

Research Paper

Spiritual Psychology and Mental Well-being through the Lens of the Bhagavad Gita

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to relate the teachings of spiritual psychology with mental health, drawing lessons from the Bhagavad Gita—a fundamental text in Indian philosophy. Instead of a historical or religious reading, this study attempts to reread the Gita as a valuable psychological source that throws light on human behavior, emotional resilience, and inner peace. In this research work, an attempt has been made to discover how far the teachings of the Gita can lead real practice and philosophy towards mental well-being. Analyzing core concepts such as dharma (one's duty), detachment towards results, self-realization, and inner balance gives an idea about how far this ancient scripture can speak to contemporary worries about anxiety, stress, and finding meaning in hard times. The paper contends that the teachings of the Gita are laden not only with philosophical richness but also with practical ways of steering a person's life. To bridge this gap between Indian spiritual thought and the Western psychological framework, this paper will emphasize how spiritual understanding can subtly enhance and support contemporary treatment through which an individual may be aided in establishing a deeper connection with inner strength, sense of purpose, and sense of meaning.

Keywords: *Bhagavad Gita, spiritual psychology, mental health, well-being, dharma, detachment, self-realization, equanimity*

The past few years, mental wellbeing has become a pressing concern across the globe, prompting experts to explore more integrated and holistic methods to support psychological well-being. Mental health is more than just the free from disease or any illness—it encompasses the capacity to cope with life's ups and downs, nurture one's abilities, form healthy relationships, and contribute meaningfully to society. In today's fast-paced, often overwhelming world, many of us find ourselves silently struggling—with stress, anxiety, uncertainty, or simply a sense that something is missing. While therapy, medication, and psychological support are crucial, they don't always answer deeper questions like: *Why am I feeling this way? What is the point of all this effort? How do I stay calm when life doesn't go my way?* It's in this space—where emotions meet meaning—that spiritual psychology comes in. Spiritual psychology goes beyond treating symptoms. It helps us understand our emotional pain not just as a problem to be fixed, but as an invitation to grow. It asks us to look inward—not only to manage stress or sadness, but to rediscover who

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we truly are. In this sense, spiritual psychology blends the insights of the mind with the wisdom of the heart. It reminds us that healing isn't just about "getting better"—it's also about rediscovering with our inner power, our purpose, and something deeper than everyday worries.

A compelling source of such insight is the *Bhagavad Gita*, an ancient text that continues to resonate with modern challenges. Written more than 2,000 years ago, it forms part of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and contains powerful lessons on personal transformation, ethical living, and emotional strength. Instead of being approached solely as a religious scripture, the Gita can also be viewed as a guide to navigating mental distress, offering timeless advice on handling stress, anxiety, and inner conflict.

The narrative unfolds as a dialogue between Arjuna, a warrior facing a moral crisis, and Krishna, his charioteer and spiritual guide. Arjuna's internal struggle reflects the dilemmas many people face today: confusion about purpose, fear of failure, and emotional overwhelm. Krishna responds not just with philosophical ideas but with deeply practical guidance—encouraging action, self-awareness, and balance.

What makes the Gita so powerful, especially in the context of mental health, is how it addresses the inner struggles we all face: fear of failure, guilt, indecision, pressure to succeed, and the feeling of being torn between what we want and what we're meant to do. Through this ancient dialogue, we find timeless techniques that can make anyone feel more grounded, more focused, and more emotionally resilient.

Some of the Gita's core ideas are especially relevant when we look at emotional well-being through the lens of spiritual psychology:

- **Dharma:** This refers to one's personal duty or path. It's about living in a way that feels true to who you are. When we act out of alignment with our values, it often leads to inner tension. But when we honor our responsibilities and make choices that feel meaningful, we start to feel more centered—even during hard times.
- **Detachment:** The Gita teaches us to do our best without clinging to the outcome. That doesn't mean giving up—it means releasing the anxiety that comes from needing things to turn out a certain way. In therapy, this shows up as learning to let go of control and focusing more on the process than the result.
- **Self-realization:** The Bhagavad Gita gently encourages us to look beyond the surface—to remember who we truly are beneath all the roles we play and the expectations we carry. We're not just defined by our careers, relationships, or achievements. Tapping into this deeper sense of self can ease feelings of stress, overwhelm, and self-doubt, offering a sense of inner calm that helps us move through life more peacefully.
- **Equanimity:** One of the most powerful messages of the Gita is about staying steady when life feels unpredictable. Whether we're celebrating success or facing a setback, the Gita teaches us to hold a sense of inner calm. This balance doesn't mean ignoring emotions—it means not being consumed by them. It's a quiet strength that helps us stay grounded and mentally strong, even in the face of life's storms.

