

Beyond the Western Canon: Integrating the Bhagavad Gita to Decolonize English Literature Syllabi

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Abstract:

The English Literature syllabus across Indian and global universities has long been dominated by Western texts, theories, and philosophical frameworks. This Eurocentric orientation, while valuable, often marginalizes non-Western epistemologies and limits students' engagement with global modes of thought. This paper argues for the inclusion of the Bhagavad Gita in English Literature curricula as a critical step toward decolonizing literary studies and expanding the canon beyond its Western boundaries. Positioned within the thrust area of Eastern Philosophy in World Literature and Postcolonial Philosophy, the study examines how the Gita, read in translation and through comparative frameworks, can function not merely as a religious text, but as a philosophical and literary work that addresses universal themes of duty, ethics, selfhood, and existential choice. The paper explores conceptual dialogues between the Gita and American Transcendentalism, particularly Emerson and Thoreau, demonstrating existing but under-recognized cross-cultural literary conversations. Drawing on digital humanities methodologies and postcolonial pedagogical theory, this research assesses the potential effects of integrating the Gita on students' critical thinking, cultural competence, and literary interpretation skills. Ultimately, the paper makes a case for curriculum reform that acknowledges India's philosophical contributions as world literature, fostering decolonial reading practices and preparing students for a more interconnected literary imagination in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Decolonizing the Canon, Bhagavad Gita, English Literature Curriculum, Eastern Philosophy in World Literature, Transcendentalism, Postcolonial Pedagogy.

Introduction

The traditional English Literature curriculum has historically operated within a rigid Eurocentric paradigm, prioritizing Western philosophical and literary traditions while relegating non-Western texts to peripheral or specialized study. This systemic imbalance deprives students of engaging with rich epistemological traditions that have fundamentally shaped global intellectual history. The Bhagavad Gita, an ancient Sanskrit text foundational to Indian philosophy, offers profound explorations of duty, ethics, and human consciousness that resonate deeply with universal literary themes. Integrating the Bhagavad Gita into mainstream literature curricula represents a vital step toward pluralizing the academic canon. By moving beyond a singular cultural lens, educators can foster a more inclusive and dialogic classroom environment where diverse philosophical systems interact synergistically.

Despite recent movements toward decolonizing the curriculum, the integration of Eastern philosophical texts remains fraught with challenges. The current pedagogical frameworks for introducing texts like the Bhagavad Gita into English literature programs are insufficient for several key reasons. First, existing approaches often rely on uncritical readings of translated texts, failing to address the substantial loss of original semantic and poetic nuance that occurs during translation (Shukla et al. 2023). Second, non-Western texts are frequently taught in isolation rather than in active, structural dialogue with Western canonical works, which prevents students from recognizing deeply embedded cross-cultural literary conversations. Consequently, texts like the Gita are often exoticized or strictly categorized under religious studies, rather than being analyzed for their literary and comparative philosophical merit.

To overcome these pedagogical barriers, educators must adopt methodologies that critically examine both the linguistic translation and the thematic resonances of the text. Analysing the linguistic complexity of the original Sanskrit text alongside its English translations can reveal how cultural concepts are either preserved or distorted (Kumar 2026). Furthermore, bridging the Bhagavad Pita with movements such as American Transcendentalism provides a familiar entry point for students while validating Eastern texts as integral components of global literary movements. In addressing these pedagogical gaps, this paper aims to redefine how classical Eastern literature is taught in contemporary academic settings. This paper proposes a structured, comparative pedagogical framework that seamlessly integrates the Bhagavad Pita with Western literary traditions, specifically American Transcendentalism, to facilitate cross-cultural critical analysis. This research establishes a methodology for critically evaluating translated literary texts in the classroom by utilising insights from digital humanities and semantic analysis tools to highlight the nuances lost in English translation.

