

A Theoretical Framework for Triguna-Based Psychospiritual Rehabilitation: The Srimad Bhagavad Gita-Inspired Intervention Module for Offenders

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Abstract

This theoretical review proposes a Bhagavad Gita-inspired psychospiritual rehabilitation framework for correctional settings, rooted in the Triguna model of Indian psychology. Drawing from verses of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, the intervention aims to reduce Rajas (restlessness, impulsivity) and Tamas (inertia, apathy) while enhancing Sattva (clarity, compassion, and self-awareness) among offenders. The eight-week module integrates chanting, guided contemplation, Gita-based affirmations, journaling, and group reflection to foster inner transformation. Weekly themes address self-concept healing, emotional regulation, trauma reframing, and moral agency. Though inspired by a Hindu scripture, the intervention is presented through a nonsectarian psychospiritual lens, emphasizing universal principles of inner change and ethical growth. This paper outlines the theoretical rationale, psychospiritual mechanisms, and thematic structure of the module. The review further discusses how this culturally grounded framework contributes to rehabilitation science by integrating indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary psychological constructs.

Keywords: Triguna, Srimad Bhagavad Gita, psychospiritual rehabilitation, correctional intervention, offender transformation

1. Introduction

1.1 Background: The Need for Psychospiritual Rehabilitation in Correctional Settings

Rehabilitation within correctional environments often focuses on behavioral reform, vocational training, and legal deterrence. However, such approaches may fall short in addressing the deeper layers of self-identity, emotional dysregulation, and existential guilt experienced by offenders (Day et al., 2006). A growing body of literature emphasizes the importance of integrating moral, emotional, and spiritual

dimensions in correctional rehabilitation to promote long-term transformation (Richards et al., 2005; Maruna, 2001).

In the Indian context, these issues are further complicated by socio-cultural stigmatization, karmic fatalism, and identity crises rooted in both past actions and systemic exclusion (Narang, 2015). Consequently, there is a need for culturally rooted, value-based rehabilitation models that engage the inner self—not merely the behavior—of the incarcerated individual.

1.2 Indian Psychology and the Triguna Framework

Indian Psychology (IP), as an indigenous discipline, offers a profound understanding of human nature through metaphysical, ethical, and cognitive frameworks grounded in classical texts such as the Upanishads, Yoga Sutras, and *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). A central concept within IP is the Triguna theory, which posits that human consciousness is constituted by three dynamic qualities:

- Sattva (purity, clarity, harmony),
- Rajas (restlessness, passion, ego), and
- Tamas (inertia, ignorance, delusion) (*Bhagavad Gita*, 14.5–8).

These gunas operate as fluctuating psychological tendencies that determine cognition, emotion, and behavior. An individual dominated by Rajas and Tamas may exhibit impulsivity, aggression, guilt, or apathy—traits commonly associated with criminal conduct and recidivism. Sattva, in contrast, is associated with moral clarity, compassion, and self-awareness, making it a desirable state for rehabilitation.

1.3 The Bhagavad Gita as a Source of Psychospiritual Healing

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, a canonical dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, provides a multidimensional approach to moral conflict, self-inquiry, emotional regulation, and surrender. It integrates Jnana (wisdom), Bhakti (devotion), and Karma (right action) as transformative pathways for spiritual growth and psychological stability (Radhakrishnan, 1948; Aurobindo, 1922). Gita-based therapeutic work has shown potential in reducing anxiety, fostering meaning-making, and improving emotional balance (Rao, 2005; Pandey, 1996).

In the context of offender rehabilitation, the *Gita* offers a powerful psychospiritual roadmap, guiding the individual from a fragmented self-concept to a restored inner moral agency through introspection, emotional purification, and ethical reorientation.

1.4 Rationale for the Present Framework

The present paper introduces a Triguna-based psychospiritual intervention module developed over eight weeks and inspired by verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, specifically designed for correctional rehabilitation. While prior work in positive psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy has addressed aspects of offender reform (Gilligan, 2001; Van Dierendonck & Mohan, 2006), few frameworks are rooted in Indian epistemology and capable of engaging both spiritual and psychological dimensions of change.

This intervention bridges that gap by:

- Enhancing Sattva guna as a psychological state of clarity and compassion.
- Reducing Rajas and Tamas gunas, which contribute to aggressive and apathetic behaviors.
- Using Gita-based affirmations, meditative practices, and moral introspection to transform self-concept, regulate emotion, and cultivate Universal Compassionate Love (UCL).
- Offering a nonsectarian, culturally sensitive model that resonates with Indian correctional contexts without enforcing doctrinal beliefs.

