

Revisiting the Yogic Concept of Dhāraṇā in Gītā Literature: A Textual and Analytical Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Dhāraṇā, the sixth limb of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, represents a pivotal stage in the progressive refinement of consciousness, bridging pratyāhāra (withdrawal of the senses) and dhyāna (meditation), and culminating in samādhi. Although Pātañjala Yoga provides the classical definition of dhāraṇā, its treatment in the wider corpus of Gītā literature preserved within the Purāṇas remains comparatively underexplored. This study undertakes a critical textual and analytical investigation of the concept of dhāraṇā in selected Gītās, including the Vyāsa Gītā, Agni Gītā, Yama Gītā, Kapila Gītā, Haṁsa Gītā, Śrī Datta Gītā, Śaṅkara Gītā, Sūta Gītā, and Īśvara Gītā, together with other related texts. Drawing upon primary Sanskrit sources, the study examines the definitions, objectives, methods, objects of concentration, and philosophical foundations of dhāraṇā across these works through a comparative analytical approach. The findings reveal a shared understanding of dhāraṇā as the stabilization of the mind, while simultaneously demonstrating significant variations in theological orientation, contemplative practice, and metaphysical interpretation. Vaiṣṇava Gītās predominantly advocate concentration on the personal form of the Supreme Being, whereas Śaiva texts emphasise internal yogic centres, elemental contemplations, and the realization of identity with Śiva. Several texts further integrate bhakti, jñāna, and yoga into a unified contemplative discipline. The study argues that the Purāṇic Gītā tradition substantially broadens the classical conception of dhāraṇā by incorporating devotional, cosmological, and metaphysical dimensions without compromising its essential role as the foundation of higher yogic realization. By highlighting these diverse yet complementary perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolution of contemplative practices in classical Yoga and enriches contemporary scholarship on Indian philosophical and yogic traditions.

Keywords: Dhāraṇā; Gītā Literature; Aṣṭāṅga Yoga; Pātañjala Yoga; Purāṇas; Bhakti; Contemplative Traditions; Yoga Philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of Yoga occupies a central position in the intellectual and spiritual heritage of India, offering a systematic path for the transformation of human consciousness through ethical discipline, physical stability, breath regulation, sensory control, concentration, meditation, and spiritual realization (Feuerstein, 2012; White, 2011). Among the eight limbs (Aṣṭāṅga Yoga) of classical Yoga, dhāraṇā represents the first stage of internal yogic practice and serves as an indispensable bridge between external discipline and meditative absorption (Ratna, n.d.). By restraining the fluctuations of the mind and directing awareness towards a chosen object, dhāraṇā prepares the practitioner for uninterrupted meditation (dhyāna) and, ultimately, the experience of samādhi (Bryant, 2009). Consequently, the concept occupies a pivotal position not only in the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali but also in numerous Sanskrit works belonging to diverse philosophical and theological traditions (White, 2011, 2014).

The Sanskrit word Gītā means song, and Gītā denotes sacred writings in verse form, usually presented as dialogues expounding philosophical doctrines. When the soul is overwhelmed by pain, anguish, devotion, love, dispassion, or the longing for transcendence, these inner emotions flow forth as song, giving rise to Gītā (69). Such songs may be sung in solitude, in gatherings, before a divine image, or addressed to another,

and their verse form makes them easy to recite, memorize, and appealing directly to the heart. Thus, the Gītās are songs of wisdom, unity, knowledge, and self-realization.

A survey of Gītā literature reveals the existence of numerous Gītās embedded in the Purāṇas, Samhitās, and epics such as the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, as well as independent Gītās, reflecting the richness of Indian tradition and cultural heritage. It appears that there are more than seventy-four Gītās, each occupying a distinct place and influencing seekers in its own way. These are broadly classified according to the Guṇas as Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, with their central deities being Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Śiva respectively, as reflected in the corresponding Mahāpurāṇas.

The vast Gītā literature constitutes one of the richest repositories of yogic teachings in Sanskrit intellectual history. Although the Bhagavad Gītā has received extensive scholarly attention, several other Gītās embedded within the Purāṇas and related scriptures present equally significant expositions of Yoga, contemplative practice, and spiritual discipline (Dimmitt & Van Buitenen, 2015; Rocher, 1986). These texts employ the dialogical format characteristic of the Gītā genre to communicate profound teachings concerning liberation (mokṣa), self-realization (ātma-sakṣatkaara), devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jñāna), and yogic discipline. Within these discourses, dhāraṇā emerges as a recurring concept, interpreted according to the philosophical orientation of each text while retaining its essential role in the progressive path towards liberation (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017).

