

Bhagwat Gita

Three Gunas to Monitor One's Spiritual Progress

In Chapter 14 of Bhagwat Gita, Lord Krishna defines and describes the three gunas: Sattvic, Rajas and Tamas. In subsequent chapters, Lord Krishna classifies many of our daily actions and sadhanas into these three types.

Swami Paramarthananda has translated Bhagwat Gita for use by his students. Many students use these translations, published by chapter in book form, to chant the verses when attending Swamiji's Bhagwat Gita classes. In the introduction to Chapter 14, Swamiji has presented and analyzed the three gunas in a chart form. In subsequent topics, he presented the classifications of some karma and sadhana in chart forms.

Based on Swamiji's teachings of Bhagwat Gita, I somewhat expanded these charts to include teachings from Chapters 16, 17 and 18. The first chart defines the three gunas and the subsequent charts classify actions and sadhanas into these three gunas. I believe these charts give guidance on how to understand the three gunas, classify actions into the three gunas and try to improve the quality of actions. According to the scriptures we can improve the quality of actions by eliminating tamasic actions, reducing rajasic actions and increasing sattvic actions.

Please note that my knowledge of Sanskrit is very limited, and these charts may reflect that limitation.

With Regards

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Bhagwat Gita
Three Gunas
Based on Swami Paramarthananda's Teachings

Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas
लक्षण (Definition)	Chapter 14, Verse 6 Prakasatmakam Pre-disposed to acquire more knowledge; addicted to introspection	Chapter 14, Verse 7 Ragatmakam Tend to act more; clings on to possessions and desires for things not yet possessed	Chapter 14, Verse 8 Mohanatmakam Eternal conflict, delusion and procrastination; not sure about the needs
बन्धनप्राकार (Mode of bondage)	Chapter 14, Verses 6 & 9 Causes attachment to knowledge; addicted to knowledge	Chapter 14, Verses 7 & 9 Causes attachment to activity; addicted to karma (activities)	Chapter 14, Verses 8 & 9 Causes attachment to indifference; bound to negligence
लिङ्ग (Sign of predominance)	Chapter 14, Verse 11 Increase of knowledge	Chapter 14, Verse 12 Increase of activity, greed, restlessness and craving	Chapter 14, Verse 13 Dullness, inaction, negligence and delusion
गति (travel after death)	Chapter 14, Verses 14 & 18 To higher lokas	Chapter 14, Verses 15 & 18 To middle lokas	Chapter 14, Verses 15 & 18 To lower lokas
फलम् (consequence in this life)	Chapter 14, Verses 16 & 17 Punya & Knowledge	Chapter 14, Verses 16 & 17 Sorrow & greed	Chapter 14, Verses 16 & 17 Ignorance & delusion

Bhagwat Gita
Classification of Actions
Based on Swami Paramarthananda's Teachings

Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas
श्रद्धा (Faith)	Chapter 17, Verse 4 Worship of satvic deities Mental worship Spiritual motive	Chapter 17, Verse 4 Worship of rajasic deities Verbal and physical worship Materialistic motive	Chapter 17, Verse 4 Worship of tamasic deities Violent worship Destructive motive
आहार (Food)	Chapter 17, Verse 8 That which is delicious, which gives longevity, health, strength and happiness	Chapter 17, Verse 9 That which is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent and which causes pain	Chapter 17, Verse 10 That which is improperly cooked, without nutrition, putrid, stale, left over and impure
यज्ञ (Sacrifice)	Chapter 17, Verse 11 All activities done sincerely according to the scriptures; without expecting any results; karma yoga is satvic yoga; focus is on what one gives to the society	Chapter 17, Verse 12 All activities done for fame, show and money; focus is on what one gets back from the society	Chapter 17, Verse 13 All activities done involuntarily; without rules, faith, mantra or dakshina
दान (Charity)	Chapter 17, Verse 20 Given with sincerity to a deserving person at the proper time and place without expecting any return; Charity is the end in itself	Chapter 17, Verse 21 Given reluctantly for the sake of return and result	Chapter 17, Verse 22 Given without respect to an undeserving person at an improper time and place
तपस् (Austerity)	Chapter 17, Verse 17 Practiced with faith and without expecting any results; any worldly results should only be by-products	Chapter 17, Verse 18 Practiced for the sake of show, name and fame; Results will be temporary and uncertain	Chapter 17, Verse 19 Practiced with false notions and bodily torture for harming others

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Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas
सन्यास (Renunciation)	Chapter 18, Verse 9 Renunciation of the results of Nitya karmas Continues to do karma yoga, but renounces the results	Chapter 18, Verse 8 Renunciation of Nitya karmas due to fear of bodily strain	Chapter 18, Verse 7 Renunciation of Nitya karmas due to the ignorance of their value Renunciation of dhyānam and tapas
ज्ञान Knowledge	Chapter 18, Verse 20 Sees the undivided Self in and through all the beings I am the conscious principle which enlivens the body mind complex (I am the consciousness)	Chapter 18, Verse 21 Takes the Self to be distinct from every other being I am the tenant/owner of the body and am immortal; there are many immortal jivas just as me (I am the mind)	Chapter 18 Verse 22 Takes the body as the self Believes in only what can be sensed by sense organs (I am the body)
कर्म (Karma)	Chapter 18, Verse 23 Duty performed without attachment and expectations Action done to improve my self knowledge	Chapter 18, Verse 24 Action done with egoism for the sake of results Action done to improve my surroundings	Chapter 18, Verse 25 Indiscriminate action done without considering the consequences Actions done without any planning
कर्ता (Doer)	Chapter 18, Verse 26 Detached, perseverant, enthusiastic, unassuming and calm in success and failure Does not get attached to any success or failure and uses all experiences for inner growth	Chapter 18, Verse 27 Attached, greedy, harmful and subject to elation and depression Gets attached to success and failure and does not use the results for inner growth.	Chapter 18, Verse 28 Undisciplined, uncultured, arrogant, harmful, dull and procrastinating Does not have an integrated personality

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Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas
बुद्धि (Intellect)	Chapter 18, Verse 30 Clearly knows dharma and adharma, right and wrong as well as bondage and liberation	Chapter 18, Verse 31 Has doubts regarding dharma and adharma, right and wrong	Chapter 18, Verse 32 Considers adharma as dharma (e.g. Arjuna thought the war was adharma at the beginning of Bhagwat Geeta)
धृति (Will)	Chapter 18, Verse 33 Sustains the functions of all organs in the spiritual path; controls sense organs by unswerving practice of yoga Leads to spiritual success	Chapter 18, Verse 34 Pursues dharma, artha and kama craving for their benefits Leads to material success	Chapter 18, Verse 35 Does not give up sleep, fear, grief and indulgence Leads to sensory pleasures and attachment
सुखम् (happiness)	Chapter 18, Verse 37 Like poison in the beginning and like nectar in the end; Happiness is born of self-knowledge Not subject to loss; sadhana shadhushta sambanthi सधन सुतुष्ट सम्बन्धि	Chapter 18, Verse 38 Like nectar in the beginning and like poison at the end; happiness is born of contact between sense organs and objects Subject to loss and will go away creating a vacuum	Chapter 18, Verse 39 Deludes the mind in the beginning and in the end; happiness is born of indolence and negligence. Based on fatalism and does not use free will