

Three Gunas

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
परिभाषा (Definition)	Chapter 14, Verse 6	Chapter 14, Verse 7	Chapter 14, Verse 8
	Prakasatmakam	Ragatmakam	Mohanatmakam
	Pre-disposed to acquire more knowledge; addicted to introspection	Tend to act more; clings on to possessions and desires for things not yet possessed	Eternal conflict, delusion and procrastination; not sure about the needs
बन्धनप्रकारः (Mode of bondage)	Chapter 14, Verses 6 & 9	Chapter 14, Verses 7 & 9	Chapter 14, Verses 8 & 9
	Causes attachment to knowledge; addicted to knowledge	Causes attachment to activity; addicted to karma (activities)	Causes attachment to indifference; bound to negligence
लक्षणं (Sign of predominance)	Chapter 14, Verse 11	Chapter 14, Verse 12	Chapter 14, Verse 13
	Increase of knowledge	Increase of activity, greed, restlessness and craving	Dullness, inaction, negligence and delusion

पूँज (travel after death)	Chapter 14, Verses 14 & 18	Chapter 14, Verses 15 & 18	Chapter 14, Verses 15 & 18
	To higher lokas	To middle lokas	To lower lokas
पूँज (consequence in this life)	Chapter 14, Verses 16 & 17	Chapter 14, Verses 16 & 17	Chapter 14, Verses 16 & 17
	Punya & Knowledge	Sorrow & greed	Ignorance & delusion
Bhagwat Gita			
Classification of Actions			
Based on Swami Paramarthananda's Teachings			
Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas
पूँज (Faith)	Chapter 17, Verse 4	Chapter 17, Verse 4	Chapter 17, Verse 4
	Worship of satvic deities	Worship of rajasic deities	Worship of tamasic deities
	Mental worship	Verbal and physical worship	Violent worship
	Spiritual motive	Materialistic motive	Destructive motive

आहार (Food)	Chapter 17, Verse 8	Chapter 17, Verse 9	Chapter 17, Verse 10
	That which is delicious, which gives longevity, health, strength and happiness	That which is excessively bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent and which causes pain	That which is improperly cooked, without nutrition, putrid, stale, left over and impure
दान (Sacrifice)	Chapter 17, Verse 11	Chapter 17, Verse 12	Chapter 17, Verse 13
	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	All activities done for fame, show and money; focus is on what one gets back from the society	All activities done involuntarily; without rules, faith, mantra or dakshina

दान (Charity)	Chapter 17, Verse 20	Chapter 17, Verse 21	Chapter 17, Verse 22
	Given with sincerity to a deserving person at the proper time and place without expecting any return; Charity is the end in itself	Given reluctantly for the sake of return and result	Given without respect to an undeserving person at an improper time and place
व्रत (Austerity)	Chapter 17, Verse 17	Chapter 17, Verse 18	Chapter 17, Verse 19
	Practiced with faith and without expecting any results; any wordily results should only be by-products	Practiced for the sake of show, name and fame; Results will be temporary and uncertain	Practiced with false notions and bodily torture for harming others
Bhagwat Gita			
Classification of Actions			
Based on Swami Paramarthananda's Teachings			
Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas

संन्यासः (Renunciation)	Chapter 18, Verse 9	Chapter 18, Verse 8	Chapter 18, Verse 7
	Renunciation of the results of Nitya karmas	Renunciation of Nitya karmas due to fear of bodily strain	Renunciation of Nitya karmas due to the ignorance of their value
	Continues to do karma yoga, but renounces the results		Renunciation of dhyānam and tapas
ज्ञानम् Knowledge	Chapter 18, Verse 20	Chapter 18, Verse 21	Chapter 18 Verse 22
	Sees the undivided Self in and through all the beings	Takes the Self to be distinct from every other being	Takes the body as the self
	I am the conscious principle which enlivens the body mind complex (I am the consciousness)	I am the tenant/owner of the body and am immortal; there are many immortal jivas just as me (I am the mind)	Believes in only what can be sensed by sense organs (I am the body)

कर्म (Karma)	Chapter 18, Verse 23	Chapter 18, Verse 24	Chapter 18, Verse 25
	Duty performed without attachment and expectations	Action done with egoism for the sake of results	Indiscriminate action done without considering the consequences
	Action done to improve my self knowledge	Action done to improve my surroundings	Actions done without any planning
कर्मात्मा (Doer)	Chapter 18, Verse 26	Chapter 18, Verse 27	Chapter 18, Verse 28
	Detached, perseverant, enthusiastic, unassuming and calm in success and failure	Attached, greedy, harmful and subject to elation and depression	Undisciplined, uncultured, arrogant, harmful, dull and procrastinating
	Does not get attached to any success or failure and uses all experiences for inner growth	Gets attached to success and failure and does not use the results for inner growth.	Does not have an integrated personality
Bhagwat Gita			
Classification of Actions			
Based on Swami Paramarthananda's Teachings			
Topic	Sattva	Rajas	Tamas

बुद्धि (Intellect)	Chapter 18, Verse 30	Chapter 18, Verse 31	Chapter 18, Verse 32
	Clearly knows dharma and adharma, right and wrong as well as bondage and liberation	Has doubts regarding dharma and adharma, right and wrong	Considers adharma as dharma (e.g. Arjuna thought the war was adharma at the beginning of Bhagwat Geeta)
इन्द्रिय (Will)	Chapter 18, Verse 33	Chapter 18, Verse 34	Chapter 18, Verse 35
	Sustains the functions of all organs in the spiritual path; controls sense organs by unswerving practice of yoga	Pursues dharma, artha and kama craving for their benefits	Does not give up sleep, fear, grief and indulgence
	Leads to spiritual success	Leads to material success	Leads to sensory pleasures and attachment

சுப (happiness)	Chapter 18, Verse 37	Chapter 18, Verse 38	Chapter 18, Verse 39
	Like poison in the beginning and like nectar in the end; Happiness is born of self-knowledge	Like nectar in the beginning and like poison at the end; happiness is born of contact between sense organs and objects	Deludes the mind in the beginning and in the end; happiness is born of indolence and negligence.
	Not subject to loss; sadhana shadhushta sambanthi	Subject to loss and will go away creating a vacuum	Based on fatalism and does not use free will
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