1.5 Scope and Structure of This Review

This paper is a theoretical review, not an empirical evaluation. It elaborates:

- The philosophical and psychological underpinnings of the Triguna-based module.
- The thematic structure of the 8-week *Gita*-based intervention (discussed in Section 3).
- The anticipated psychospiritual and behavioral outcomes.
- The relevance of this framework for broader applications in rehabilitation science, Indian psychology, and cross-cultural moral transformation.

Although this model is framed for incarcerated offenders, it holds potential for application in trauma recovery, addiction treatment, and moral-emotional realignment in diverse populations. By integrating indigenous wisdom with applied psychology, this framework seeks to expand the theoretical repertoire of global correctional rehabilitation.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

2.1 Triguna Theory in Indian Psychology

The Triguna theory, derived from the *Samkhya* and *Bhagavad Gita* traditions,

presents a foundational model of human behavior and consciousness in Indian psychology. According to this model, all psychological states and actions emerge from the dynamic interplay of three qualities or **gunas**:

- **Sattva**, associated with clarity, wisdom, harmony, and ethical awareness;
- **Rajas**, associated with desire, agitation, ego, and restlessness; and
- **Tamas**, associated with inertia, delusion, ignorance, and apathy (Bhagavad Gita 14.5–14.8; Rao & Paranjpe, 2016).

Each person's mental disposition is a unique combination of these gunas, which fluctuate based on life experiences, cognitive habits, and spiritual maturity (Misra, 1994). A predominance of Rajas and Tamas can give rise to impulsivity, moral confusion, and destructive behavioral tendencies. In contrast, a Sattva-dominant state is marked by equanimity, self-regulation, and prosocial conduct. This framework has been used in Indian psychology to understand personality, emotional health, and spiritual development (Mehrotra, 2001).

In the context of offender rehabilitation, Triguna theory offers a culturally resonant and spiritually grounded model for identifying and transforming inner tendencies that contribute to criminal behavior.

2.2 Psychospiritual Interventions and Inner Transformation

Psychospiritual models of rehabilitation emphasize not only the behavioral correction of individuals but also their inner transformation. Unlike conventional rehabilitation models that focus solely on external compliance or legal reintegration, psychospiritual approaches aim to engage the individual's conscience, self-concept, and meaning-making capacity (Richards et al., 2005; Maruna, 2001).

Such interventions often draw upon meditative practices, moral introspection, narrative reauthoring, and spiritual guidance to initiate change. These processes can assist offenders in reframing their identities, regulating emotions, and reconnecting with moral and communal values (Day et al., 2006; Sharma, 1999). They promote a shift from shame to dignity, from alienation to ethical agency.

2.3 The Bhagavad Gita as a Psychospiritual Text

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* has been interpreted as both a philosophical and psychological text that addresses the human condition during moral crisis. Arjuna's existential collapse on the battlefield (Gita 1.28–2.7) is emblematic of the inner conflict experienced by those struggling with guilt, duty, and identity. Krishna's

guidance offers not only theological solutions but also cognitive-emotional strategies for moral reorientation, detachment from harmful impulses, and alignment with higher purpose (Radhakrishnan, 1948; Rao, 2005).

Key constructs relevant to offender rehabilitation include:

- **Ātman (true self)** as distinct from body and social identity (Gita 2.13, 2.20);
- **Karma Yoga**, the disciplined performance of duty without attachment (Gita 2.47, 3.19);
- **Self-regulation and equanimity** in pain and pleasure (Gita 2.14–15);
- **Moral discernment** between sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic intellect (Gita 18.30–32);
- **Surrender**, as a psychological and spiritual release of past guilt (Gita 18.66).

These teachings, when translated into experiential and affirmation-based practices, can facilitate deep psychospiritual transformation. They offer offenders a way to reconstruct their moral selves and reengage with life purpose through clarity, responsibility, and compassion.

2.4 Moral Injury, Shame, and the Healing of Self-Concept

Research in moral injury and correctional psychology shows that incarcerated individuals often suffer from fractured self-concepts, unresolved guilt, and persistent shame (Gilligan, 2001; LeBel, 2012). Western therapeutic models, such as narrative therapy and compassion-focused therapy, attempt to address these wounds through identity re-authoring and self-forgiveness.

The Bhagavad Gita provides a culturally grounded parallel. Arjuna's recovery from paralyzing moral confusion through dialogue, surrender, and inner awakening is a powerful symbolic map for offenders. By aligning themselves with a deeper, unchanging self (Ātman) and shifting from a tamasic or rajasic state toward sattvic consciousness, individuals can experience relief from guilt and cultivate positive moral agency.