As mental health challenges become increasingly complex in today's fast-paced world, the timeless wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita offers not just spiritual insight, but practical tools for navigating modern life with clarity and resilience. They don't promise to erase pain—but they help us face it with strength, clarity, and compassion. By blending the teachings of the

Gita with the approaches of spiritual psychology, this paper discovers how inner transformation can support emotional healing and well-being in a deep meaningful and lasting way.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spiritual Psychology and Mental Health

Spiritual psychology emphasizes the integration of spiritual beliefs and practices with psychological understanding. Research shows that spiritual orientation can enhance coping mechanisms, reduce anxiety, and foster a sense of purpose (Pargament, 2007). According to Koenig (2012), individuals with a strong spiritual foundation often demonstrate higher emotional resilience, enabling them to cope more effectively with life's challenges. Individuals who engage in spiritual practices often report enhanced well-being, better coping mechanisms, and a deeper sense of fulfillment in life (Pargament, 1997). A study by Jasmindehora et al (2019) revealed that Spiritual intelligence is positively correlated to psychological well-being. According to K. Ramakrishna Rao (2005), spiritual psychology explores the nature of mind and consciousness at the intersection of science and religion. Spiritual psychology is a discipline dedicated to understanding and realizing the self, aligning with the Indian philosophical assertion "*Ātmanam viddhi*"—know thyself. In this framework, self-knowledge is viewed not merely as an intellectual pursuit, but as a fundamental duty. Spiritual psychology seeks the holistic transformation of the individual, aiming to cultivate higher states of awareness, self-realization, and personal excellence.

The Bhagavad Gita in Psychological Studies

Scholars like Rao (2011) and Sharma (2015) have examined the Bhagavad Gita's influence on psychological well-being. Concepts such as karma yoga (selfless action) and jnana yoga (wisdom) have been interpreted as psychological tools for stress management and cognitive restructuring. The Gita's dialogic form also presents a therapeutic model of crisis intervention, as seen in Arjuna's existential breakdown and Krishna's counsel. The *Bhagavad Gita* offers a powerful look into the kind of moral struggles that many people experience—especially when we're asked to choose between emotional comfort and our deeper responsibilities. Arjuna's breakdown on the battlefield isn't just about fear—it's about the pain of acting against personal ties in order to fulfill a greater duty. In guiding him through this, Krishna introduces *karma yoga*, the path of selfless action, encouraging Arjuna to act with integrity while letting go of the need to control the outcome. As Easwaran (2007) explains, this kind of action—done without selfish desire—serves as a vehicle for spiritual transformation. It's not just about what we do, but how and why we do it. In psychological terms, this reflects how values-based decision-making and moral clarity can help individuals build inner strength, emotional balance, and resilience in the face of life's challenges.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE BHAGAVAD GITA'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Dharma and Purpose

The idea of dharma, or righteous duty, offers a powerful way to find meaning and take personal responsibility in life. Psychologically, having a clear sense of purpose and meaning is strongly connected to better mental health and overall well-being (Steger et al., 2006). The inner turmoil faced by Arjuna on the battlefield beautifully mirrors the struggles many people experience when trying to balance personal ethics with the roles and responsibilities life places on them.

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Ryff and Singer's (1998) research emphasizes that having a clear sense of purpose is a key factor in psychological well-being. This aligns closely with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, which encourages living in harmony with one's dharma—or true path in life. When individuals embrace their personal roles and responsibilities with intention, they often experience greater emotional strength and fewer symptoms of depression. It's this connection to a deeper meaning that brings a sense of direction and balance, which in turn nurtures mental health.

Moreover, studies focusing on Indian cultural contexts show that dharma isn't just a spiritual idea but also shapes motivation and ethical behavior. People who embrace dharma-related values tend to experience greater life satisfaction and less internal conflict (Joshi, 2016). This illustrates the extent to which dharma shapes a person's behavior and sense of self.

From the perspective of motivation science, Deci and Ryan (2000) describe how intrinsic motivation—the kind that drives us from within—arises when our actions align closely with our core values and identity. This closely parallels the Gita's message about selfless action and following one's duty without attachment to the results. When people act in harmony with their true purpose, they tend to be more persistent, engaged, and psychologically healthy.

