbordes et al., (2015) suggest that this specific component shares similarities and corresponds with the description of equanimity. Zeng et al. (2015) proposed that both awareness and equanimity are basic abilities shared by most common people even without the experience of meditation, and thus, teaching people to practice equanimity through reflective practices may be attainable and effective to accrue the positive consequences similar to mindfulness-based interventions. Particularly in India, *Samatva* may prove to have an emic embedded cultural competence that is accepted and practiced easily, to develop more effective employees and productive work environment.

Tomassini (2016) critiques that corporate mindfulness trainings such as MBSR (Mindfulness based Stress Reduction), largely serve organizational needs and may reinforce the individualized nature of modern corporate organizations. He suggests that mindfulness should be practiced in work-life as a more liberating practice and should be carried out in smaller groups, and simulates more reflective practices among participants. Taking this into consideration, reflective practices to develop equanimity or *samatva* may be developed in the context of work-life leading to more harmonious and co-operative relationships in small teams, culminating into a strong work-place culture.

Our engagement at workplace occupies almost half of our productive time during our working life, and it has very strong spill-over effect on our personal and social life. Moreover, it has been widely acknowledged that good interpersonal relationships at work place contribute to successful

careers. As equanimity is strengthened over time and integrated into one's practice of healthily responding to any situation, it may moderate the physiological response to stress and anxiety (Gard et al., 2012) and in turn contribute to a better working life. Maher et al. (2019) report that, cultivating equanimity promotes understanding and beneficially affects one's interpersonal relationships. Understanding equanimity as a distinct concept with its specific cognitive, affective and behavioural mechanisms will also be useful for the development of indigenous therapeutic models/skills for emotional regulation. Thus, equanimity-based training modules may sustain long term harmonious relationships in the teams, reducing interpersonal conflicts, and leading to high productivity. Simple ways of cultivating equanimity may also be integrated into the employees' wellness programs so that when faced with stress and failure at work, they are resilient and don't avoid pain or discomfort with unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Connaughton (2016) elaborates in detail on the impact and role of equanimity in leadership practice. Leaders who take decisions from a place of equanimity are able to see the wider perspective, and are able to correctly assess the situation; they may be more open to understand the perspectives of others and may be guarded from reacting too quickly to the situation. Cultivating equanimity may help leaders in truly being unbiased towards their employees. This is significant considering the negative role that bias may play in appraisals and promotions. Rather than being stuck in mal-adaptive ways of responding, cultivating equanimity may enable the leader to find flexible and creative solutions for the greater good. Leaders who practice equanimity may also be better at adapting to challenges and have a calm approach to solving problems, which offers reassurance to the employees and sub-ordinates that they are in the hands of a capable leader.

Thus, as seen above, the cultivation of equanimity or *Samatva* has significant implications for management, leadership and holistic well-being.

### Summary

This paper aimed to define the construct of *Samatva* as delineated in the Bhagavad Gita. From the rigorous methodology employed it was found that *Samatva* consists of being even-minded towards objects, experiences and individuals. *Samatva* was defined as a state of even-mindedness and rising above the dualities. Various cognitive-affective pathways towards the cultivation of *Samatva* were elaborated such as reduced desires, and attachments to the outcomes or results of one's

work. Similarly, beliefs in the underlying oneness of consciousness and the awareness of transience play a significant in the cultivation of *Samatva*. The suggested health and spiritual implications of cultivating *Samatva* were peace, tranquillity and self-realization. The implications of *Samatva* for holistic well-being, leadership and management were elaborated in detail. With increasing stress, anxiety, and depression in personal and professional life of individuals, it is time to turn to our native wisdom for indigenous mental health techniques. It is hoped that the thick description of the construct of *Samatva* and the proposed nomological network will stimulate research in this direction.

