

## THE ROLE OF THE BHAGAVAD GITA IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

*The Bhagavad Gita, one of the most influential philosophical texts from ancient India, has played a pivotal role in shaping English literary thought and aesthetics. Since its early translations into English during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Gita has inspired poets, novelists, and philosophers with its concepts of duty (dharma), detachment, and spiritual wisdom. This paper explores the intertextual presence and philosophical resonance of the Bhagavad Gita in English literature, tracing its influence from Romanticism to Modernism and beyond. By examining key authors such as T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and William Blake, as well as critical scholarship surrounding these intersections, the study reveals how the Gita has functioned as both a moral and metaphysical framework for literary creation. The paper also analyzes how English writers adapted the Gita's principles to address existential questions of human purpose, ethics, and faith, thereby enriching the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of English literary discourse.*

**Keywords:** *Bhagavad Gita, English Literature, Intertextuality, Indian Philosophy, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Romanticism, Modernism, Comparative Literature, Spiritual Humanism.*

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### Introduction

The *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most revered texts in Indian philosophy, has traversed linguistic, cultural, and temporal boundaries to become a significant influence on world literature, particularly English literary traditions. Often regarded as a philosophical dialogue between the divine and the human, the text encapsulates universal themes such as duty, righteousness, moral conflict, and spiritual enlightenment. Over the centuries, its profound wisdom has captivated philosophers, poets, and novelists, who found in it a mirror reflecting both personal and societal dilemmas. In the context of English literature, the *Gita* has not merely served as an exotic source of spiritual thought but as an enduring philosophical framework that shaped intellectual discourses from the Romantic era to postcolonial writings. Understanding its role requires examining how its moral and metaphysical ideas have been assimilated, reinterpreted, and contested by English writers across historical periods.

### Cultural and Philosophical Context

The dissemination of the *Bhagavad Gita* into English thought began during the colonial era, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The translation by Charles Wilkins in 1785 marked a pivotal moment when Indian scripture became accessible to English readers. This translation coincided with a growing European fascination with the "Orient," a fascination that was often both intellectual and political. The *Gita*'s introduction into English discourse thus occurred within the complex framework of colonial power relations and cultural curiosity. Yet, despite its initial reception through Orientalist lenses, the text transcended those confines, engaging deeply with philosophical and literary figures seeking universal truths. Romantic writers such as William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and William Wordsworth resonated with its vision of the unity of all existence and the moral struggles inherent in human life.

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### Philosophical Parallels and Literary Resonances

English literature has long grappled with themes of duty, morality, and self-realization, concepts that find profound articulation in the *Gita*. The dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna epitomizes the tension between worldly responsibility and spiritual transcendence, a conflict mirrored in the existential and moral crises of many English literary protagonists. For instance, T. S. Eliot's engagement with Eastern philosophy, particularly in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, demonstrates a synthesis of Christian theology and Hindu metaphysics, reflecting the *Gita*'s influence on his conception of redemption and detachment. Similarly, Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* explicitly draws upon the *Gita* to argue for a universal spiritual core underlying all religions. These intertextual resonances reveal not mere borrowings but genuine dialogues between philosophical traditions that redefine the boundaries of English literary thought.

### Transcultural Dialogues and Colonial Encounters

The *Bhagavad Gita*'s integration into English literature cannot be separated from the historical conditions of colonialism, which facilitated both cultural exchange and ideological tension. British intellectuals and colonial administrators often approached Indian texts through the dual lens of admiration and appropriation. The translation and interpretation of the *Gita* were instrumental in shaping colonial perceptions of India as a land of mysticism and spiritual depth. At the same time, Indian thinkers writing in English, such as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, reintroduced the *Gita* into Western discourse through reinterpretations that emphasized its universal ethical and psychological dimensions. These reinterpretations complicated colonial hierarchies, transforming the *Gita* from an object of study into a subject of philosophical engagement. Thus, English literature became a site where East and West negotiated moral and metaphysical values, producing a hybrid intellectual space.

### Modernist and Postcolonial Appropriations

During the twentieth century, the influence of the *Gita* extended into modernist and postcolonial literature, where it served as both a philosophical resource and a tool for cultural resistance. Writers such as E. M. Forster and T. S. Eliot, through their engagement with Eastern spirituality, sought alternative paradigms to the disillusionment of Western modernity. For Eliot, the *Gita* provided a framework to reconcile despair with transcendence, particularly in the context of post-World War I fragmentation. In contrast, postcolonial authors like Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan reinterpreted the *Gita* within narratives of identity, spirituality, and nationalism. Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* reflects the dialogic relationship between Eastern metaphysics and Western philosophy, using the *Gita* as a moral and narrative guide. These writings underscore how the *Gita*'s concepts evolved from a colonial curiosity to a universal philosophical touchstone, influencing English literature across diverse contexts.