The selected Gītās demonstrate remarkable diversity in their presentation of dhāraṇā. Certain texts explain concentration through contemplation of the Supreme Lord, whereas others advocate meditation on subtle bodily centres (cakras), elemental principles (bhūtas), cosmic manifestations (virāṭ-rūpa), or the identity of the individual self (jīvātman) with the Supreme Reality (Paramātman) (Flood, 2020; A. G. Mohan, 2010). In several instances, dhāraṇā is inseparably associated with prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna, and samādhi, reflecting an integrated understanding of yogic practice (Telles et al., 2016). Such diversity indicates that the concept of dhāraṇā evolved within different doctrinal traditions while preserving its fundamental significance as the stabilization of consciousness (Jha & others, 1907).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of dhāraṇā has attracted considerable scholarly attention within the broader field of Yoga studies. Most academic investigations have focused on the formulation of dhāraṇā in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras, where it is defined as the binding of consciousness (citta) to a particular locus (deśa). Subsequent commentarial traditions have elaborated upon this definition by emphasizing the psychological discipline required for sustained concentration and its indispensable role in the attainment of dhyāna and samādhi. Consequently, the classical Yoga tradition has generally been regarded as the principal framework for understanding dhāraṇā (Stiles, 2001).

Another important stream of scholarship has examined dhāraṇā within Haṭha Yoga and related yogic literature. These traditions explain concentration through internal practices, subtle-body concepts, meditation upon divine principles, and the progressive control of mental modifications. Such developments demonstrate that medieval Yoga expanded the practical dimensions of concentration by integrating contemplative and metaphysical approaches into the broader yogic discipline (Bühnemann, 2011; Samuel, 2009).

Scholarly investigations of the Bhagavad Gītā have examined concentration, meditation, and mental discipline, particularly in relation to Karma Yoga, Jñāna Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga. The Bhagavad Gītā presents control of the mind, withdrawal from sensory distractions, and the fixing of consciousness upon the Supreme Reality as essential aspects of spiritual progress. These discussions provide an important philosophical foundation for understanding the development of dhāraṇā in the later Gītā traditions (Malinar, 2007).

The Purāṇic Gītās constitute a significant body of yogic literature that preserves independent discussions of contemplative practice. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa presents teachings related to meditation, devotion, and the realization of the Supreme through disciplined awareness, reflecting the continuity of yogic concentration within the Purāṇic tradition (Adluri, 2017). Similarly, the Brahma Purāṇa contains discussions of yogic practice and spiritual discipline, demonstrating the incorporation of concentration-based practices within Purāṇic theological frameworks (Rocher, 1986). The Agni Purāṇa provides systematic expositions of Yoga, meditation, and methods for attaining spiritual realization. Its treatment of yogic practice indicates the close relationship between concentration, self-control, and higher states of consciousness within the Purāṇic tradition (S. Gupta & Birch, 2022). Likewise, studies on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa reveal that several Gītā sections within the text present diverse approaches to meditation, devotion, and contemplation, reflecting different dimensions of dhāraṇā from devotional and philosophical perspectives (Wasilewska, 2021).

Further studies of Purāṇic literature reveal that texts such as the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa, Liṅga Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa, Vāyu Purāṇa, and Nārada Purāṇa preserve independent discussions of Yoga and meditation. These works demonstrate variations in the objects of concentration, theological orientation, and methods of contemplative practice while maintaining the fundamental objective of stabilizing consciousness and attaining spiritual realization (Bhattacharya, 1947; Chapple, 2017).

3. RESEARCH GAP

Despite the richness of these sources, modern scholarship has devoted comparatively little attention to the collective study of dhāraṇā in the wider Gītā literature. Existing studies have primarily examined individual texts or focused exclusively on the Bhagavad Gītā and Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras, leaving the broader corpus of Purāṇic Gītās largely unexplored from the perspective of yogic concentration [7]. Consequently, the continuity, diversity, and philosophical development of dhāraṇā across these texts have not been systematically investigated.

The present study addresses this scholarly lacuna by undertaking an analytical investigation of the concept of dhāraṇā in Gītā literature. Drawing upon primary Sanskrit sources preserved in selected Gītās, the study examines how different traditions conceptualize the nature, purpose, methods, and objects of concentration (Ratna & Dwarapudi, 2023). Rather than merely describing individual texts, the article seeks to identify broader philosophical patterns and distinctive doctrinal emphases that illuminate the evolution of yogic thought. Through this analytical approach, the study demonstrates that Gītā literature not only preserves the classical conception of dhāraṇā but also significantly enriches it by integrating devotional, metaphysical, and contemplative perspectives into a comprehensive vision of yogic realization.

4. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY, MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopts a qualitative research design employing an analytical textual methodology. The primary source materials comprise selected Gītās preserved in the Purāṇic tradition, including the Vyāsa Gītā, Agni Gītā, Yama Gītā, Kapila Gītā, Haṃsa Gītā, Śrī Datta Gītā, Śaṅkara Gītā, Sūta Gītā, Īśvara Gītā, and other relevant Gītās discussed in the source material (Dimmitt & Van Buitenen, 2015; Saha, 2018).

To explore the conceptual understanding of Dhāraṇā as presented in selected Gītā literature.

To identify the principal methods, objects, and loci of concentration described in the selected Gītā texts.

To examine the philosophical and spiritual orientations associated with the practice of Dhāraṇā in Gītā literature.

To identify the recurring themes and distinctive dimensions through which Dhāraṇā is presented across the selected texts.

The study examines the concept of dhāraṇā through a systematic analysis of its definitions, methods, objects and loci of concentration, and philosophical interpretations as presented in these texts (Krippendorff, 1996). Primary textual evidence was collected from the original Sanskrit sources and analysed through thematic classification and comparative textual analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). The collected data were subsequently organised into thematic categories and interpreted analytically to identify common philosophical foundations, distinctive doctrinal perspectives, and the collective contribution of Gītā literature to the understanding and development of the concept of dhāraṇā within the broader yogic tradition (Miles et al., 2014).

The analysis was undertaken through close reading of the selected texts, with particular attention to passages explicitly describing Dhāraṇā, its objects or loci, methods of practice, associated preparatory or subsequent practices, and its stated spiritual purpose. Relevant textual descriptions were extracted and organized thematically to identify recurring patterns and distinctive presentations of Dhāraṇā within the selected Gītā literature.

5. ANALYSIS OF DHARANA IN VARIOUS GITAS

The Gītā literature presents a progressive and multidimensional understanding of Dhāraṇā, extending its meaning far beyond the concise definition of Patañjali, who describes it simply as the binding of the mind to a particular place (deśabandhaḥcittasyadhāraṇā). Across the various Gītās, Dhāraṇā evolves from a technique of mental concentration into a comprehensive yogic discipline integrating ethical preparation, regulation of prāṇa, subtle-body awareness, devotional contemplation, elemental meditation, and ultimately the realization of Brahman. Although the fundamental objective of stabilizing the mind remains unchanged, each text enriches the concept by emphasizing different philosophical and practical dimensions according to its theological orientation (J. B. Edelmann, 2012).

The Vyāsa Gītā of the Brahma Purāṇa presents one of the most systematic expositions of Dhāraṇā within the Purāṇic tradition. Unlike texts that define Dhāraṇā merely as mental concentration, the Vyāsa Gītā situates it within a comprehensive yogic way of life. Yoga is first redefined as the union of the mind and senses with the Self, rather than the mere practice of bodily postures or external concentration. Consequently, Dhāraṇā is presented as the culmination of moral purification, disciplined conduct, regulated diet, sensory restraint, and inner composure (Shastri & Bhatt, 1993). The text identifies specific bodily centres—including the navel, heart, chest, head, sides of the body, and sensory organs—as loci of concentration, indicating an early development of psycho-physiological meditation that later became characteristic of Haṭha Yoga (Soteriology, 2020). Furthermore, its emphasis on overcoming desire, anger, fear, sleep, attachment, and lethargy demonstrates that Dhāraṇā cannot be separated from ethical and psychological purification. Particularly significant is the metaphor of the skilled charioteer, which illustrates that only a mind firmly restrained through Dhāraṇā can guide the individual safely towards liberation (Debroy, 2022).

The Agni Gītā of Agni Purana shifts the emphasis from preparatory discipline to the technical dimensions of concentration. It defines Dhāraṇā as the firm fixation of the mind upon a chosen object (lakṣya) and introduces a systematic temporal hierarchy in which twelve units of concentration constitute one Dhāraṇā, twelve Dhāraṇās constitute one Dhyāna, and twelve Dhyānas culminate in Samādhi (Kaul, 2019). This numerical progression reflects the increasingly technical orientation of later yogic traditions. The Agni Gītā further broadens the concept by introducing four specialised forms of Dhāraṇā—Āgneyī, Vāruṇī, Aiśānī, and Amṛtātmikā—each associated with particular elemental energies, visualizations, and therapeutic outcomes (Theosophy, 2020). These practices demonstrate that Dhāraṇā is not merely a process of cognitive concentration but also one of energetic transformation involving bodily purification, regulation of subtle energies, healing, and the realization of Viṣṇu. The integration of mantra, visualization, elemental symbolism, and internal energy reflects a sophisticated synthesis of Yogic and Tantric contemplative traditions (Basapur, 2018).