This model, unlike many imported frameworks, emerges from within the Indian civilizational ethos, and is therefore more likely to resonate with Indian populations.

2.5 Summary: Justifying the Framework

The convergence of Triguna theory, Bhagavad Gita-based psychospiritual practice, and offender rehabilitation provides a rich theoretical foundation for developing

culturally sensitive and morally transformative interventions. A rehabilitation model grounded in these principles offers the following advantages:

- It addresses not only cognition and behavior but also emotion, morality, and selfhood.
- It is consistent with Indian metaphysical psychology and resonates with familiar ethical and spiritual symbols.
- It fosters sustainable transformation through inner purification and responsibility, rather than behavioral compliance alone.

In the following section, the eight-week Triguna-based intervention module is elaborated in detail through a thematic framework that integrates selected verses from the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, corresponding psychological constructs, and spiritually oriented rehabilitation practices tailored for offender transformation.

3. Thematic Structure of the Intervention Module

The Triguna-Based Psychospiritual Rehabilitation Module was conceptually designed to facilitate a gradual realignment of the individual's inner nature by reducing tamasic and rajasic tendencies and enhancing sattvic qualities. Each of the eight weekly themes was carefully selected based on their relevance to psychological healing, moral reorientation, and spiritual insight, as presented in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. The structure follows a progressive trajectory—beginning with self-awareness and culminating in spiritual surrender and reintegration.

Note. The term Gita Focus refers to the key philosophical verses from the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* that serve as thematic anchors for each week's psychospiritual objectives and affirmations within the intervention module.

Although the module was originally developed for empirical intervention purposes, it can be appreciated as a stand-alone theoretical framework for correctional psychology and Indian psychospiritual rehabilitation. Each week incorporates specific *Bhagavad Gita* verses, psychological constructs, reflection practices, and affirmations designed to address different layers of the offender's cognitive-emotional and moral-spiritual reality.

3.1 Week 1: Self-Awareness and Spiritual Identity

This foundational theme introduces participants to the Triguna model and to the concept of *Ātman* as the eternal self beyond the body and crime. The aim is to shift identity from criminal self-narrative to spiritual awareness.

- **Gita Focus:** 14.5 (Triguna), 2.13, 2.20 (Ātman)
- **Psychological Focus:** Self-concept, identity healing, detachment from past
- **Affirmation:** "I am not my past. I am a conscious, eternal being guided by the light within."

3.2 Week 2: Karma and Choice-Making

This week emphasizes personal responsibility and the freedom to choose right action (karma) without attachment. It helps participants understand the principle of moral agency without being overwhelmed by guilt.

- **Gita Focus:** 2.47, 3.19, 3.37–3.41
- **Psychological Focus:** Moral agency, guilt transformation, decision-making
- **Affirmation:** "I take full responsibility for my actions and choose the path of right karma today."

3.3 Week 3: Emotional Equanimity

Building emotional resilience and regulation is central to this week's focus. Participants explore equanimity in the face of dualities (e.g., pleasure–pain) and learn strategies to respond mindfully instead of reacting impulsively.

- **Gita Focus:** 2.14–2.15, 6.5–6.6
- **Psychological Focus:** Emotion regulation, reactivity control, mindfulness
- **Affirmation:** "Pleasure and pain come and go — I remain steady like the deep ocean."

3.4 Week 4: Overcoming Rajas – Impulse and Agitation

This theme targets the rajasic qualities of restlessness, aggression, and ego. The goal is to cultivate awareness of one's restless tendencies and reduce reactive behavior through inner stillness.

- **Gita Focus:** 14.7
- **Psychological Focus:** Impulsivity reduction, self-awareness, behavioral slowing
- **Affirmation:** "I no longer react blindly. I pause, breathe, and respond with peace and purpose."

3.5 Week 5: Overcoming Tamas – Guilt and Inertia

Tamas is linked with lethargy, denial, and hopelessness. This week invites participants to confront internal darkness and awaken their sattvic buddhi (intellect) for self-guidance and inner clarity.

- **Gita Focus:** 14.8, 18.30–18.32
- **Psychological Focus:** Motivation, apathy reduction, guilt transcendence
- **Affirmation:** "The darkness in me is not who I am. I rise each day toward light, clarity, and purpose."

3.6 Week 6: Cultivating Sattva and Compassion

The focus this week is on elevating sattvic qualities through wisdom and compassion. Participants reflect on what brings them peace and how to express care toward others in the correctional setting.

- **Gita Focus:** 14.6, 12.13–12.15
- **Psychological Focus:** Positive affect, empathy, moral reorientation
- **Affirmation:** "I am rooted in calmness, clarity, and compassion for all beings."