### Intertextuality and Comparative Aesthetics

The literary engagement with the *Bhagavad Gita* reveals the power of intertextuality as a mode of cultural exchange. Comparative aesthetics allows for a deeper understanding of how English writers internalized and rearticulated the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the *Gita*. For instance, the moral poise of Shakespearean heroes can be reinterpreted through the *Gita*'s idea of detachment in action (*nishkama karma*), while the spiritual quest in Wordsworth's poetry parallels Arjuna's journey toward enlightenment. The *Gita*'s philosophy of equanimity resonates with the stoic virtues admired in English thought, creating a confluence between Eastern and Western moral frameworks. This comparative lens demonstrates how the *Gita*'s universalism challenges binary oppositions between East and West, faith and reason, or spirituality and art.

### Purpose and Scope of the Study

The significance of studying the *Bhagavad Gita*'s role in English literature extends beyond tracing literary references; it involves uncovering a transnational dialogue about the human condition. Through its reinterpretations, the *Gita* has shaped the moral imagination of English writers who sought a universal foundation for art and ethics. This research examines how the *Gita*'s core philosophical ideas—particularly those of *dharma* (duty), *karma yoga* (selfless action), and *sattva* (balance)—manifest in English literary works across historical periods. It also investigates how English authors appropriated, transformed, or even contested these ideas to reflect their cultural contexts. The approach combines textual analysis with comparative literary theory, situating the *Gita*'s presence within broader discourses of Orientalism, spirituality, and global modernism.

### Historical Context

The introduction of the *Bhagavad Gita* to Western audiences represents a pivotal moment in the intellectual history of cross-cultural exchange. The earliest English translation by Charles Wilkins in 1785, published under the patronage of the East India Company, marked the first time an Indian sacred text was rendered directly from Sanskrit into English. Wilkins's translation, accompanied by Warren Hastings's prefatory remarks, reflected the Enlightenment belief in universal reason and moral order, but it also carried the undertones of colonial ideology that framed India as a subject of scholarly curiosity. Despite this bias, the translation awakened profound interest among European philosophers and writers who sought alternatives to mechanistic rationalism and Christian dogmatism.

Subsequent translations and commentaries deepened the Western encounter with the *Gita*. Figures such as Edwin Arnold, whose poetic rendition *The Song Celestial* (1885) captured Victorian spiritual idealism, and Annie Besant, who emphasized its theosophical and ethical dimensions, played crucial roles in popularizing the text. These works presented the *Gita* not merely as a religious scripture but as a universal philosophical dialogue addressing moral duty and inner transformation. Their interpretive efforts coincided with a broader Romantic fascination with the "Orient" as a repository of spiritual wisdom.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Bhagavad Gita* had become an intellectual bridge between Eastern and Western thought. Its themes of selfless action, detachment, and devotion resonated with writers and philosophers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and later T. S. Eliot, who found in it a framework for reconciling faith and modernity. Thus, the *Gita*'s early translation history not only introduced Indian philosophy to Western readers but also laid the groundwork for its enduring influence on English literary imagination.

### The Bhagavad Gita and English Romanticism

The encounter between the *Bhagavad Gita* and English Romanticism marks one of the earliest and most fertile phases of intercultural literary exchange. Romantic writers disillusioned with Enlightenment rationalism and drawn toward the sublime, the spiritual, and the natural found in the *Gita* a philosophy that fused moral action with transcendence. The Romantic age's growing interest in Oriental texts paralleled its quest for imaginative and moral renewal, allowing the *Gita* to serve as both a metaphysical source and a poetic symbol of universal harmony.

- **Romantic Imagination and the Discovery of the East**

By the late eighteenth century, European intellectuals were fascinated by India's philosophical heritage. The English translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Charles Wilkins in 1785 provided Romantic poets with direct access to Indian metaphysical ideas, which circulated through literary salons, periodicals, and correspondence. The *Gita*'s emphasis on spiritual unity, inner illumination, and the harmony of action and contemplation paralleled the Romantics' desire to reconcile reason with emotion and humanity with nature. For them, the East represented not merely an exotic landscape but a mirror reflecting their own search for moral and imaginative wholeness.