The Yama Gītā of Agni Purana offers one of the most concise and philosophically direct expositions of Dhāraṇā. Here, Dhāraṇā is described as the unwavering fixation of consciousness upon a single auspicious object, whereas Dhyāna is understood as the uninterrupted continuation of this focused awareness. Unlike texts that elaborate numerous techniques or internal centres of concentration, the Yama Gītā emphasizes the psychological continuity between Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi. Samādhi itself is interpreted through the Vedāntic realization, aham brahmāsmi, thereby presenting Dhāraṇā primarily as the initial stage leading to non-dual knowledge rather than to extraordinary yogic powers or subtle psycho-physiological experiences (Dasgupta, 1969).

The Kapila Gītā of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa integrates Dhāraṇā with devotional meditation more extensively than many other Gītā traditions. Although it accepts the classical sequence of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, its principal concern is not abstract concentration but the progressive internal visualization of the divine form of Śrī Viṣṇu. The practitioner first stabilizes the mind through ethical discipline, moderation in diet, prāṇāyāma, and pratyāhāra, before successively fixing awareness upon different parts of the Lord's divine form (Sinha, 1986). This gradual movement of concentration from the feet to the crown closely resembles the systematic visualization practices found in later devotional traditions. Consequently, Dhāraṇā functions both as an instrument of mental stabilization and as an expression of Bhakti, in which concentrated awareness is inseparable from loving contemplation of the Supreme. The detailed visualization of the divine body further demonstrates how concentration becomes progressively refined through successive focal points, anticipating the structured meditative systems developed in later yogic traditions (J. Edelmann, 2022).

The Haṁsa (Uddhava) Gītā of Bhagavatha Purana complements the Kapila Gītā by emphasizing the ethical and spiritual qualifications necessary for successful concentration. Rather than introducing new techniques of Dhāraṇā, it expands upon the disciplines that support meditation through the observance of twelve yamas and twelve niyamas. The text simultaneously cautions against attachment to yogic powers, explaining that although numerous siddhis naturally arise from advanced meditation, they may themselves become obstacles when pursued for worldly purposes. Consequently, Dhāraṇā is implicitly understood not as a means of acquiring supernatural abilities but as an instrument for directing consciousness towards the Paramātmā. This perspective provides an important corrective to traditions that emphasize yogic attainments, reaffirming liberation (mokṣa), rather than siddhi, as the authentic goal of concentration (Rocha, 2009).

The Śrī Datta Gītā of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa introduces a distinctive psycho-physiological orientation to Dhāraṇā. Here, Dhāraṇā is closely associated with the movement of prāṇa through successive bodily centers extending from the navel to the crown of the head. Unlike purely devotional approaches, concentration functions as a method of internal ascent, gradually elevating awareness through subtle psycho-energetic centres until the realization of Brahman is attained (Chatterjee, 2001). The text thus anticipates several concepts that were subsequently elaborated within Haṭha Yoga, particularly the intimate relationship between breath, subtle anatomy, and concentrated awareness. By presenting different forms of Dhāraṇā in conjunction with pratyāhāra and prāṇāyāma, the text illustrates the progressive integration of the inner limbs of Yoga into a unified contemplative process (Kashyap, 2021).

The Śaṅkara Gītā (Bṛhaspati Gītā) of the Skanda Purāṇa presents one of the most philosophically sophisticated expositions of Dhāraṇā by integrating yogic practice with Advaita Vedānta. While retaining the classical framework of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, the text extends the meaning of Dhāraṇā beyond mere mental concentration. Initially, it prescribes pañca-dhāraṇā—contemplation on the five great elements (ākāśa, vāyu, agni, jala, and pṛthivī) together with their corresponding bīja-mantras—thereby indicating a gradual purification of the subtle body through elemental meditation (Chapple, 2017). The text subsequently introduces a higher contemplative interpretation in which the practitioner progressively dissolves all effects into their respective causes until the unmanifest Māyā itself is absorbed into the Self. The highest form of Dhāraṇā is thus defined as the firm establishment of consciousness in the realization, Brahmaivāham, transforming concentration into direct Self-knowledge (ātma-jñāna) (Sivananda, 1957). This dual presentation illustrates a profound synthesis of yogic psychology and Vedāntic metaphysics, wherein external concentration ultimately culminates in the realization of

non-dual consciousness(Saha, 2014).