3.7 Week 7: Reframing Identity and Restoring Purpose

The narrative arc of Arjuna's despair and recovery is mirrored here as participants explore their own turning points. Purposeful living through karma yoga becomes the new life orientation.

- **Gita Focus:** 2.7, 3.19, 18.66
- **Psychological Focus:** Life meaning, redemptive self-narrative, responsibility
- **Affirmation:** "Like Arjuna, I rise with courage. I am more than my fall—I walk my dharma with dignity."

3.8 Week 8: Integration and Surrender

The final theme brings all prior insights together in a culminating act of inner surrender. The concept of surrender is framed not as defeat but as the highest form of moral clarity and spiritual freedom.

- **Gita Focus:** 18.66
- **Psychological Focus:** Closure, ego transcendence, integration

- **Affirmation:** "I surrender my past to the Divine within. My path is clear, my heart is light, my mind is free."

4. Implications for Correctional Psychology and Theoretical Synthesis

The Bhagavad Gita-inspired intervention model, rooted in the Triguna framework, introduces a culturally congruent and spiritually integrative approach to offender rehabilitation. Unlike conventional models that primarily focus on behavioral modification or cognitive restructuring, this intervention draws on deep psychospiritual wisdom to address the root causes of psychological imbalance—namely, the dominance of *Rajas* (impulsivity, restlessness) and *Tamas* (inertia, denial, ignorance), and the absence of *Sattva* (clarity, harmony, and self-awareness) (Dasgupta, 1922; Misra, 1994).

In line with theories of Indian Psychology, the Triguna construct offers a dynamic model of personality that can be intentionally transformed through contemplation, ethical living, and spiritual surrender (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). The intervention thus provides a multi-level scaffold for offender transformation by targeting not only maladaptive behaviors but also core dimensions of identity, volition, and emotional intelligence (Pandey & Naidu, 1992).

Psychospiritual rehabilitation is an emerging field that emphasizes healing the inner wounds of moral injury, shame, and existential emptiness—common experiences in incarcerated populations (Scharff, 2015). The Gita's focus on *Ātman* (the eternal self) provides a transcendent self-concept that helps participants reframe their identity beyond the crime or social stigma. This aligns with the existential need for personal meaning and agency as proposed in Frankl's (1959) logotherapy and further extended by Indian approaches to *karma* and *dharma* (Sengupta, 1960).

Furthermore, the model integrates emotional regulation by encouraging equanimity amidst pleasure and pain (*samatvam yoga ucyate*; Gita 2.48), enhancing reflective capacities and reducing impulsivity (Rao, 2005). Weekly affirmations derived from Gita verses function similarly to cognitive reframing techniques found in CBT but are spiritually anchored and culturally resonant. Studies on mantra and affirmation-based interventions suggest neuropsychological benefits including increased emotional stability and decreased sympathetic arousal (Kozhevnikov et al., 2009; Wolf & Abell, 2003).

The inclusion of Universal Compassionate Love (UCL), drawn from verses such as Gita 12.13–15, introduces a transpersonal and relational dimension to rehabilitation. Compassion meditation, as supported by Buddhist and Indic traditions, fosters

empathy and moral reorientation—a cornerstone of restorative justice (Dalal, 2011; Vieten et al., 2013). This aligns with the broader goals of correctional psychology to develop prosocial behaviors, reduce recidivism, and promote reintegration through internal moral development (Van Dierendonck & Mohan, 2006).

Overall, this intervention module exemplifies a layered model of transformation that interweaves personality restructuring (Triguna balancing), emotional regulation, spiritual identity, moral cognition, and universal empathy. By doing so, it opens new pathways for Indian Psychology to contribute meaningfully to correctional rehabilitation and applied therapeutic frameworks, particularly in culturally rooted yet globally relevant contexts.

5. Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the conceptual depth and cultural richness of the Bhagavad Gita-inspired Triguna-based psychospiritual rehabilitation model, several limitations must be acknowledged to guide future scholarship and application.

5.1 Absence of Empirical Validation

This paper presents a theoretical framework grounded in Indian psychospiritual concepts without empirical testing or quantitative outcome data. While the thematic intervention structure has been carefully aligned with both classical texts and psychological constructs, it lacks rigorous experimental validation. Future research must empirically evaluate the module's efficacy using standardized psychological assessments (e.g., emotional regulation, moral development, self-concept, and impulsivity) to determine its measurable impact within correctional populations (Misra, 1994; Rao & Paranjpe, 2016).