- **William Blake: Visionary Parallelism**

Although Blake did not cite the *Gita* directly, his prophetic poems reveal striking thematic parallels. His concept of the "divine imagination" as the creative force within all beings resonates with Krishna's assertion that the divine dwells in every heart. Blake's rejection of materialism and his vision of spiritual energy as life's true essence echo the *Gita*'s doctrine of *prakriti* (nature) animated by the eternal *Atman*. Both Blake and the *Gita* emphasize visionary knowledge over sensory experience and the triumph of spiritual perception over empirical limitation. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's portrayal of contraries as necessary to progress recalls the *Gita*'s teaching on balance and equanimity, *samatvam yoga uchyate* ("equanimity is yoga"). Thus, even without textual borrowing, Blake's mythopoetic framework aligns closely with the *Gita*'s metaphysics of unity through conflict.

- **Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Philosophical Mediation**

Coleridge's engagement with the *Gita* was more explicit and philosophical. His marginalia and lectures show familiarity with Wilkins's translation and other Oriental writings. Seeking a synthesis between reason and faith, Coleridge was drawn to the *Gita*'s dialectical movement between knowledge (*jnana yoga*) and action (*karma yoga*). He found in it a model for reconciling moral will with divine necessity, an issue that permeates his *Aids to Reflection* and *The Friend*. Coleridge's conception of the "One Life," the immanent divine principle linking mind, nature, and spirit, parallels Krishna's revelation of the cosmic self (*Vishvarupa*). Moreover, his critique of mechanical materialism and advocacy for an

organic worldview reveal the *Gita's* philosophical shadow, which offered him an alternative metaphysics rooted in unity rather than dualism. Through Coleridge, the *Gita's* ideas filtered into English theological and aesthetic debates, influencing later Romantic and Victorian thought.

- **William Wordsworth: Ethical Nature and Selfless Action**

For Wordsworth, the *Gita's* influence emerges less through direct citation and more through shared moral vision. His poetry enacts the discipline of perceiving the divine within the natural worldan endeavor that mirrors Arjuna's gradual awakening to Krishna's omnipresence. Wordsworth's notion of "a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things" (*Tintern Abbey*) evokes the same metaphysical unity central to the *Gita*. The ethic of *nishkama karma*, selfless action without attachment to results finds poetic expression in Wordsworth's humble yet purposeful figures, such as the leech-gatherer or the solitary reaper, who perform their duties with quiet devotion. His emphasis on moral steadfastness and acceptance of natural order parallels Arjuna's reconciliation of duty and doubt. In this sense, Wordsworth's poetry functions as a Western analogue to the *Gita's* teaching on disciplined living within the flux of existence.

- **Romanticism's Ethical Transformation**

The *Bhagavad Gita* offered the Romantics not just metaphysical consolation but a new ethical grammar. Its doctrine that true action arises from detachment challenged both Enlightenment utilitarianism and Christian moral absolutism. For Blake, it validated visionary freedom; for Coleridge, philosophical synthesis; for Wordsworth, moral equanimity within the natural order. Across these poets, the *Gita* catalyzed a movement from external moral codes toward an inward spiritual law grounded in self-knowledge. This interiorization of ethics redefined Romantic individuality as a site of divine potential rather than mere self-expression. The cross-cultural dialogue thus reshaped the moral and imaginative foundations of English Romanticism, giving it a universal resonance that transcended national and theological boundaries.

**Table 1: Comparative Overview of the Bhagavad Gita's Influence on Key Romantic Poets**

Poet	Approximate Exposure to Gita Concepts	Central Gita Themes Reflected	Representative Works	Mode of Adaptation
<b>William Blake</b>	Indirect, through Orientalist discourse	Unity of opposites; divine imagination; spiritual vision over materialism	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Jerusalem</i>	Thematic parallelism; symbolic equivalence between contraries and cosmic balance
<b>S. T. Coleridge</b>	Direct engagement with Wilkins (1785) and German Idealist commentaries	<i>Karma yoga</i> (action and detachment); <i>jnana yoga</i> (knowledge); the One Life	<i>Aids to Reflection, The Friend, Religious Musings</i>	Philosophical mediation; integration into Christian idealism
<b>William Wordsworth</b>	Indirect, through intellectual climate influenced by Eastern texts	<i>Nishkama karma</i> (selfless action); divine unity in nature; moral equanimity	<i>Tintern Abbey, The Prelude, "Leech-Gatherer"</i>	Ethical and aesthetic assimilation within nature poetry