The Sūta Gītā of Skanda Purana likewise adopts the classical eight-limbed structure of Yoga but places particular emphasis on the intimate relationship between prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, and Dhāraṇā. Unlike the Śaṅkara Gītā, its exposition remains firmly rooted in yogic physiology. Dhāraṇā is explained through the gradual ascent of prāṇa from the nostrils to the heart, palate, eyebrow centre, and finally the brahmarandhra, illustrating concentration as an internal movement of vital energy rather than merely a psychological function(Schomerus, 2000). The statement that twelve prāṇāyāmas constitute one Dhāraṇā further emphasizes the inseparable relationship between breath regulation and mental steadiness(A. Gupta, 2017). Another distinctive contribution of the text is its theological inclusiveness. Although meditation upon Śiva is ultimately recommended as the highest form of contemplation, the Sūta Gītā also recognizes meditation upon Hari, Brahmā, Sūrya, and Devī, affirming that the practitioner ultimately becomes united with the chosen object of meditation(Desai & Prajapati, 2022).

The Īśvara Gītā of the Kūrma Purāṇa presents a comparatively concise yet systematic exposition of Dhāraṇā that closely follows the classical model of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga. Here, Dhāraṇā is primarily understood as fixing the mind upon specific bodily centres, such as the heart, navel, and head, thereby emphasizing localized concentration rather than elaborate visualization(Morinis & Morinis, 1979). Unlike the Liṅga Purāṇa, the text avoids extensive symbolic imagery and instead focuses on the orderly progression of the internal limbs of Yoga from pratyāhāra to Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi. The repeated numerical sequence in which twelve prāṇāyāmas constitute one Dhāraṇā, twelve Dhāraṇās constitute one Dhyāna, and twelve Dhyānas culminate in Samādhi reflects the influence of an established yogic tradition that sought to standardize the stages of meditative progression(Tapasyananda, 1987). Thus, the Īśvara Gītā contributes to the understanding of Dhāraṇā as a disciplined intermediate stage that links breath regulation with uninterrupted meditation while preserving the ethical and devotional foundations essential for higher spiritual realization(Nicholson, 2013).

The Liṅga Purāṇa presents perhaps the most comprehensive synthesis of ethical discipline, yogic practice, subtle physiology, and Śaiva devotion among the Purāṇic texts examined. Unlike texts that define Dhāraṇā only briefly, the Liṅga Purāṇa integrates concentration into an elaborate spiritual discipline extending from Yama and Niyama to Samādhi. Dhāraṇā is initially defined conventionally as fixing the mind upon a single locus; however, this concise definition is subsequently expanded through detailed instructions concerning bodily posture, regulation of the guṇas, meditation upon internal lotuses, visualization of cosmic symbols, and contemplation of diverse manifestations of Śiva within specific bodily centres (Coomaraswamy, 1922). The practitioner successively meditates upon the navel, heart, throat, forehead, eyebrow centre, and crown while contemplating progressively subtler manifestations of Śiva, ranging from luminous symbolic forms to the formless and attributeless Brahman beyond conceptualization(Goudriaan, 2000). The text also preserves the traditional progression in which twelve prāṇāyāmas constitute one Dhāraṇā, thereby harmonizing physiological discipline with metaphysical realization(Nair, 2009). Consequently, Dhāraṇā functions simultaneously as mental concentration, internal worship, subtle-body meditation, and direct contemplation of the Supreme Śiva(Chatterjee, 2001).

The Garuḍa Purāṇa offers one of the briefest treatments of Dhāraṇā among the texts examined. Nevertheless, its concise exposition is of considerable philosophical significance. Dhāraṇā is defined as the firm stabilization of the mind, whereas Dhyāna is identified as meditation upon Īśvara and Samādhi as complete absorption into Brahman through the realization Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi (Rhyner, 2017). This progression reflects a predominantly Vedāntic interpretation in which Dhāraṇā serves as the preparatory stabilization necessary for contemplative knowledge. Unlike texts that emphasize internal bodily centres, elemental meditation, or subtle physiology, the Garuḍa Purāṇa directs attention primarily towards the transformation of consciousness through Self-realization(Ian, 1998).

The Śrī Devī Gītā of Srimad Devi BhagavathaUpapurana introduces another distinctive perspective by integrating Dhāraṇā into the framework of Śākta Yoga. Whereas many earlier texts associate concentration with specific bodily centres or elemental regions, the Devī Gītā prescribes twelve successive loci extending from the toes to the crown of the head. This ascending sequence transforms Dhāraṇā into a systematic psycho-physical discipline through which consciousness progressively ascends along the vertical axis of the body(Callahan, 2015). The close relationship between prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi demonstrates that concentration is inseparable from the regulation of prāṇa and the inward withdrawal of awareness(Stiles, 2008). Unlike purely philosophical presentations, the Śrī Devī Gītā ultimately directs this stabilized consciousness towards meditation upon the Divine Mother, thereby integrating classical Yoga with devotional Śākta theology(Brown, 2002).

