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A Comparative Analysis of Self-Realisation in the Bhagavad Gita with Psychology and Philosophy and its Educational Implications

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Abstract

The Bhagavad Gita concentrates on awakening, which serves as the scripture's overarching core theme. Meditation and expanding one's consciousness can help one achieve self-realisation. Reflection and self-awareness are crucial in realising one's true nature and achieving self-actualisation. The Bhagavad Gita generally gives a complete and multifaceted view of self-realisation. This notion includes the realisation of one's true self, the eradication of one's ego, the pursuit of spiritual paths, and the attainment of freedom. Abraham Maslow proposed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a psychological theory. Human needs can be classified into five levels of hierarchy. Carl Rogers, a well-known humanistic psychologist, coined the term 'self-actualisation.' Eastern philosophies, such as mindfulness and Zen Buddhism, have a long history of emphasising self-realisation via inward awareness and meditation. Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy that encourages people to unite with the Tao. Existentialism is a philosophical movement investigating self-realisation by delving into fundamental concerns about life and individuality. While the Bhagavad Gita's concept of self-realisation is similar to Western psychology theories and Eastern philosophies, it is distinguished by its comprehensive approach. The Bhagavad Gita's self-realization teachings complement psychology and philosophy. Students learn morals, self-awareness, and progress from these lessons. These concepts can harmonise and educate.

Keywords: Reflection, Meditation, Self-Realisation, Self-Awareness, Self-Actualisation and Comprehensive Approach

Introduction

Self-realisation is a concept central to Buddhism's teachings, particularly the Gita, which focuses on awakening and serves as the overarching core theme of the scripture. Self-realisation is achieved through reflection and self-awareness, as well as through meditation and expanding consciousness. Self-actualisation is defined as the realisation of the true self, the removal of the ego, the search for spiritual paths, and the acquisition of freedom. Human needs are divided into five levels, which Abraham Maslow proposed as his Hierarchy of Needs, and Carl Rogers, a renowned humanistic psychologist, first coined the term self-actualisation'. Eastern philosophies, including mindfulness and Zen Buddhism, have a long-standing tradition of emphasising self-realisation through inward awareness and meditation, respectively. Taoism, an ancient Chinese philosophy, is a philosophical movement that explores fundamental existential questions about life and individualism. This paper compares Bhagavad Gita's self-realisation concept with modern Psychological and Philosophical thoughts.



The Concept of Self-Realisation in the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita revolves around coming to one's realisation, which serves as the scripture's overarching fundamental topic.

The Bhagavad Gita provides significant insights into knowing one's true self, Atman, and the road to realize one's potential. The following is a list of the most critical aspects of this idea (Kaul):

The Bhagavad Gita explains that the true self, sometimes referred to as Atman, is immutable and enduring throughout time (Levin). The above discussion deals with the nature of Atman. It is separate from the mind, the ego, and the physical body. Realizing one's inner self, or Atman, is considered one of the most essential goals in human existence (Klein). Atman is seen to be a divine spark.

The Gita emphasizes that the ego, also known as ahamkara, frequently induces humans to identify themselves with their material bodies and transient identities. It has been argued in various Indian traditions, including the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, that the path to genuine happiness is the realisation of one's self. It requires following the path of anasakti (non-attachment) and detaching oneself from attachments to the material world in order to transcend the empirical-self based identity (ahamkara) and merge the individual soul with the transcendental Self (Brahman) or pure consciousness (Gupta and Agrawal). The above condition is one of the illusions that the ego creates. This identification with the ego is the basis of the experience of being alone and the sorrow that comes with it.

Various Routes to Realisation of the Self

The Bhagavad Gita outlines a variety of routes to the realisation of one's true nature, notably including the following:

a. Karma Yoga

This school of thought encourages putting others before oneself and carrying out one's responsibilities without being attached to the outcomes. It is expected to refer to Karma yoga as 'the yoga of action' or 'the path of selfless service.' The word 'karma' comes from the root word 'kru,' which can be translated as 'work, deed, or action.' Karma is a Sanskrit word. Karma yoga is a method of spiritual practice that emphasises the performance of altruistic, charitable, and benevolent deeds to achieve a unified state of being (Burgin: Karma Yoga). Doing so allows a person to cleanse their thoughts and get closer to understanding who they are in their authentic state.