**Table 2: Gita Themes Reflected in English Romanticism**

Gita Themes	William Blake	S. T. Coleridge	William Wordsworth
<b>Spiritual Unity</b>	Divine Imagination	The One Life	Spirit in Nature
<b>Detachment and Duty</b>	Creative Freedom	Moral Will and Detachment	Selfless Labor
<b>Vision and Revelation</b>	Prophetic Vision	Symbolic Reason	Intuitive Perception
<b>Harmony in Conflict</b>	Contraries as Progress	Reconciliation of Dualities	Emotional and Moral Balance

### The Gita in Modern English Literature

The twentieth century witnessed a renewed engagement with the *Bhagavad Gita* as Western intellectuals and writers sought new frameworks for understanding moral duty, spiritual conflict, and the human condition in an increasingly fragmented world. The horrors of industrialization, world wars, and the decline of traditional faith led many modernist writers to turn toward Eastern philosophies for metaphysical orientation. Among these, the *Gita* stood out not merely as an “Eastern text,” but as a dialogic exploration of conscience and action that mirrored modernity’s own existential dilemmas. Writers such as T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and E. M. Forster found in the *Gita* both a philosophical refuge and a creative provocation—an ethical vocabulary for the fractured consciousness of modern man.

- **T. S. Eliot and the Search for Spiritual Order**

No English author of the modern era demonstrates the *Gita*’s influence more visibly than T. S. Eliot. His poetic and philosophical imagination was deeply shaped by his engagement with Indian texts during his studies at Harvard under George Santayana and Irving Babbitt. In *The Waste Land* (1922), the echoes of the *Gita* emerge through allusions to detachment and renunciation. The poem’s concluding invocation, “*Shantih shantih shantih*”, functions not only as a Sanskrit benediction but also as a yearning for the peace that comes from spiritual insight, as taught by Krishna to Arjuna. Eliot’s later religious philosophy, particularly in *Four Quartets* (1943), reflects the *Gita*’s doctrine of karma yoga—the call to perform one’s duty without attachment to its outcomes. This principle becomes the foundation of Eliot’s moral poetics: a search for inner stillness amid worldly chaos. His essay “The Dry Salvages” explicitly refers to the *Gita*’s notion of action through faith: “For most of us, there is only the unattended moment, the moment in and out of time.” The resemblance between Eliot’s meditative temporality and the *Gita*’s timeless *Brahmanic* perspective highlights the text’s profound philosophical integration into modernist aesthetics.

- **Aldous Huxley and the Perennial Philosophy**

While Eliot used the *Gita* to reconcile faith with modern despair, Aldous Huxley approached it as part of his quest for universal spirituality. His *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) identifies the *Gita* as one of the core expressions of humankind’s shared metaphysical wisdom. Huxley viewed Krishna’s teachings as an antidote to the materialism of the modern West, emphasizing detachment and self-realization as the path to enlightenment. This worldview permeates his later novel *Island* (1962), in which he envisions a utopian society founded on synthesis between Eastern mysticism and Western rationalism. The character of Dr. Robert MacPhail explicitly quotes from the *Gita*’s exhortation to act without attachment, revealing Huxley’s vision of spirituality as pragmatic and universal. His interpretation recontextualized the *Gita* not as a sectarian scripture but as a *philosophia perennis*, accessible to all traditions that seek liberation through awareness.

- **Isherwood, Forster, and the Gita’s Ethical Humanism**

Christopher Isherwood, along with his mentor Swami Prabhavananda, co-translated the *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God* (1944), a version widely read by Western audiences for its clarity and devotional tone. This translation was more than a linguistic exercise, it was a creative collaboration that fused literary sensitivity with philosophical precision. Isherwood’s novels, particularly *The Berlin Stories* and *A Single Man*, while set in modern, often secular contexts, carry undertones of the *Gita*’s ethical humanism. His protagonists struggle with self-understanding and moral engagement, much like Arjuna on the battlefield. The *Gita* thus offered Isherwood a psychological template for reconciling duty and identity in a morally ambiguous world.

E. M. Forster, though less overt in citation, shared this spiritual humanism. In *A Passage to India* (1924), the narrative’s exploration of connection beyond cultural boundaries echoes the *Gita*’s teaching of divine unity (*Vasudeva sarvamiti* “all is the Divine”). Forster’s spiritual motif of “only connect” encapsulates the same philosophical intuition: that human understanding arises from perceiving the underlying oneness of existence. In both Isherwood and Forster, the *Gita* serves as an implicit text shaping modern ethical consciousness.

