

Research Paper

Exploring the Interrelationship of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Bhagavad Gita

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ABSTRACT

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a widely practised technique that aims to promote a calm mind, reduce stress, and enhance personal growth. Originating from the Vedic tradition of India, TM shares a philosophical and spiritual lineage with the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient Hindu scripture. The connection between Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Bhagavad Gita highlights the profound link between contemporary meditation practices and traditional spiritual teachings. The founder of TM, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, emphasises the importance of achieving union with the divine self, a concept closely aligned with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. This article explores the interconnections between TM and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, examining how a fundamental philosophical context for the practice of TM is provided by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and how these teachings specifically align with the core principles of the Bhagavad Gita. This refers to self-realisation, meditation, and the pursuit of happiness. Through a comparative analysis, we delve into the principles, practices, and benefits of Transcendental Meditation (TM) in light of the wisdom contained in the Bhagavad Gita.

Keywords: *Transcendental Meditation, Bhagavad Gita, Vedic Tradition, Mantra, Unity of Consciousness, Psychological and Physical Benefits, Global Impact*

शनेः शनेरुपरमेद् बुद्ध्या धृतिगृहीतया।
आत्मसंस्थं मनः कृत्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत्॥
— भगवद्गीता ६.२५

(Gradually, with firm resolve, one concentrates the mind and establishes it in the Self, and thinks of nothing else.)

Transcendental Meditation, developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the mid-20th century, is a technique that has gained global popularity for its simplicity and effectiveness in enhancing mental and physical well-being. It aims to promote mental clarity, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being. It is characterised by the use of a mantra and is practised by sitting comfortably with eyes closed for 15-20 minutes, twice a

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day. This technique is designed to allow the practitioner to enter a state of deep relaxation and heightened awareness.

The Bhagavad Gita, a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the Indian epic Mahabharata, presents a dialogue between the archer Arjuna and Lord Krishna, who serves as his charioteer and divine guide. The Gita addresses the moral and philosophical dilemmas faced by Arjuna on the battlefield, emphasising the importance of duty, righteousness, and the pursuit of spiritual knowledge.

Both Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Bhagavad Gita emphasise the importance of inner peace and self-realisation, but they approach these concepts from different perspectives. This article attempts to explore how TM can be understood in light of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, highlighting their similarities and differences, and examining the implications for practitioners seeking spiritual growth.

Cultural Influence and Popularity

In the 1960s, a time of significant cultural change, Transcendental Meditation (TM) gained popularity in the Western world. There was a growing interest in Eastern philosophies and practices, partly influenced by prominent figures such as The Beatles. In 1968, The Beatles travelled to India specifically to study with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Their endorsement of TM drew attention to the practice and introduced many Westerners to concepts such as karma, guru, and yoga for the first time.

Maharishi's teachings resonated with the counterculture movement of the time, which sought alternatives to traditional Western values and lifestyles. The media frenzy surrounding The Beatles' spiritual journey contributed to the mainstream acceptance of TM and meditation practices. This period marked a pivotal moment in which Eastern spirituality began to influence Western consciousness, leading to the widespread acceptance of meditation techniques as tools for personal growth and well-being.

Historical and Philosophical Context

Transcendental Meditation (TM)

This technique involves the use of a mantra. Unlike other forms of meditation that require concentration or control of the mind, TM allows the mind to naturally settle down to a quieter level of thought.

Transcendental Meditation was introduced in the 1950s by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Maharishi's teachings were based on the ancient Vedic tradition of India, which emphasises the development of higher states of consciousness through meditation (1). Transcendental Meditation (TM) involves the use of a specific mantra – a particular sound or phrase chosen for its calming properties – which is silently repeated for 20 minutes twice a day to help bring the mind into a state of relaxed alertness. The practice aims to allow the mind to settle into a state of relaxed awareness, transcending ordinary thought processes and experiencing a state of pure consciousness (2).