नकर्मणामनारम्भान्नैष्कर्म्यंपुरुषोऽश्नुते | नचसंन्यसना देवसदिधसिमधि गच्छति ||

Chapter 3-sloka:4||

Meaning

A true karma yogi must learn to labour without connection to the results of his or her deeds. This explanation necessitates the intellectual cultivation of knowledge. As a result, philosophical understanding is also required for karma yogi success (Mukundananda)

b. Bhakti Yoga

This kind of yoga strongly emphasises devotion to the divine. The Sanskrit word bhakti can be translated as 'devotion' or 'love,' and it comes from the root word 'bhaj,' which can mean 'devotion, worship, or to serve God.' Bhakti is derived from this word. In several languages, 'yoga' can mean 'union' or 'to yoke'. Bhakti Yoga, or devotional yoga, seeks spiritual enlightenment and oneness with the divine via devotion (Burgin: Bhakti Yoga). Bhakti yoga is recommended for more emotionally than intellectually driven people. The path of devotion, also known as Bhakti yoga, is a means for achieving union with God via loving remembrance of God and love itself. Most religions emphasise this spiritual path since it is the most straightforward. As is the case with other forms of yoga, the objective of the bhakta, also known as a devotee of God, is to realise God and become one with the divine. The bhakta accomplishes this goal through the power of love, the most potent and inescapable of all human emotions (Vedanta Society of Southern California). Bhakti Yoga, or devotional yoga, seeks spiritual enlightenment and oneness with the divine via

devotion. Individuals can achieve self-realisation if they cultivate a profound and loving connection with the deity of their choice or with universal awareness.

श्रीभगवानुवाच | मय्यावेश्यमनोयेमांनत्ययुक्ताउपासते | श्रद्धयापरयोपेतास्तेमेयुक्ततमामता:॥

Chapter 12-Sloka: 2||

Meaning

The Lord Shree Krishna declared, 'Those who fix their minds on Me and always engage in My devotion with steadfast faith are the best yogis' (Mukundananda).

c. Jnana Yoga

often known as the path of knowledge and wisdom, is the third type of yoga. One interpretation of Jnana Yoga is that it is the yoga of knowledge. The seeker who walks this road relies on reason and discernment to unearth the divine nature that is within, and in order to do so, they must let go of anything incorrect or not real. The practice of yoga reveals to us that the Supreme Reality is present within every one of us (Vedanta Society of Southern California). It requires profound introspection, investigation into the essence of the self, and the ability to differentiate between what is genuine and not authentic. Following this route results in an immediate awakening to one's authentic self.

भूमरिापोऽनलोवायुः खंमनोबुद्धरिवच | अहङ्कारइतीयंमेभिन्नाप्रकृतरिष्टधा ||

Chapter 7-Sloka: 4||

Meaning

Matter is seen as a component of God's energy and is referred to as prakiti. It is subdivided into eight components: Earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intellect, and ego. It is surprising how profound the knowledge in these old books is to modern science's evolving tendencies (Mukundananda).

येचैवसात्त्विकाभावाराजसास्तामसाश्चये | मत्तएवेतितान्विद्धिनित्वहंतेषुतेमयि ॥

Chapter 7- sloka:12||

Meaning

Shree Krishna sums up only his energy and makes all good, bad, and ugly objects and states of existence conceivable. His energy manifests the three forms of material fact: goodness, passion, and ignorance. They are within him, yet he is more excellent than them (Mukundananda).