- **The Gita and Modern Cross-Cultural Philosophy**

Beyond individual authors, the *Gita* shaped the broader modernist turn toward comparative spirituality. The rise of the Theosophical Society, the influence of Indian thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, and the intellectual curiosity of Western academies together framed the *Gita* as a cornerstone of intercultural dialogue. The text became a reference point for discussing moral autonomy,

the tension between action and contemplation, and the possibility of spiritual democracy in a secular age. For modern writers, it provided an archetype of inner struggle that transcended national and religious boundaries.

The Gita's dialogic structure, an intimate conversation between Arjuna and Krishna also appealed to modernist aesthetics of fragmentation and multiplicity. Its form, alternating between despair and revelation, mirrored the psychological interiority sought by twentieth-century literature. The Gita thus entered English letters not as an exotic curiosity but as a living philosophy that addressed the crises of modernity.

**Table 3: Gita's Influence in Modern English Literature**

Thematic Focus	T. S. Eliot	Aldous Huxley	C. Isherwood	E. M. Forster
<b>Spiritual Discipline (Karma Yoga)</b>	Moral order through selfless action ( <i>Four Quartets</i> )	Integration of duty and detachment ( <i>Island</i> )	Moral struggle mirrored in modern identity	Ethical integrity beyond social norms
<b>Search for Meaning</b>	Transcendence through spiritual stillness	Awakening of consciousness through meditation	Self-realization amid alienation	Connection as spiritual awareness
<b>Unity and Oneness</b>	"Shantih" as peace of divine order	Universalism of all faiths	Spiritual equality of all beings	Human connection as divine recognition
<b>Form and Expression</b>	Poetic meditation as prayer	Essayistic exposition of perennial truth	Translational devotion as art	Symbolic fiction as ethical dialogue

### Literary Themes and Philosophical Parallels

The *Bhagavad Gita* has profoundly shaped the thematic and philosophical landscape of English literature through its exploration of *dharma* (duty), *vairagya* (detachment), and *jnana* (spiritual knowledge). These concepts, foundational to the Gita's moral universe, have served as interpretive bridges between Eastern and Western thought. English authors, poets, and philosophers have engaged with these ideas to question moral action, human agency, and the relationship between worldly obligation and spiritual transcendence.

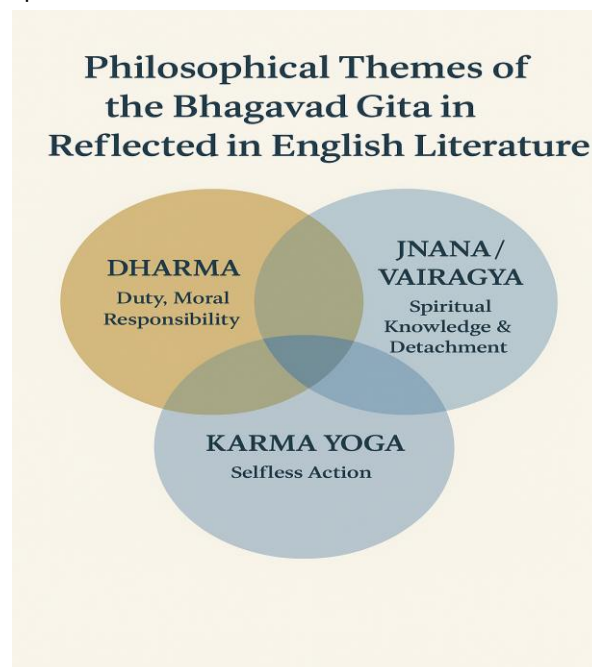
The concept of *dharma*, righteous duty performed without selfish motive, forms the ethical core of the *Gita* and has resonated with English writers grappling with moral complexity. In Victorian literature, moral duty often appeared as a social or religious imperative; yet the *Gita* introduced a dynamic alternative, urging the fulfillment of duty without attachment to its fruits (Radhakrishnan, 1948). This teaching found philosophical kinship in Matthew Arnold's ideal of "disinterestedness" and T. S. Eliot's view of impersonal art, both of which reflect a moral engagement devoid of egocentric reward (Eliot, 1943). The *Gita*'s notion of action grounded in faith and selflessness broadened the Western conception of virtue from obedience to inner clarity, a shift visible in modernist explorations of moral freedom.