The core principles of Transcendental Meditation (TM) include effortlessness, naturalness, and transcendence. Unlike other forms of meditation that may require focused concentration or control of the mind, TM emphasises a natural and effortless approach. Practitioners are instructed to sit comfortably with their eyes closed and gently repeat their mantra without

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any effort or concentration. This process is believed to lead the mind to a state of transcendence, where it goes beyond ordinary thinking and experiences a profound state of relaxation and inner peace (3).

Bhagavad Gita

युञ्जन्नेवं सदा आत्मानं योगी नियतमानसः।
शान्तिं निर्वाणपरमां मत्संस्थामधिगच्छति॥

— भगवद्गीता ६.१५

(The disciplined yogi, by thus concentrating the mind, attains supreme peace and liberation and becomes one with God.)

The Bhagavad Gita, often referred to simply as the Gita, is a 700-verse scripture written around 200 BCE and is part of the Indian epic Mahabharata. Set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the Gita addresses the moral and philosophical dilemmas faced by Arjuna as he prepares to go into battle. It presents a synthesis of various paths to spiritual realisation, including devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jnana), and action (karma). Central to the Gita's teachings are the concept of selfless action and the realisation of one's true self (Atman), distinct from the physical body and mind.

Key Teachings:

The Bhagavad Gita offers several key teachings that have had a profound impact on Indian philosophy and spiritual practice:

1. *Dharma (Duty)*: The Gita emphasises the importance of performing one's duty without attachment to the results. This principle, known as Nishkama Karma, encourages individuals to act responsibly and ethically, regardless of the outcome.
2. *Yoga (Union)*: The Gita presents various paths of yoga (union), including Karma Yoga (the path of selfless action), Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion), and Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge). Each path offers a different approach to achieving spiritual growth and self-realisation (6).
3. *Self-realisation*: The Gita teaches that the ultimate goal of human life is to realise one's true nature (Atman) and its unity with the ultimate reality (Brahman). This realisation is achieved through spiritual practice and inner transformation (4).
4. *Detachment and Equanimity*: The Gita advocates detachment from material possessions and desires, as well as equanimity in the face of success and failure. By cultivating a balanced mind, individuals can attain inner peace and resilience.
5. *Devotion (Bhakti)*: The Gita highlights the path of devotion as a means to attain spiritual fulfilment and inner harmony. Devotion to a higher power helps individuals transcend their ego and connect with the divine (4).

Transcendental Meditation and the Bhagavad Gita: A Comparison

The Concept of Transcendence in TM and the Gita

One of the fundamental aspects of Transcendental Meditation is the experience of transcendence, a state of pure consciousness that goes beyond ordinary thought processes. This concept resonates deeply with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, which emphasises the importance of understanding one's true nature (Atman) and its unity with the ultimate reality (Brahman). In the Gita, Krishna encourages Arjuna to transcend his limited ego and recognise his divine nature. TM provides a practical method for experiencing this transcendence, allowing practitioners to access a state of pure awareness and inner peace.

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The Concept of TranscendenceTM and the Bhagavad Gita

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Ease and Naturalness in TM and the Gita's Teachings on Detachment

The principles of ease and naturalness in Transcendental Meditation align with the Gita's teachings on detachment and equanimity. In the Gita, Krishna advises Arjuna to perform his duties without attachment to the results, maintaining a sense of detachment and inner balance. Similarly, TM emphasises a natural and effortless approach to meditation, allowing the mind to settle into a state of relaxed alertness without force or concentration. This effortless practice can help practitioners cultivate a sense of detachment from their thoughts and emotions, fostering inner peace and resilience (5).

TM and the Practice of Bhakti Yoga

The Bhagavad Gita presents Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion, as a powerful means of achieving spiritual fulfilment and inner harmony. Transcendental Meditation can be seen as a complementary practice to Bhakti Yoga, as it helps individuals cultivate inner peace and a deeper sense of connection with the divine. By experiencing the state of pure consciousness through TM, practitioners can enhance their devotion and strengthen their relationship with a higher power. This integration of meditation and devotion can lead to a more profound and holistic spiritual practice (1).