The Vyāsa Gītā of the Mahābhārata presents one of the most original interpretations of Dhāraṇā through its celebrated chariot metaphor. Unlike other Gītās that primarily discuss bodily centres or devotional objects of meditation, the Mahābhārata symbolically portrays the entire yogic process. The senses are represented as horses, knowledge serves as the charioteer, Dharma constitutes the seat, and the Self occupies the chariot as its true master(Pattanaik, 2015). Within this symbolic framework, Dhāraṇā represents the disciplined control required to direct the entire psycho-physical organism towards Brahman. Particularly significant is the doctrine of the seven

Dhāraṇās, corresponding to earth, water, fire, air, space, intellect, and ego. These successive stages describe an ascending process of internal refinement in which progressively subtler elements are transcended until consciousness merges with the unmanifest Reality (Gulakari & Kad, 2014). Unlike devotional traditions that emphasize meditation upon divine forms, the Mahābhārata presents Dhāraṇā primarily as a process of cosmological transcendence, illustrating the gradual dissolution of the manifest universe into its ultimate source (Bühnemann, 2011).

The Yoga Yājñavalkya Gita represents one of the most mature developments of the concept of Dhāraṇā and serves as an important bridge between classical Yoga and the later Haṭha Yoga tradition. While accepting the classical eight-limbed (Aṣṭāṅga) system, the text considerably expands the understanding of both pratyāhāra and Dhāraṇā. Pratyāhāra is interpreted not merely as the withdrawal of the senses but also as the inward performance of obligatory duties, the movement of prāṇa through subtle centres, and ultimately the placement of prāṇa near Kuṇḍalinī (Daniele et al., 2022). Within this broader contemplative framework, Dhāraṇā is defined as the complete absorption of the harmonized mind into the Self. The text further elaborates the doctrine of the five elemental Dhāraṇās, assigning the elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space to successive regions of the body extending from the feet to the crown of the head (Bhardwaj, 2019). This systematic correspondence between the cosmic elements and human anatomy reflects an advanced psycho-cosmological model in which the practitioner internalizes the entire universe within the body (Katyal, 2022). Thus, Dhāraṇā transcends the status of a mere exercise in concentration and becomes the inward ascent of consciousness through progressively subtler levels of reality, culminating in the direct realization of the Supreme Self (Sri, 2022).

These diverse presentations collectively demonstrate that, although all the Gītās preserve the fundamental purpose of Dhāraṇā as the stabilization of consciousness, they enrich both its practical methodology and philosophical interpretation in distinctive ways. Some texts emphasize ethical purification, whereas others highlight subtle physiology, devotional visualization, elemental contemplation, or non-dual realization. Collectively, these perspectives reveal the remarkable evolution of Dhāraṇā from a technical yogic practice into a comprehensive spiritual discipline capable of accommodating multiple theological, philosophical, and contemplative traditions (von Glasenapp, 1949).

Table 1. Summary of Dhāraṇā Descriptions in Selected Gītā Literature

Gītā / Text	Principal Object / Locus	Method or Mode of Practice	Associated Concept	Spiritual Orientation
Vyāsa Gītā – Brahma Purāṇa	Navel, heart, chest, head, sides of body and sensory organs	Concentration supported by moral purification, disciplined conduct, regulated diet and sensory restraint	Ethical and psychological purification; control of desire, anger, fear, sleep, attachment and lethargy	Movement towards liberation
Agni Gītā – Agni Purāṇa	Chosen object (<i>lakṣya</i>); elemental forms	Firm fixation; Āgneyī, Vāruṇī, Aśvinī and Amṛtātmikā Dhāraṇās; mantra and visualization	Prāṇa/energy, elemental symbolism, bodily purification	Healing and realization of Viṣṇu
Yama Gītā – Agni Purāṇa	A single auspicious object	Unwavering fixation of consciousness; continuity from Dhāraṇā to Dhyāna and Samādhi	Mental continuity and concentration	Non-dual knowledge; <i>aham brahmāsmi</i>