Equally transformative was the Gita's teaching of *vairagya*, or spiritual detachment. Detachment, in the Gita's sense, does not signify withdrawal but disciplined engagement, an equilibrium between action and renunciation. This paradox resonated with writers like Aldous Huxley and E. M. Forster, who sought reconciliation between ethical action and personal authenticity (Huxley, 1945). Huxley's adaptation of the Gita's detachment principle as a form of intellectual humility and moral steadiness appears across his essays and fiction. Similarly, Christopher Isherwood's translations with Swami Prabhavananda (1944) reinterpret detachment as a spiritual realism, participation in the world with awareness, not apathy. The Western literary imagination thus assimilated the *Gita*'s detachment as a psychological and aesthetic stance: acting, creating, and loving without possession.

The *Gita*'s emphasis on *jnana* (spiritual knowledge) further enriched English intellectual traditions. Knowledge in the Gita transcends rationalism; it is experiential wisdom that unites intellect and intuition. This idea parallels the Romantic and humanist pursuit of self-knowledge and spiritual truth. Wordsworth's nature mysticism, Coleridge's transcendental imagination, and later Eliot's quest for divine order each echo the *Gita*'s ideal of seeing unity in multiplicity (Raine, 2006). Where Western humanism often posited man as the center of moral authority, the *Gita* reoriented that vision toward a cosmic consciousness, an awareness that liberates action from ego.

Comparatively, the *Gita*'s philosophy both converges with and diverges from Christian ethics. Like the Christian Gospel, it upholds selfless service and inner devotion, but it departs from Christian dualism by harmonizing action and renunciation. Huxley (1945) identified this synthesis as the "perennial philosophy," suggesting that the *Gita* embodies a universal moral law beyond doctrinal borders. However, modern critics such as King (1999) and Sharma (2013) caution that Western readings often overemphasize universality, neglecting the text's devotional roots in *bhakti*. Still, the interplay between Christian humanism and Vedantic non-dualism produced fertile ground for English literary ethics, one that views moral action not as submission, but as realization.

Through these convergences, the *Bhagavad Gita* has become a moral compass in English literature, guiding writers toward an integrated vision of life, where duty aligns with self-knowledge, and detachment deepens compassion.



### Literature Review

The *Bhagavad Gita* has long been a subject of extensive scholarly and literary engagement across the world, particularly in English literary traditions. From the earliest colonial translations to modern postcolonial reinterpretations, the text has served as a mirror through which moral, spiritual, and philosophical concerns of each era have been reflected. Scholars and writers have explored it as both a sacred scripture and a philosophical poem, drawing on its themes of duty, self-realization, and transcendence to shape moral and aesthetic discourse in English literature. This review surveys major scholarly trajectories concerning the *Gita*'s reception, interpretation, and transformation in English literary thought, focusing on key historical phases and evolving critical approaches.

- **Early Translations and the Colonial Encounter**

The earliest English encounter with the *Bhagavad Gita* arose during the late eighteenth century, when Charles Wilkins (1785) produced the first English translation under the East India Company's patronage. In the nineteenth century, figures like Edwin Arnold in *The Song Celestial* (1885) rendered the *Gita* in poetic form, framing it as a spiritual text aligned with Christian ethics. Arnold's translation was influential among British Romantics and early transcendentalists, who perceived the *Gita* as a bridge between Eastern contemplation and Western moralism (Minor, 1986). Later commentators such as Annie Besant (1905), a theosophist and reformer, emphasized the *Gita*'s universality, shaping it into a foundational document of comparative religion. This trend reflected what Said (1978) later termed *Orientalism*: the selective romanticization of Eastern wisdom to serve Western intellectual and spiritual needs.

- **Philosophical Engagement and Comparative Thought**

Scholars of the early twentieth century, such as Radhakrishnan (1948) and Zimmer (1951), reframed the *Gita* as a text of universal metaphysics rather than sectarian theology. Radhakrishnan's influential translation and commentary placed the *Gita* at the center of the "perennial philosophy" later elaborated by Huxley (1945). These readings highlighted the doctrine of *karma yoga*, action without attachment as a moral philosophy relevant to global ethics.

Modern comparative scholars such as King (1999) and Sharma (2013), however, critique this universalist framing for overlooking the historical and ritual specificity of the *Gita* within the Hindu context. King (1999) argues that early comparative interpretations were shaped by the colonial search for a "philosophical India" that validated Western moral ideals. Sharma (2013) similarly emphasizes the need to recognize the *Gita*'s theological structure, especially its emphasis on devotion (*bhakti*) and divine intervention, which were often diminished in Western translations.