Self-Realisation as Freedom (Moksha)

According to the Bhagavad Gita, the ultimate goal of self-realisation is to break free from the cycle of birth and death (known as samsara) (Noonan). Moksha is the name for this state of liberation. A person who has achieved self-realisation can transcend the limitations of the material world and arrive at a place of unending happiness, oneness with the divine, and freedom from the endless cycle of rebirth.

मुक्तसङ्गोऽनहंवादीधृत्युत्साहसमन्वति: | सदि्ध्यसद्धि्योर्निर्विकार: कर्तासात्त्विकउच्यते || Chapter 18-Sloka:26||

When a performer is in the mode of goodness, he or she is free of ego and attachment, full of excitement and determination, and balanced in success and failure (Mukundananda).

Self-realisation can be achieved by practising meditation and developing one's awareness. Meditation and self-awareness play an essential part in coming to terms with one's true nature and achieving self-actualisation (Ackerman). Individuals can connect directly with their authentic selves when they learn to still the chattering of their minds, face inward, and acknowledge the presence of the divine within.

Self-Realisation is not an Escapist Pursuit

Dharma is a concept of great complexity and paramount importance in Hindu thought before the modern period. Dharma refers to what one should do and why one should do it. Before modern times, dharma was highly nuanced and was of utmost significance in Hindu philosophical discourse. The concepts of what one should do and why one should

do it are called dharma (Creel). The Gita emphasizes that pursuing self-realisation should be lived within one's obligations and responsibilities (dharma).

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मोविगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् । स्वधर्मेनिधनंशरेयः परधर्मोभयावहः॥

Chapter 3-Sloka: 35||

Meaning

It is preferable to do one's natural prescribed duty, even if it is tainted with flaws than to correctly perform another's prescribed duty. In reality, it is preferable to die while carrying out one's duty than to follow the dangerous route of another (Mukundananda).

Because it coincides with the path to self-realisation, it inspires people to carry out their responsibilities with the devotion, ethics, and integrity expected of them. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the value of having a spiritual teacher or guru who can help individuals along their journey to self-realisation by providing them with knowledge, wisdom, and direction. The concept of guru is emphasized quite a bit throughout the text.

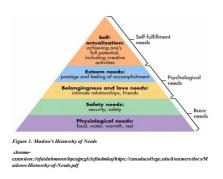
We should approach a spiritual teacher to learn the Truth. Inquire of him with reverence and be of service to him. Because he has glimpsed the Truth, such an enlightened Saint can teach us (Mukundananda).

In general, the Bhagavad Gita presents a vision of self-realisation that is holistic and multifaceted. This concept incorporates the comprehension of the true self, the destruction of the ego, the pursuit of spiritual pathways, and the accomplishment of emancipation. Throughout the conversation, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna who he believes he is and what his proper form, the Self, actually is. When Arjuna finally understands this, Lord Krishna bestows upon him the gift of self-realisation as a reward for his service (Bhagwan). It offers profound intellectual and practical insights on the path towards self-realisation and the awakening of one's spiritual nature.

Psychological Theories Related to Self-Realisation

Studying different psychological theories and philosophies concerning self-realisation offers a broad and varied outlook on human development and satisfaction. Several theories and philosophies will be discussed, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Carl Rogers' concept of self-actualisation, and Eastern philosophies like mindfulness and Zen Buddhism

Abraham Maslow proposed Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a psychological theory. Human needs can be structured into a five-level hierarchical system. These levels include physiological needs, safety needs, and belonging. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a widely recognised psychological theory that presents a pyramid of human needs (McLeod). The hierarchy of needs begins with fundamental physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter. As these needs are satisfied, individuals progress to higher-level needs, including safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation. As conceptualised by Maslow, self-realisation refers to attaining one's complete potential, resulting in enhanced creativity, problem-solving abilities, and a profound sense of purpose and satisfaction (Mcleod).



Carl Rogers, a renowned humanistic psychologist, introduced the concept of self-actualisation. He posited that individuals possess an innate inclination towards personal development and actualising their potential. Rogers posits that self-actualisation is achieved when individuals achieve congruence with their authentic selves (Looti).