TM and the Bhagavad Gita's Teachings on Self-Realisation

The ultimate goal of both Transcendental MeditationTM and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita is self-realisation. In TM, practitioners aim to transcend ordinary thought processes and experience a state of pure consciousness, which is considered the true nature of the self. Similarly, the Gita teaches that self-realisation involves recognising the unity of the individual self (Atman) with the supreme reality (Brahman). By practising TM and applying the Gita's teachings on self-realisation, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of their true nature and achieve spiritual growth (2).

TM and the Path of Karma Yoga

Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action, is one of the central teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. It emphasises the importance of performing one's duties without attachment to the results, focusing on the intention behind the actions rather than the outcomes. Transcendental Meditation can support the practice of Karma Yoga by fostering a state of inner peace and clarity, which can help individuals act with greater awareness and selflessness. By integrating TM with the principles of Karma Yoga, practitioners can enhance their ability to perform selfless actions and contribute to the greater good (6).

Core Principles and Practices

Unity of Consciousness

One of the central teachings of the Bhagavad Gita is the unity of all existence, which is reflected in the practice of Transcendental MeditationTM. TM aims to transcend the

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individual mind and experience a state of pure consciousness, described as a state of unity and wholeness. This aligns with the Gita's concept of Brahman, the ultimate reality that pervades and transcends the material world.

Self-Realization

The Gita emphasises the importance of self-realisation and understanding one's true nature. TM facilitates this process by allowing practitioners to experience deeper levels of their consciousness. This inner journey is consistent with the Gita's teaching of turning inward to discover the self beyond the ego and the mind.

Stress Reduction and Inner Peace

Both TM and the Gita address the human condition of stress and suffering. TM is known for its effectiveness in reducing stress and promoting inner peace. Similarly, the Gita provides practical wisdom for maintaining mental equilibrium in the face of life's challenges, advocating a balanced and detached approach to action.

Scientific Validation and Modern Acceptance

As Transcendental Meditation TM gained popularity, Maharishi also sought to establish its credibility through scientific research. He collaborated with various academic institutions to study the effects of TM on health and well-being. Over the years, numerous peer-reviewed studies have demonstrated the benefits of TM, including reductions in stress, anxiety, and blood pressure. These findings have contributed to its acceptance within the medical and psychological communities.

The American Heart Association has recognised TM as a beneficial practice for lowering blood pressure, further solidifying its place in contemporary health discussions. This scientific validation has helped TM transcend its origins, leading to its adoption by diverse individuals, including professionals in high-stress environments such as finance and entertainment.

The Philosophical Foundations of Transcendental Meditation

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Interpretation

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita is crucial to understanding the philosophical foundations of TM. Maharishi frequently referenced the Gita in his teachings, emphasising its messages of self-realisation, duty (dharma), and the importance of meditation. The Gita outlines a path to spiritual enlightenment that involves the integration of action (karma yoga) and knowledge (jnana), which Maharishi incorporated into his framework for TM. In his commentary, he emphasised that the Gita encourages individuals to perform their duties while remaining detached from the results of their actions. This principle aligns with the practice of TM, which encourages practitioners to transcend their thoughts and emotions, achieving a state of restful awareness.

नैव किञ्चित्करोमीति युक्तो मन्येत तत्त्ववित् |
पश्यञ्शृण्वन्स्पृशञ्जिघ्रन्श्चक्षन्स्वपञ्चसन् ||8||
प्रलपन्विसृजन्गृह्णन्नुन्मिषन्निमिषन्पि |
इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेषु वर्तन्त इति धारयन् ||9|| (7)

Maharishi's commentary on Chapter 5 of the Bhagavad Gita highlights the need for a combination of action and renunciation to attain liberation. He states, "By harmonising the

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material and spiritual aspects of life, this opens the path to both success and liberation for a person, whether a householder or an ascetic, at any age" (Bhagavad Gita 5.8-9). This perspective underscores the relevance of TM as a practical tool for realising the ideals of the Gita in contemporary life.