Despite these critiques, the *Gita*'s conceptual triad, knowledge (*jnana*), action (*karma*), and devotion (*bhakti*) continues to inspire literary and ethical debates in English studies. Scholars like McDermott (2012) and Chakrabarti (2017) have examined how these categories influence narrative ethics and the portrayal of moral agency in English novels and poetry.

- **The Gita and Modernist Aesthetics**

In twentieth-century modernism, the *Gita*'s resonance deepened. T. S. Eliot's writings, both poetic and critical, bear the marks of the *Gita*'s teachings on renunciation and spiritual stillness. His *Four Quartets* exemplify a literary realization of *karma yoga*, acting through faith without seeking reward (Eliot, 1943). Modern scholars such as Raine (2006) and Ghosh (2015) argue that Eliot's use of Sanskrit phrases and cyclical temporality reflects a synthesis of Christian mysticism and Hindu metaphysics.

Aldous Huxley, in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), positioned the *Gita* as a text of universal spiritual ethics, accessible beyond cultural boundaries. Later scholarship has critiqued this position for its implicit homogenization of Eastern thought.

Christopher Isherwood and Swami Prabhavananda's collaborative translation (1944) further shaped mid-century literary spirituality. Their version, blending philosophical clarity with lyrical expression, became one of the most widely read English editions. Lutgendorf (2017) observes that Isherwood's fiction, especially *A Single Man*, reflects Gita-like ethical introspection, using Arjuna's moral crisis as a metaphor for modern alienation.

- **Postcolonial and Intercultural Readings**

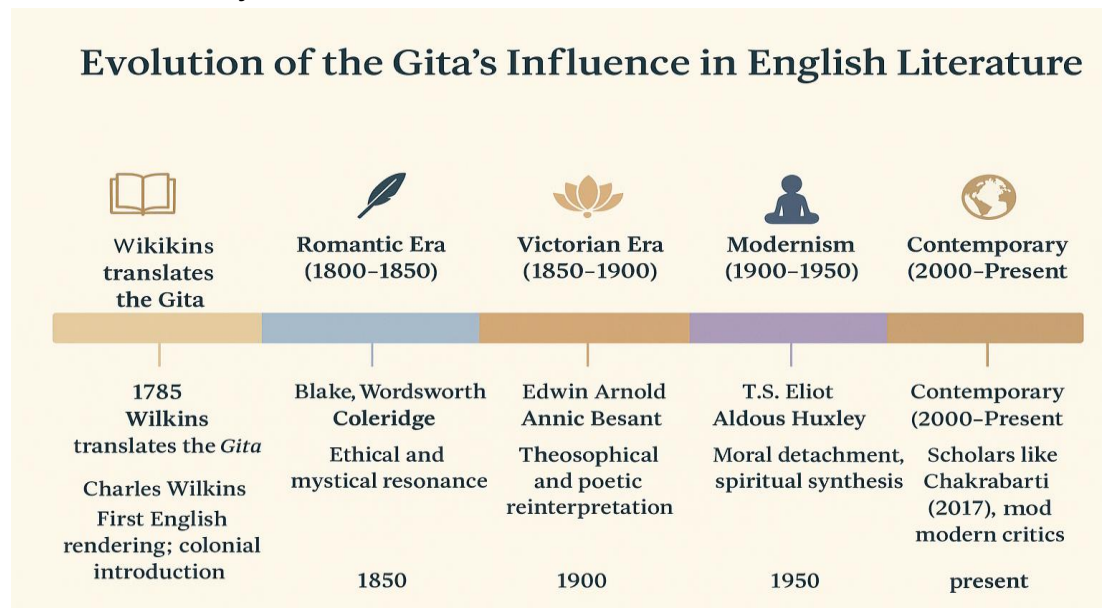
Postcolonial criticism has reframed the *Bhagavad Gita*'s presence in English literature as a site of negotiation between spiritual authority and colonial modernity. Said's (1978) framework of *Orientalism* remains foundational: the Western literary reception of the *Gita* both idealized and domesticated Indian thought. Nandy (1983) extends this critique, arguing that colonial intellectuals used Hindu texts like the *Gita* to construct a spiritual "Other" that mirrored Western crises of faith.