Gītā / Text	Principal Object / Locus	Method or Mode of Practice	Associated Concept	Spiritual Orientation
Kapila Gītā – Bhāgavata Purāṇa	Different parts of the divine form of Śrī Viṣṇu	Progressive internal visualization from the feet towards the crown	Ethical discipline, diet regulation, prāṇāyāma and pratyāhāra	Bhakti and loving contemplation of the Supreme
Haṃsa / Uddhava Gītā – Bhāgavata Purāṇa	Paramātman	Concentration supported by ethical disciplines, including twelve yamas and twelve niyamas	Detachment from siddhis and worldly purposes	Liberation (<i>mokṣa</i>) and direction of consciousness towards Paramātman
Śrī Datta Gītā – Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa	Bodily centres from the navel to the crown	Movement of prāṇa through successive centres; integration with pratyāhāra and prāṇāyāma	Subtle-body and psycho-physiological process	Ascent of awareness towards realization of Brahman
Śaṅkara Gītā – Skanda Purāṇa	Five great elements and ultimately the Self	Pañca-dhāraṇā with elemental contemplation and corresponding bīja-mantras; progressive dissolution	Elemental meditation, subtle-body purification and Advaita Vedānta	Ātma-jñāna and realization of Brahman
Sūta Gītā – Skanda Purāṇa	Nostrils, heart, palate, eyebrow centre and brahmarandhra	Prāṇāyāma-associated concentration and gradual ascent of prāṇa	Prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra and yogic physiology	Contemplation of Śiva, Hari, Brahmā, Sūrya or Devī
Īśvara Gītā – Kūrma Purāṇa	Heart, navel and head	Fixing the mind upon specific bodily centres; progression through pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna and Samādhi	Localized concentration and regulated progression of yogic practice	Higher spiritual realization
Liṅga Purāṇa	Navel, heart, throat, forehead, eyebrow centre and crown	Concentration on internal lotuses, cosmic symbols and manifestations of Śiva; associated with prāṇāyāma	Yama, Niyama, subtle physiology, guṇas and internal worship	Contemplation of Supreme Śiva and Brahman
Garuḍa Purāṇa	Mind / Īśvara	Firm stabilization of mind leading to Dhyāna and Samādhi	Mental stabilization and contemplative knowledge	Self-realization; <i>ahaṃ brahmāsmi</i>

Gītā / Text	Principal Object / Locus	Method or Mode of Practice	Associated Concept	Spiritual Orientation
Śrī Devī Gītā	Twelve successive loci from toes to crown	Progressive concentration along the vertical axis of the body; associated with prāṇāyāma and pratyāhāra	Psycho-physical discipline and ascending consciousness	Meditation upon the Divine Mother
Vyāsa Gītā – Mahābhārata	Seven principles: earth, water, fire, air, space, intellect and ego	Successive stages of internal refinement and transcendence	Chariot metaphor; cosmological transcendence	Merging with unmanifest Reality / Brahman
Yoga Yājñavalkya Gītā	Five elements assigned to successive bodily regions from feet to crown; ultimately the Self	Elemental Dhāraṇā and absorption of the harmonized mind into the Self	Prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, subtle centres and psycho-cosmological correspondence	Direct realization of the Supreme Self

The textual examination indicates that Dhāraṇā is consistently presented as a practice concerned with the stabilization, direction, and sustained engagement of consciousness. Across the selected Gītā literature, its presentation is associated with diverse objects and loci of concentration, including the Divine, the Self, subtle bodily centres, elemental principles, prāṇic processes, and contemplative visualizations.

The analysis further indicates that Dhāraṇā is not presented as an isolated practice but is situated within a broader yogic and spiritual framework involving prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna, ethical discipline, devotion, and Self-realization. Although the specific objects, methods, and philosophical interpretations vary among the texts examined, the underlying emphasis remains the disciplined stabilization and inward direction of consciousness.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates that the concept of Dhāraṇā undergoes significant development across the Gītā literature while retaining its fundamental purpose of stabilizing the mind. Although all the texts recognize Dhāraṇā as an essential limb of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, they expand its scope in accordance with their respective philosophical and theological orientations. Consequently, Dhāraṇā emerges not merely as a technique of mental concentration but as a comprehensive contemplative discipline integrating ethical purification, regulation of prāṇa, pratyāhāra (sensory withdrawal), subtle-body awareness, devotional contemplation, elemental meditation, and ultimately Self-realization(Chollangi Sri Sai Ratna & Dwarapudi, 2023).

A common feature across the Gītā literature is the close relationship between ethical discipline and concentration. The Vyāsa Gītā (Brahma Purāṇa), Kapila Gītā, Haṁsa (Uddhava) Gītā, Liṅga Purāṇa, and Īśvara Gītā consistently emphasize that mastery over desire, anger, attachment, fear, sleep, and other mental disturbances is indispensable for the successful practice of Dhāraṇā. Accordingly, Yama, Niyama, moderation in diet, purity, and self-restraint are presented not merely as preliminary disciplines but as essential foundations for sustained concentration(Ferrini, 2014; Simpson, 2021).