In Chapter 6 of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna provides detailed instructions on meditation, emphasising the need for a disciplined mind and the practice of self-control. Maharishi's interpretation of these teachings underscores the relevance of meditation in achieving a state of equanimity and inner peace, which is central to both TM and the philosophy of the Gita.

The Role of Meditation in the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita places significant emphasis on meditation as a means of achieving self-realisation. In Chapter 6, Krishna describes the practice of meditation as essential for controlling the mind and senses, which ultimately leads to a state of peace and enlightenment. The Gita teaches that a disciplined mind, free from distractions, can understand the true nature of the self (Atman) and its unity with the Supreme Being (Brahman).

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः |
अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्ते तात्मैव शत्रुवत् ||6|| (7)

In Chapter 6, Verse 6 of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says: "For one who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, the mind will be the greatest enemy." This highlights the importance of controlling the mind through meditation. Maharishi's approach to Transcendental Meditation (TM) aligns with this teaching, as it provides a systematic method for calming the mind and accessing deeper levels of consciousness. The practice of TM facilitates the experience of transcendence, allowing practitioners to connect with their inner selves and recognise their inherent divinity. This resonance with the teachings of the Gita reinforces the idea that meditation is a crucial component of spiritual growth.

The interconnectedness of TM and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita

Self-realization and inner peace

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन |
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ||47|| (7)

Both Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Bhagavad Gita emphasize self-realization as the ultimate goal of spiritual practice. The Gita teaches that true happiness arises from understanding one's eternal nature and aligning oneself with the divine will. In Chapter 2, Verse 47, Krishna advises Arjuna: "You have the right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your actions, nor be attached to inaction." Similarly, TM practitioners experience increasingly profound states of inner peace and well-being as they deepen their practice.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi claims that the transcendental experience gained through TM leads to a profound sense of unity with the universe, echoing the Gita's assertion that self-realisation brings liberation from suffering. This shared focus on self-realisation highlights the complementary nature of TM and the Gita, as both paths guide individuals toward a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the cosmos.

The concept of separation

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥14॥ (7)

Detachment is a central theme in both Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita, Krishna instructs Arjuna to perform his duty without attachment to the results, emphasising that true renunciation involves acting selflessly. Chapter 2, Verse 14 states, "O son of Kunti, the temporary appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, O descendant of Bharata, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed." This principle is reflected in TM, where practitioners are encouraged to let go of their thoughts and distractions, allowing them to experience a state of pure awareness.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥19॥ (7)

Maharishi's interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita reinforces the idea that "performing right action without attachment to the fruits of action is the essence of Karma Yoga" (Bhagavad Gita 3.19). By cultivating detachment through Transcendental Meditation, practitioners can navigate the challenges of daily life with greater ease and resilience, integrating the teachings of the Gita into their actions.

Criticisms and Differences

While there are significant similarities between TM and the Bhagavad Gita, some criticisms highlight important differences. In particular, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), argues that TM lacks the devotional aspect emphasised in the Gita. He contends that meditation should focus on the divine form of Vishnu, rather than being a secular practice devoid of specific concentration.

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥22॥ (7)

This critique raises fundamental questions about the nature of meditation and its ultimate purpose. While TM promotes a universal approach to spirituality, the teachings of the Gita are deeply rooted in devotion and the recognition of a personal deity. Chapter 9, Verse 22 states, "To those who are constantly devoted and worship Me with love, I give them the understanding by which they can come to Me." This difference can influence how practitioners of TM and followers of the Gita understand their respective spiritual journeys.