Detachment and Emotional Regulation

The Gita advocates *nishkama karma* – action without attachment to outcomes. This aligns with cognitive-behavioral strategies that improve emotional regulation by controlling rumination and anxiety. In the Gita, attachment does not translate into apathy but rather equanimity; balance in the face of failure and success. As noted in Gavade's (2023) research, the Gita serves real manuals for emotional regulation, which is an activity close to reappraisal cognitive functions, mindfulness, and resilience-building strategies. Whereas consciousness' nature was being analyzed Bhagavad Gita already has laid down this track further and is concerned about how emotions and desires affect our mental well-being. "Control your emotions" is the advice Krishna gives Arjuna for achieving psychological harmony. He tells Arjuna to control his desires and attain peace through self-discipline and spiritual practice (Bhagavad Gita 2.64-65).

This wisdom really connects with some of the concepts of modern psychology, mainly those related to emotional intelligence and self-regulation, as highlighted by Goleman (2000). Through learning to manage our emotions and desires, we can lead to be a more stable and fulfilling mental state. It's kind of similar to what Krishna teaches Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita.

The *Bhagavad Gita* introduces the concept of *samatvam*— which is all about finding that inner steadiness. It's a crucial part of what true yoga is all about. This teaching, often summed up in the phrase "*Samatvam yoga uchyate*," highlights the value of staying emotionally balanced, no matter what life throws at us. Maintaining this kind of calm, even in the face of success or failure, helps foster greater emotional flexibility and overall mental well-being. As Harris (2022) notes, learning to respond instead of react is a core element of psychological resilience. Krishna reinforces this in verse 2.50 by encouraging Arjuna to stay grounded through self-discipline and mindful action, showing that resilience comes not from avoiding challenges, but from how we meet them.

Self-Realization and Identity

The goal of Indian psychology is Self-realization, and Self is viewed as a major concept to bring about behavior change. In order to realize real Self there are processes described in the Indian scriptures and Bhagavad-Gita is one among them (Rangaswamy, 1996).

The Gita's emphasis on the eternal self (atman) invites reflection on deeper identity beyond ego and societal roles. Spiritual identity formation is associated with increased self-esteem and lower levels of depression (Hill et al., 2000). Krishna's dialogue with Arjuna nurtures a deep sense of inner stability and purpose by reminding him of the eternal nature of the self, or *atman* (Bhagavad Gita 2.22). This idea—that our true self is unchanging and beyond the ups and downs of life—can be incredibly grounding, especially in times of emotional turmoil. It resonates with modern psychological insights, such as Erikson's theory of identity, which suggests that a clear and secure sense of self plays an important role in our overall mental well-being. Similarly, contemporary perspectives on self-awareness, like those proposed by Gallagher (2000), emphasize the value of introspection in understanding who we are and in finding deeper personal fulfillment. In this way, the Gita's view of the *atman* aligns beautifully with today's understanding of the self as central to both psychological growth and inner peace.

Equanimity and Resilience

The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes *Samatvam*, or equanimity, encouraging a calm and balanced mind in both success and failure. This idea of non-attachment really plays a big role in keeping one's emotions steady. It's like what we see in the text — it encourages us to stick to our Dharma, even when fear or doubt creeps in. The journey of Arjuna's, moving from hopelessness to action with Krishna's help, perfectly illustrates this resilience.

These days, modern theories on resilience really resonate with that notion. They talk about how being adaptable and emotionally stable is crucial, especially during tough times (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). And Mittal (2025) really drives home the point that things like equanimity (or *samatva*), being detached (that's *vairagya*), and understanding that suffering doesn't last forever can really help people to deal with psychological stress and those emotional ups and downs. Pandey & Mishra (2021) highlight the contribution of Gita to build resilience as both a trait and a dynamic process. It's all about nurturing inner strength, self-awareness, and spiritual insight.

Many other researches also support these teaching as well. Dhankar and Bijlani (2023) found that folks who read the Gita tend to report higher resilience and life satisfaction. They think it's because of values like *Anasakti*, which is all about non-attachment. Sharma (2020) pointed out that acceptance, having control within ourselves, and taking disciplined actions create this Gita-inspired way of being resilient. Manimegalai (2021) also noted that letting go of attachment to outcomes really builds our emotional strength. Similarly, Raghavan and Deshpande (2024) found that maintaining equanimity helps reduce stress and improves how we handle our emotions.

These studies show that the Gita's insights into psychology aren't just profound on a spiritual level but also empirically valid, aligning closely with modern mental health frameworks.

APPLICATIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICE

Therapeutic Interventions

Practices derived from the Gita, such as mindfulness, detachment, and value-based action, can be incorporated into therapeutic models like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Integrating Gita principles may enhance culturally sensitive counseling for clients from South Asian backgrounds. Joshi & Sahu (2023) propose that the Gita can serve as a psychotherapeutic model, offering a spiritual framework for psychological well-being, emphasizing detachment from results, and the development of intellectual equanimity.

Preventive Mental Health

Teaching principles of self-awareness, dharma, and equanimity in schools and workplaces may build psychological resilience and reduce stigma around mental health. The Gita's teachings can serve as a resource for positive psychology and strength-based interventions.

DISCUSSION

The present study highlights the significant psychological dimensions embedded within the *Bhagavad Gita* and their relevance to contemporary mental health frameworks. The findings emphasize that the Gita's teachings, particularly regarding dharma, detachment, self-realization, and equanimity, closely parallel modern psychological constructs such as purpose in life, emotional regulation, identity formation, and resilience.

Dharma, as presented in the Bhagavad Gita, offers a powerful framework for meaning-making and personal responsibility—both of which are strongly associated with improved psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Steger et al., 2006). Arjuna's inner turmoil reflects the universal human struggle of reconciling one's inner values with external expectations. His existential dilemma highlights how clarity of purpose can be a vital force in easing emotional distress and strengthening one's resilience in the face of life's challenges.

The Bhagavad Gita's teaching on detachment, or *nishkama karma*—acting without attachment to outcomes—closely mirrors modern psychological practices like cognitive reappraisal and mindfulness-based emotional regulation (Gavade, 2023; Goleman, 2000). The promotion of non-attachment to outcomes reflects a cognitive strategy that mitigates anxiety and rumination, supporting greater emotional stability and adaptive coping.

In addition, the focus on self-realization fits with developmental psychology's acknowledgment of identity coherence as necessary for psychological health (Hill et al., 2000; Gallagher, 2000). The belief in the eternal self (atman) serves as an unshakable base, and innate source of transcendence, that can potentially make people invulnerable to the fluctuations of life.

Most importantly, equanimity or *samatvam* is considered as a key psychological construct which encapsulates emotional regulation and resilience (Mittal, 2025; Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Empirical evidence that indicates higher resilience and life satisfaction in Gita philosophy followers lends further support to its psychological effectiveness (Dhankar & Bijlani, 2023; Sharma, 2020).

While the Bhagavad Gita has much that could be useful for (Western) mental health practice, its application requires more caution and reflection at both the cultural and

individual level. Because this spiritual and philosophical context in the text may not be relevant to everyone, there is a legitimate need for a client-focused and a culturally grounded modification. Future studies should focus on longitudinal and intervention-driven research to better assess the effect of Gita-based psychological approach in diverse populations.

Despite the promising intersections between the Bhagavad Gita and contemporary mental health practices, its application requires thoughtful cultural and individual consideration. Given that the spiritual and philosophical framework of the text may not universally resonate, there is a clear need for culturally sensitive and client-centered adaptations. Future research should emphasize longitudinal and intervention-based studies to better understand the sustained impact of Gita-informed psychological approaches across diverse populations. In conclusion, the Bhagavad Gita offers a rich and balanced way of looking at mental health—one that brings together inner wisdom and modern understanding. Its timeless teachings naturally complement today's psychological theories and therapies, creating deeper possibilities for truly holistic and compassionate mental health care.

CONCLUSION

The present study underscores the enduring relevance of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s psychological teachings in addressing contemporary mental health challenges. Combining core concepts like dharma, detachment, self-realization, and equanimity with modern psychological theories creates a strong framework to enhance emotional well-being and resilience. Empirical evidence confirms that the principles of the Gita align well with important psychological constructs such as purpose in life, emotional regulation, identity formation, and adaptive coping strategies.

The Bhagavad Gita offers more than just spiritual wisdom—it provides down-to-earth guidance for handling stress, easing anxiety, and building emotional resilience. Its timeless lessons can meaningfully support mental well-being when thoughtfully woven into therapeutic approaches that respect individual and cultural differences. These findings advocate for the incorporation of Gita-based concepts into culturally sensitive therapeutic interventions and preventive mental health practices.

Future Research on Gita-Informed Therapeutic Models emphasize systematic evaluations of Gita-informed therapeutic models across diverse populations to validate and expand the applicability of these models. Significance of Ancient Wisdom in Psychological Understanding highlight the potential of ancient wisdom in enriching contemporary psychological understanding and promote holistic mental health through this integration.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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