The texts further reveal a gradual expansion in the methodology of meditation. Whereas the Yama Gītā, Garuḍa Purāṇa, and Īśvara Gītā define Dhāraṇā primarily as the steady fixation of the mind upon a single object or specific bodily centre, later works develop increasingly elaborate contemplative systems. The Vyāsa Gītā (Brahma Purāṇa), Śrī Datta Gītā, Sūta Gītā, Liṅga Purāṇa, Śrī Devī Gītā, and Yoga Yājñavalkya prescribe concentration on specific bodily centres together with the regulation of prāṇa, indicating a progressively sophisticated integration of yogic psychology and subtle-body physiology(Maehle, 2007).

Another significant development is the emergence of elemental Dhāraṇā. The Śāṅkara Gītā teaches contemplation upon the five great elements through their corresponding bīja-mantras, whereas the Yoga Yājñavalkya assigns these elements to successive regions of the body (Ashok et al., 2020). Similarly, the Vyāsa Gītā of the Mahābhārata presents the doctrine of seven Dhāraṇās, corresponding to the progressive transcendence of both gross and subtle principles. These teachings demonstrate that Dhāraṇā functions not only as mental concentration but also as an inward cosmological process culminating in the realization of the Supreme Reality.

The theological orientation of each text further shapes the object of concentration without altering the essential purpose of Dhāraṇā. The Kapila Gītā and Agni Gītā emphasize devotion to Viṣṇu through progressive visualization, whereas the Liṅga Purāṇa, Śāṅkara Gītā, Sūta Gītā, and Īśvara Gītā direct concentration towards diverse manifestations of Śiva. Likewise, the Śrī Devī Gītā adapts the same yogic framework within the context of Śākta theology, thereby illustrating the universality and adaptability of Dhāraṇā across different devotional traditions (S. Mohan, 2023).

The literature also consistently establishes a close relationship between prāṇāyāma and Dhāraṇā. The Agni Gītā, Sūta Gītā, Liṅga Purāṇa, and Īśvara Gītā preserve the traditional sequence in which twelve prāṇāyāmas constitute one Dhāraṇā, twelve Dhāraṇās constitute one Dhyāna, and twelve Dhyānas culminate in Samādhi, reflecting an increasingly standardized model of contemplative progression. Although several texts acknowledge the emergence of yogic powers (siddhis), particularly the Haṁsa (Uddhava) Gītā, Śrī Datta Gītā, and Agni Gītā, they consistently regard such attainments as secondary to the ultimate goal of liberation (mokṣa) (Rosen, 2010).

The present study is limited to a selected corpus of Gītā literature and therefore does not represent an exhaustive examination of all texts belonging to the wider Gītā tradition. As a textual and analytical inquiry, the study is primarily interpretive and does not empirically examine the contemporary practice or therapeutic outcomes of Dhāraṇā. Future research may extend the textual corpus and examine the practical and contemporary implications of the Dhāraṇā concepts identified in these texts.

7. CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that Dhāraṇā occupies a central position in the Gītā literature as the indispensable bridge between pratyāhāra and dhyāna. Although all the texts retain its essential meaning as sustained mental concentration, they considerably expand its scope by integrating ethical discipline, regulation of prāṇa, subtle-body contemplation, elemental meditation, devotional visualization, and ultimately non-dual realization (Chollangi Sri Sai Ratna et al., 2022).

The comparative analysis reveals that the various Gītās interpret the object of Dhāraṇā in accordance with their respective theological and philosophical orientations while preserving its common purpose of stabilizing consciousness and attaining liberation (mokṣa). Vaiṣṇava texts emphasize meditation upon Viṣṇu, Śāiva texts advocate contemplation of Śiva, Śākta texts direct concentration towards the Divine Mother, and Vedāntic traditions emphasize contemplation of Brahman or the Self. These diverse perspectives demonstrate the adaptability and universality of Dhāraṇā across different schools of Indian philosophical thought (Pothugunta et al., 2026).

By bringing together the dispersed teachings on Dhāraṇā preserved in the wider Gītā literature, the present study highlights its historical and philosophical evolution from a relatively concise practice of mental concentration into a comprehensive contemplative discipline integrating ethics, devotion, subtle-body physiology, cosmological symbolism, and spiritual realization. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the development of yogic thought within the Purāṇic Gītā tradition and enrich contemporary scholarship on Yoga philosophy and Indian contemplative traditions (Ashok et al., 2023).

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