Rogers distinguishes between authentic and ideal self. The ideal self is what one desires to be, whereas the authentic self is who they are. People's ideal selves do not match reality (Main). The above statement entails cultivating self-awareness, embracing oneself, and establishing an authentic connection with one's experiences and emotions.



Figure 1: Carl Roggers cocept of self-actualisation

https://www.structural-learning.com/post/carl-rogerstheory#:--:text=His%20work%20continues%20to%20influence,strive%20to% 20meet%20these%20theeds.

Philosophies Related to Self-Realisation

Eastern philosophies, such as mindfulness and Zen Buddhism, have a rich tradition of prioritising self-realisation through internal awareness and meditation. Mindfulness originates from Buddhist practises and entails being fully present in the present moment, impartially observing thoughts and sensations (Xiao et al.). Self-reflection enhances self-awareness and promotes self-realisation by revealing one's authentic essence. Zen Buddhism emphasises the practice of meditation as a means of achieving direct and experiential self-realisation (Swann). Zen is a Buddhist school that places a premium on meditation and intuition (Decor). It encourages individuals to go beyond conceptual thinking and encounter their authentic nature, commonly known as 'Satori' or an instance of enlightenment.



Figure 1: Zen Buddhism https://medium.com/@mckinneydecor/zen-garden-buddha-statue-

Vedanta is a Hindu philosophical tradition that is closely associated with the idea of self-realisation. Advaita Vedanta teaches the identity between the true self (Atman) and the ultimate reality (Brahman), emphasising that recognising this unity is essential for self-realisation (Wrenn). Self-realisation in Vedanta entails a profound comprehension of the self, the dissolution of ego, and the direct encounter with the divine unity.



Figure 1: Taoism
https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource

Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy that promotes the alignment with the Tao, also known as the Way, and the cultivation of a state of wu-wei, which refers to effortless action (Mahaffey and Whittemore). This alignment enables individuals to self-realise and harmoniously coexist with the natural rhythm of existence.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that examines self-realisation by contemplating fundamental questions surrounding existence and individuality (Burnham and Papandreopoulos). Prominent existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert



Camus delve into these inquiries. Existentialists believe that self-realisation entails constructing one's sense of meaning and purpose within a world that appears indifferent or absurd (Aho).

Psychological theories and philosophies provide different viewpoints on self-realisation, encompassing the satisfaction of fundamental needs and attaining one's authentic identity and harmony with the universe. Examining various approaches can enhance our understanding of self-realisation and its perception in Western and Eastern traditions.

Self-Realisation from the Bhagavad Gita, Psychology, and Philosophy are Compared

The Bhagavad Gita revolves around coming to one's realisation, which serves as the scripture's overarching fundamental topic. The Bhagavad Gita provides significant insights into knowing one's true Self, Atman, and the road to realize one's potential.

Bhagavad Gita's Concept of Self-Realisation

Nature of the Self (Atman): The Bhagavad Gita asserts that the true Self, Atman, is immutable and enduring, separate from the mind, ego, and physical body. Detachment from Ego (Ahamkara): It emphasizes the ego's role in leading individuals to identify themselves with their material bodies and transient identities, causing sorrow. The path to genuine happiness involves transcending the empirical-self identity through non-attachment (anasakti).

Routes to Self-Realisation in the Bhagavad Gita

Karma Yoga: Encourages selfless action and putting others before oneself. The emphasis is on performing duties without attachment to outcomes, leading to a unified state of being. Bhakti Yoga: Devotion to the divine is emphasised to attain spiritual enlightenment and oneness with the sacred via loving memory and dedication. Jnana Yoga: The path of wisdom and knowledge entails reflection, discrimination, and a profound comprehension of the Self, which leads to immediate awakening (Ashish).

Ultimate Goal

The Bhagavad Gita asserts that the ultimate goal of self-realisation is to achieve freedom (Moksha) from the cycle of birth and death (samsara). Attaining Moksha allows individuals to transcend the limitations of the material world and experience unending happiness and oneness with the divine.