5.2 Cultural Specificity and Contextual Generalizability

The intervention is embedded within the Indic philosophical worldview, with core concepts such as *Ātman*, *Karma Yoga*, and *Triguna* that may be unfamiliar or culturally distant to non-Indian populations. Although the model has been designed in a non-sectarian and symbolic format, its direct application in non-Indic or secular prison environments may require cultural adaptation (Dalal, 2011). Comparative cross-cultural research could explore how elements of this framework resonate with similar moral-spiritual constructs found in other religious or indigenous traditions.

5.3 Theoretical Complexity for Lay Practitioners

While the Bhagavad Gita provides a profound psychospiritual vocabulary for inner transformation, its metaphysical and philosophical complexity might pose a barrier to lay facilitators or prison psychologists without adequate training in Indian psychology. Implementing this module effectively requires not only a deep understanding of the Gita's symbolic teachings but also competence in trauma-sensitive spiritual counseling. Future work should include the development of facilitator training manuals, simplified handbooks, and psychoeducational content to support widespread dissemination (Rao, 2005).

5.4 Ethical Challenges and Informed Consent

Using sacred scriptures within correctional settings requires sensitivity to participants' religious identities, worldviews, and histories of coercion. Even though the model emphasizes optional engagement and secular framing of spiritual themes, institutional ethics boards must ensure informed consent, voluntary participation, and respect for pluralistic beliefs (Scharff, 2015). Incorporating multi-faith and humanistic alternatives may enrich the ethical inclusivity of such programs.

5.5 Future Research Directions

Future lines of inquiry may include:

- **Empirical trials** evaluating pre- and post-intervention changes in Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, self-concept clarity, and compassion using validated Indian Psychology scales (e.g., Vedic Personality Inventory).
- **Qualitative studies** exploring offender narratives of inner transformation, remorse, and spiritual growth.
- **Neuropsychological investigations** of mantra-based affirmations, emotional regulation, and cognitive flexibility using EEG or mindfulness metrics (Kozhevnikov et al., 2009).
- **Comparative analyses** of Triguna-based rehabilitation with secular models like cognitive-behavioral therapy, restorative justice, or logotherapy.

As psychospiritual rehabilitation continues to grow as a transdisciplinary field, such culturally rooted, ethically grounded, and psychologically transformative models deserve critical exploration and rigorous integration within modern correctional psychology.

6. Conclusion

This theoretical review proposed a culturally grounded and spiritually integrative rehabilitation framework for offenders, rooted in the Triguna model of Indian psychology and the psychospiritual teachings of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. The intervention emphasizes the transformation of inner dispositions, specifically Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, along with cognitive-emotional healing and ethical self-alignment. It introduces an alternative paradigm for correctional rehabilitation that moves beyond punitive behavior control and centers on compassionate, value-based rehumanization.

Unlike conventional rehabilitation programs that focus primarily on behavioral modification, the Triguna-based framework addresses the offender's internal psychological dimensions. These include unresolved emotional states such as shame, guilt, apathy, impulsivity, aggression, and moral disorientation. Through reflective self-inquiry, guided contemplation, structured affirmations, and symbolic reinterpretation of Gita teachings, the framework promotes a gradual reduction of Rajas and Tamas while strengthening Sattva, which is associated with clarity, restraint, and compassion.

The structured thematic design of the eight-week module, detailed earlier in this paper, provides a systematic approach for inner transformation. Each week integrates selected Gita verses, psychological objectives, and non-sectarian spiritual practices aimed at restoring moral agency, emotional regulation, and purpose. The intervention maintains inclusivity by presenting the Gita through a psychospiritual lens, rather than as a religious text, making it accessible to participants across different belief systems.

This model addresses a significant gap in correctional rehabilitation by offering an indigenous and culturally resonant alternative that aligns with the lived realities of Indian offenders. It invites a shift in perspective—from managing deviance to nurturing human potential—by honoring the ethical and spiritual dimensions of psychological recovery. The Triguna-based approach also contributes to decolonizing psychological interventions by reclaiming Indian epistemological resources for transformative healing.

Researchers, psychologists, spiritual counselors, and correctional administrators are encouraged to further explore the application of this intervention in varied institutional settings, including trauma care, addiction recovery, and moral rehabilitation programs. While theoretical in nature, this framework invites

empirical validation and cross-disciplinary collaboration to strengthen its foundations.

In summary, the Triguna-based rehabilitation framework suggests that rehabilitation is not merely a behavioral correction process. It is a psychospiritual journey that helps the individual rediscover inner harmony, cultivate universal compassion, and awaken a deeper alignment with dharma. Even in the context of incarceration, such transformation is not only possible but essential for meaningful reintegration into society.

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