

Integrating the Bhagavad Gita with Modern Psychological Thought: Self-Realisation, Mental Health, and Holistic Human Development

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Abstract

This study advances a theoretically rigorous synthesis between the metaphysical psychology of the Bhagavad Gita and contemporary psychological science. Drawing from humanistic, cognitive, existential, and contemplative frameworks, the analysis interprets Gita constructs—Atman, ahamkara, samskaras, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, and meditation—as components of a unified model of consciousness and human transformation. The Gita is positioned as articulating a proto-theoretical psychology in which cognition, affect, behavior, ethics, and ontology are inseparable domains of functioning. In contrast to symptom-oriented paradigms, the Gita situates mental well-being within an existential-ethical trajectory oriented toward liberation (moksha), meaning construction, and identity transcendence. This integrative synthesis supports the development of a transpersonal, value-embedded, and meaning-centered psychological framework with implications for psychotherapy, education, and interdisciplinary consciousness research.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, self-realisation, psychology, meditation, Karma Yoga, consciousness, spirituality and mental health

Introduction

Contemporary psychology has achieved significant success in empirical modeling of cognition and behavior, yet it frequently remains theoretically limited regarding ontological questions of selfhood, moral agency, and existential meaning. Rising global prevalence of anxiety, depression, burnout, and identity diffusion highlights the need for frameworks that integrate psychological functioning with purpose and value structures. The Bhagavad Gita offers a sophisticated theoretical anthropology in which metaphysics, ethics, and psychology are interwoven into a coherent explanatory system (Ramani, 2024). Arjuna's battlefield crisis symbolizes intrapsychic fragmentation characterized by affective dysregulation, cognitive dissonance, and motivational collapse (Pardhe, 2025). Krishna's dialogical intervention introduces attentional regulation, duty-based action, devotional cognition, and epistemic self-inquiry as mutually reinforcing mechanisms of psychological integration, paralleling mindfulness, CBT, and meaning-centered therapeutic approaches while extending beyond them ontologically.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative, meta-theoretical synthesis design. Primary hermeneutic analysis of the Bhagavad Gita was conducted alongside a comparative literature review of psychological theories spanning humanistic, cognitive, existential, and contemplative science traditions. Conceptual mapping was used to identify structural correspondences between Gita constructs and psychological models of self-concept, motivation, affect regulation, and consciousness. The research is interpretive rather than empirical, emphasizing theoretical integration and philosophical psychology. Sources were selected based on conceptual relevance, citation influence, and representation of major paradigms in modern psychology. This methodology enables cross-disciplinary dialogue and supports the construction of an integrative theoretical framework rather than hypothesis testing.

Ontological Model of Self-Realisation

The Gita's psychology is grounded in a stratified ontology distinguishing Atman (pure consciousness) from mental, emotional, and bodily processes. Ahamkara operates as an identity-construction function that erroneously attributes selfhood to transient experiential contents, thereby generating attachment, aversion, and existential anxiety (Ramani, 2024). Self-realisation entails a metacognitive and ontological shift in identity reference, comparable to cognitive defusion yet extending beyond it into non-dual awareness. Moksha represents a phenomenological state of equanimity, non-reactivity, and ethical coherence. This ontological psychology anticipates transpersonal models of self-transcendence and challenges reductionist accounts that equate consciousness solely with neural processes, suggesting instead a foundational model of awareness.

Motivational Theory and Karma Yoga

Karma Yoga offers a theory of action regulation based on non-attachment to outcomes. By decentering external reward contingencies, it reduces performance anxiety and ego-involved striving while promoting intrinsic engagement and resilience. This parallels self-determination theory and flow research (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) but embeds motivation within dharma, linking action to ethical responsibility and social order. Thus, behavior becomes value-driven rather than purely hedonic or self-referential. The model reframes success and failure as phenomenological events rather than identity-defining outcomes, supporting emotional stability and sustained effort in uncertain contexts.

Bhakti Yoga and Affective Regulation

Bhakti Yoga introduces a relational-affective model of regulation grounded in devotion, trust, and surrender. Devotional cognition restructures appraisal systems by situating individual experience within a transcendent relational context. Empirical studies on religious coping and attachment to God models demonstrate associations between faith-based schemas and reduced anxiety, enhanced resilience, and improved emotional recovery (Koenig et al., 2020). Bhakti thereby operates as an affective integration mechanism linking meaning, attachment security, and emotional modulation. This perspective broadens affect regulation theory beyond intrapsychic processes to include transpersonal relationality.

Jnana Yoga and Cognitive Transformation

Jnana Yoga represents an epistemological discipline aimed at discriminative knowledge (viveka). It involves systematic deconstruction of false identity beliefs and ontological assumptions about self and

world. While comparable to cognitive restructuring in challenging distorted cognitions, Jnana Yoga extends into metaphysical critique of subject-object dualism. It facilitates metatheoretical awareness in which consciousness is understood as primary rather than derivative, resonating with phenomenological and contemplative cognitive science perspectives (Kihlstrom, 2004). This process supports deep identity reconfiguration and existential insight.

Samskaras and Subconscious Conditioning

Samskaras are conceptualized as latent psychological imprints that shape dispositional tendencies and behavioral patterns (Pardhe, 2025). This anticipates schema theory, implicit memory research, and conditioning paradigms (Freud, 1918). The Gita proposes that sustained meditation and ethical intentionality can attenuate maladaptive samskaras, implying a proto-theory of neuroplastic and behavioral restructuring. Change is thus framed as cumulative reconditioning of perception and response tendencies rather than solely cognitive correction, aligning with modern understandings of habit formation and experiential learning.

Meditation as Phenomenological Method

Meditation in the Gita functions as attentional stabilization combined with reflexive awareness. Modern mindfulness research confirms improvements in attentional control, stress reduction, and emotional regulation (Deshpande et al., 2021). However, the Gita positions meditation as a phenomenological method for investigating consciousness itself, integrating introspective discipline with ontological inquiry. This transforms meditation from a clinical tool into an epistemic practice aimed at insight into the nature of mind and self, bridging psychology with contemplative philosophy.

Discussion

Theoretical convergence between the Gita and psychology appears across motivation, cognition, affect regulation, and identity processes. Yet the Gita embeds these within an ethical-ontological matrix that situates psychological functioning within a larger metaphysical narrative. Modern psychology's domain-specific models may thus be enriched through integration with value-oriented and transpersonal frameworks. This suggests development of a meta-framework where empirical findings and contemplative insights inform each other, expanding psychological science toward a comprehensive theory of the person.

Conclusion

This theoretical synthesis reveals the Bhagavad Gita as articulating a sophisticated proto-psychology integrating ontology, ethics, cognition, and phenomenology. Dialogue with contemporary psychology supports development of holistic models of mental health that address not only symptom reduction but also meaning, identity, and liberation-oriented growth. Such integration expands the scope of psychological inquiry toward a science of consciousness and human flourishing.

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