Integration with Responsibilities (Dharma)

The Gita emphasizes that pursuing self-realisation should be lived within one's obligations and responsibilities (dharma). It discourages escapism and underscores the importance of aligning self-realisation with one's duties.

Role of Spiritual Teacher (Guru)

The concept of a spiritual teacher or guru is highlighted, emphasizing the importance of seeking guidance, knowledge, and wisdom from an enlightened source on the journey to self-realisation.

Psychological Theories

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Aligns with the concept of self-realisation by placing it at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, representing the fulfillment of one's complete potential.

Carl Rogers' Self-Actualization: Rogers' concept aligns with self-realisation by emphasizing the innate drive towards personal development and congruence with one's authentic self.

Philosophies (Mindfulness, Zen Buddhism, Vedanta, Taoism, Existentialism):

- Mindfulness and Zen Buddhism: Focus on internal awareness, meditation, and direct experiential realisation, aligning with the Bhagavad Gita's emphasis on self-awareness and meditation.
- Vedanta: Teaches the identity between Atman and Brahman, emphasizing unity as essential for self-realisation, aligning with the Bhagavad Gita's perspective.
- Taoism: Emphasizes alignment with the Tao and effortless action for self-realisation, aligning with the Bhagavad Gita's focus on harmonious

coexistence with the natural flow of existence.

 Existentialism: Explores self-realisation through creating personal meaning in an indifferent or absurd world, aligning with the Bhagavad Gita's holistic vision.

Comparative Analysis with Philosophy

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, particularly concerning self-realisation, consciousness, and the nature of reality, exhibit shared principles with philosophy, particularly Eastern philosophies such as Vedanta.

Metaphysics: Vedantic philosophy, similar to the Gita, delves into the essence of existence beyond the physical realm, highlighting the interconnectedness of the individual self (Atman) with the universal consciousness (Brahman). Philosophical investigations into the nature of the self frequently coincide with the teachings of self-realisation in the Gita.

The Gita explores moral quandaries and the need to carry out one's duty (dharma) without being attached to the results. This concept aligns with philosophical, ethical systems prioritising virtue, duty, and ethical decision-making.

Implications for Education

Incorporating the wisdom from the Bhagavad Gita into education might have various ramifications:

- By incorporating principles from the Gita, holistic education, which focuses on academic learning and moral, emotional, and spiritual development, can be promoted.
- Advocating for Self-Reflection: By fostering self-reflection and mindfulness in educational environments, students can develop a heightened self-awareness, resulting in enhanced concentration, better emotional control, and increased self-fulfilment.
- Ethical Development: By imparting the teachings of the Gita regarding duty (dharma) and the ability to separate oneself from the outcomes, pupils can be nurtured to make ethical decisions and develop resilience when confronted with adversities.

 Ultimately, the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita regarding self-realisation are in harmony with psychological and philosophical concepts. These teachings are significant for education as they foster students' comprehensive growth, self-consciousness, and moral advancement. Incorporating these principles can enhance a more harmonised and all-encompassing educational approach.

Conclusion

While the Bhagavad Gita's concept of selfrealisation shares commonalities with Western psychological theories and Eastern philosophies, it stands out for its holistic approach. The Gita integrates the pursuit of self-realisation with duties, responsibilities, and the concept of Moksha, offering a comprehensive path that encompasses the spiritual, ethical, and existential dimensions of human existence. The focus on internal awareness, devotion, knowledge, and the role of a spiritual guide adds depth to the Bhagavad Gita's perspective self-realisation. Comparatively, Western psychological theories and Eastern philosophies contribute valuable insights, but the Bhagavad Gita provides a unique synthesis of these elements in the pursuit of a profound and multifaceted selfrealisation. The Bhagavad Gita's self-realisation teachings match psychological and philosophical ideas. These teachings help pupils develop morality, self-awareness, and comprehensive growth. These ideas can help harmonise and comprehensively educate.

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