Practical Implications for Practitioners

Integrating TM with Gita Teachings

For individuals seeking to deepen their spiritual practice, integrating TM with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita can offer a holistic approach to self-realisation. Practitioners can benefit from the structured practice of TM while simultaneously embracing the Gita's principles of duty, detachment, and devotion.

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Incorporating the Gita's teachings into TM practice might involve considering the concepts of dharma (righteous duty) and the importance of selfless action. By doing so, practitioners can cultivate a sense of purpose and alignment with their spiritual values, thereby enhancing their overall experience of meditation.

Community and Support

Both TM and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita emphasise the importance of community and support in spiritual development. Connecting with like-minded individuals who are also interested in TM and the Gita can foster a sense of belonging and encouragement.

Participating in group meditations, discussions, and study sessions focused on the Gita can deepen one's understanding of the text and its relevance to contemporary life. This communal aspect of spiritual practice can provide individuals with valuable insights and inspiration throughout their journey.

Challenges and considerations

Cultural sensitivity and appropriateness

The principles of Transcendental Meditation and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita offer valuable insights. However, when applying these practices in diverse settings, it is crucial to consider cultural sensitivity and appropriateness. Practitioners should be mindful of the cultural backgrounds and beliefs of the individuals and communities they work with and ensure that the approach is respectful and inclusive. Tailoring interventions to meet the specific needs and preferences of individuals can enhance the effectiveness and acceptance of these practices (8).

Personalisation and Individual Differences

It is important to recognise that each individual is unique, and the impact of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita may vary based on individual differences in temperament, personality, and preferences. Practitioners need to tailor interventions to address each person's specific needs and strengths. This involves incorporating aspects of TM and the Gita that resonate with their experiences and values. This personalised approach can improve the relevance and effectiveness of the practices, leading to greater engagement and benefits (9).

Integration with Traditional Practices and Therapies

It is important to view the integration of Transcendental Meditation and the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita as a complementary approach rather than a replacement for traditional practices and therapies. By collaborating with mental health professionals, spiritual leaders, and educators, a holistic and integrated approach to personal and spiritual development can be ensured. By combining TM and the teachings of the Gita with traditional treatments and practices, practitioners can provide comprehensive support for individuals' well-being and growth (10).

CONCLUSION

The intersection of Transcendental Meditation and the Bhagavad Gita offers a rich framework for exploring the depths of self-realisation and spiritual growth. While TM provides a practical technique for achieving inner peace and clarity, the teachings of the Gita offer profound philosophical insights into the nature of duty, detachment, and devotion.

Exploring the Interrelationship of Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Bhagavad Gita

By integrating the principles of both TM and the Gita, practitioners can develop a holistic approach to spirituality that encompasses both meditation and the ethical dimensions of life. This synthesis not only enhances personal well-being but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings.

The historical context of Transcendental Meditation reveals its roots in ancient Indian philosophy, its cultural resonance during the 20th century, and its evolution into a widely practiced technique supported by scientific research. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's efforts in popularizing TM have not only introduced meditation to a global audience but have also highlighted the enduring relevance of the teachings found in the Bhagavad Gita. As TM continues to evolve, its historical foundations and philosophical connections remain essential for understanding its impact on contemporary spirituality and well-being.

In conclusion, exploring the intersection of TM and the Bhagavad Gita reveals a complementary relationship that can guide individuals toward a deeper experience of self-realization and fulfillment. As practitioners progress on their spiritual path, the teachings of both TM and the Gita can serve as invaluable resources for achieving lasting happiness and inner peace. The principles of effortlessness, detachment, selfless action, and devotion outlined in the Gita can enhance the practice of TM, offering a holistic and integrated approach to well-being and spiritual growth. While further research is needed to empirically validate the effectiveness of these approaches, preliminary evidence and case studies suggest that the integration of TM and the Bhagavad Gita holds great promise as a valuable and transformative practice for individuals and communities.

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Conflict of Interest

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