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### Notes:

1. Verse 6.8- *jñāna-vijñāna-triptātmākūta-sthovijitendriyaḥyuktaityuchyateyogīsama-loṣṭāśhma-kāñchanaḥ*
2. Verse 2.48- *yoga-sthaḥkurukarmāṅsaṅgamītyaktvādhanāñjaya-siddhy-siddhyoḥsamobhūtvāSamatvaṁ yoga-uchyate*
3. Verse 6.29- *sarva-bhūta-sthamātmānamasarva-bhūtānichātmaniḥkshateyogayuktātmāsarvatrasama-darśhanaḥ*
4. Verse 2.14- *mātrā-*

*sparśhāstukaunteyaśhūtośhṇa-sukha-duḥkha-dāḥāgamāpāyino 'nityās tans-titikṣhasvabhārata*

5. Verse 5.19- *ihaivatairjitaḥsargoyeśhāmsāmyesthitammanāḥnirdośhaṁ hi samam brahma-tasmādbrahmaṇitesthitāḥ*
6. Verse 6.9- *suhṛin-mitrāryudāsīna-madhyastha-dveśhya-bandhuśhusādhuśhvapi cha pāpeśhusama-buddhirviśhiṣhyate*
7. Verse 2.70- *āpūryamāṇamachalapratiśṭhāmsamudramāpaḥpraviśhantiyadva-ttadvatkāmāyaṁpraviśhantisarvesaśhāntimā*



*pnotinakāma-kāmī*

8. Verse 2.51- *karma-jambuddhi-yuktā hi phalaṁtyaktvāmanīshīṇaḥjanma-bandhavinirmuktāḥpadaṁgachchhantyanāmayam*
9. Verse 2.38- *sukha-duḥkhe same kṛitvālābhālābhaujayājayautatoyuddhāyayuj yasvanaivaṁpāpamavāpsyasi*
10. Verse 2.15- *yam hi navyathayantyetepuruṣhaṁpuruṣharṣhabhasama-duḥkhasukhaṁdhīraṁ so 'mṛitatvāyakalpate*
11. Verse 5.3- *jñeyasantrya-sannyāsīyonadveṣṭīnakāṅkṣhatinirdvandvo hi mahābāhosukhaṁbandhātpramuchyate*
12. Verse 15.5- *nirmāna-mohājita-saṅga-doṣhādhyātma-nityāvinivṛitta-kāmāḥdvandvairvimuktāḥsukha-duḥkhasanjñairgachchhantyanmūdhāḥpadamavyayaṁ tat*
13. Verse 12.13- *adveṣṭāsarva-bhūtānāmmaitraḥkaruṇaeva cha nirmamonirahankāraḥsama-duḥkhasukhaḥkṣhamī*
14. Verses 12.18-19- *samaḥśhatrau cha mitre cha*

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*tathāmānāpamānayoḥśhītoṣṇasukhaduḥkheṣhusamaḥsaṅga-vivarjitaḥ Tulya-nindā-stutirmaunīsantushṭoyenakenachitaniketahst hira-matirbhaktimān me priyonaraḥ*

15. Verses 14.22-23- *śhrī-bhagavānuvāchaprakāśham cha pravṛittim cha mohameva cha pāṇḍavanadveṣṭīsampravṛittāninanivṛittāni kāṅkṣhati Udāsīna-vadāsīnoguṇairyonavichālyateguṇāvartantai tyevaṁyo 'vatiṣṭhatineṅgate*
16. Verses 14.24-25- *sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥsvasthaḥsama-loṣṭāśhma-kāṅchanaḥtulyapriyāpriyodhīrastulya-nindātma-sanstutiḥ Mānāpamānayoṣṭulyastulyomitrāri-pakṣhayoḥsarvārambha-parityāgīguṇātītaḥsauchyate*
17. Verse 5.18- *vidyā-vinaya-sampannebrāhmaṇegavihastiniśhunichaivaś hva-pāke cha paṇḍitāḥsama-darśhinaḥ*
18. Verse 2.62- *dhyāyatoviṣhayānpuṁsaḥsaṅgasteshūpajāya tesāṅgātsañjāyatekāmāḥ kāmātkrodho 'bhijāyate*

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