**Table 4: Summary of Scholarly Perspectives**

Scholarly Focus	Representative Scholars	Main Argument	Critical Perspective
Colonial Translation & Orientalism	Wilkins (1785), Arnold (1885),	Early translations adapted the <i>Gita</i> to Western moral frameworks	Reinforced imperial cultural authority while opening cross-cultural dialogue
Philosophical Universalism	Radhakrishnan (1948), Huxley (1945), Zimmer (1951)	The <i>Gita</i> expresses universal spiritual truths	Risk of abstracting the text from Hindu context (King, 1999)
Modernist Literary Integration	Eliot (1943), Isherwood & Prabhavananda (1944), Raine (2006)	The <i>Gita</i> informs modernist aesthetics of discipline and renunciation	Shows creative synthesis of East-West spirituality
Postcolonial Reinterpretation	Said (1978), Rajan (2010),	The <i>Gita</i> mediates cultural identity and moral agency	Moves from Orientalism to dialogic global ethics



## Discussion and Analysis



The *Bhagavad Gita* has profoundly influenced English literary imagination by reshaping narrative structure, poetic expression, and ethical vision. Its dialogic form—structured as a conversation between Arjuna and Krishnaintroduced a reflective mode of narration that later English writers adopted to explore psychological and moral conflict. This inward dialogue, emphasizing self-interrogation, is evident in the works of **T. S. Eliot**, whose *Four Quartets* mirrors the *Gita*'s meditative rhythm and cyclical temporality (Eliot, 1943). Similarly, **E. M. Forster** and **Aldous Huxley** employed internal monologue and spiritual debate as narrative devices echoing the *Gita*'s search for harmony between thought and action (Huxley, 1945).

In terms of poetic style, the *Gita*'s lyrical compression and balanced syntax contributed to modernist aesthetics emphasizing restraint and rhythmical precision. Its invocation of cosmic order (*dharma*) and dissolution (*yoga*) resonates in Eliot's symbolic imagery and **Yeats's** later poetry, where metaphysical reflection intertwines with mythic symbolism (Raine, 2006). The use of paradox—action in inaction, renunciation through performance—became a hallmark of modern poetic tension.

Morally, the *Gita* offered a philosophical framework reconciling duty and detachment, shaping literary ethics beyond doctrinal boundaries. It challenged the Christian moral absolutism prevalent in Victorian literature, introducing a dynamic ethic grounded in selfless action (*karma yoga*). This principle informed characters' moral struggles in modern fiction, from **Isherwood's** spiritual narratives to **Eliot's** notion of impersonal art. Contemporary critics such as **Chakrabarti (2017)** argue that the *Gita* inspired a "literature of equanimity," one that redefines heroism as moral clarity amid uncertainty.

Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita* did not merely inform English literature thematically, it re-oriented its form and conscience, merging poetic introspection with a universal ethics of action.

### Conclusion: Synthesis of Findings and Significance in Global Literary Discourse

The *Bhagavad Gita*'s role in English literature represents a profound intersection of philosophy, spirituality, and artistic expression that transcends cultural boundaries. Across centuries, it has served not merely as a sacred scripture but as a dialogic framework through which English writers and thinkers have reimagined moral duty, selfhood, and creative purpose. From **Wilkins's (1785)** colonial translation to **Eliot's (1943)** poetic introspection and **Huxley's (1945)** metaphysical synthesis, the *Gita* has continually invited reinterpretation within evolving literary and intellectual contexts. Its enduring presence in English thought reflects an ongoing search for balance between faith and reason, action and renunciation, individuality and universality.

The synthesis of findings reveals that the *Gita* has shaped English literature on multiple levels: conceptually, by influencing moral and philosophical discourse; structurally, by inspiring dialogic and reflective narrative forms; and ethically, by redefining the nature of selfless action and spiritual

awareness. Its teachings have bridged the aesthetic divide between the West's rational humanism and the East's metaphysical vision, producing a shared vocabulary of moral inquiry. The modernist appropriation of *karma yoga* and postcolonial reclamation of *dharma* illustrate how the text continues to evolve as a living dialogue within world literature.

In the broader scope of global literary discourse, the *Bhagavad Gita* exemplifies the potential of intercultural exchange to deepen human understanding. It transforms literature into a site of ethical reflection and spiritual dialogue, reminding readers that artistic creation, like action in the Gita, attains meaning through detachment, insight, and devotion. Thus, the *Gita*'s resonance within English literature stands as a testament to its universality, a timeless conversation between cultures, languages, and moral visions.

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