To operationalize this comparative model, the framework combines quantitative digital tools with close textual reading to evaluate how core philosophical concepts move across languages and historical eras. Students utilize natural language processing (NLP) visualization to isolate semantic drift and sentiment variations across landmark English renditions—from Charles Wilkins' foundational 1785 translation and Edwin Arnold's 1885 poetic work *The Song Celestial* to 20th-century editions by S. Radhakrishnan and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. This computational lens reveals how untranslatable Sanskrit terms like Dharma (moral order, duty), Karma (action and consequence), and Sthitaprajna (unshakeable wisdom) were historically reframed through Victorian or Judeo-Christian vocabularies. By pairing these data-driven translation insights with comparative readings of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" (1841) and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), the framework establishes a rigorous, decolonial methodology that transforms Eastern classical texts from passive

translated objects into active, influential partners within global literary history.

Pedagogical Frameworks for Indian Knowledge Systems:

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into formal educational structures has gained significant traction, particularly with the advent of advanced computational pedagogical models. Recent initiatives have focused on generating structured datasets and conversational models to teach concepts grounded in classical Indian texts across multiple languages (Singaravelu et al. 2026). The core idea of these frameworks is to systematically adapt traditional oral and philosophical teachings into standardized curricula. The primary strength of such approaches lies in their structured delivery and broad accessibility, ensuring that specialized pedagogical domains are represented in modern digital education (Singaravelu et al. 2026). However, a notable weakness is that these systems often prioritize general knowledge dissemination over deep, humanistic literary critique. In comparison to these broad computational approaches, the present work focuses specifically on the literary and philosophical dimensions of the Bhagavad Gita, employing comparative literature methodologies rather than automated knowledge delivery.

Building upon this critique, a close textual reading of the Bhagavad Gita reveals structural and philosophical complexities that computational frameworks struggle to process. Comprising 700 verses across 18 chapters embedded within the Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata, the text functions as a multifaceted dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Rather than presenting a singular, uniform doctrine, it synthesizes three distinct philosophical paths—Karma Yoga (the path of selfless action), Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), and Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion)—while engaging with foundational concepts from Sankhya dualism and Vedanta non-dualism. Automated educational systems tend to flatten these layered frameworks into compartmentalized data points, stripping away the dialectical dynamic that

defines Arjuna's existential crisis and Krishna's nuanced responses.

By applying comparative literary methodologies, this study situates the Bhagavad Gita alongside parallel foundational texts, such as Western philosophical dialogues and epic poetry, to unpack its rhetorical strategies and existential themes. Ancient and medieval commentaries—most notably by Adi Shankara (c. 8th century CE) emphasizing Advaita Vedanta, Ramanuja (c. 11th century CE) advancing Vishishtadvaita, and Madhva (c. 13th century CE) advocating Dvaita—demonstrate that the text has historically resisted any single interpretive consensus. Computational models designed for broad knowledge delivery frequently obscure these historical hermeneutic divergent readings in favor of simplified, standardized summaries. Examining the Gita through a comparative lens illuminates how its philosophical dilemmas mirror universal human inquiries into duty (dharma), agency, and moral conflict across global literary traditions.

Ultimately, integrating humanistic textual analysis into the study of Indian Knowledge Systems addresses a critical methodological gap left by purely computational pedagogy. While algorithmic models excel at expanding public access and standardizing curriculum delivery, they operate within static parameters that risk reducing living philosophical traditions to passive facts. By prioritizing textual integrity, linguistic nuance, and interpretive history, this approach complements digital dissemination with rigorous scholarship. Reclaiming deep literary critique ensures that classical texts like the Bhagavad Gita are understood not merely as static historical artifacts or structured training data, but as dynamic, evolving contributions to global intellectual history.

Translation Fidelity and Semantic Analysis:

A crucial area of study in comparative literature involves assessing the fidelity of translations, particularly for ancient and complex texts. Scholars have increasingly employed deep learning and natural language processing models to evaluate the semantic and sentiment preservation in English translations of

the Bhagavad Gita (Chandra and Kulkarni 2022). The core idea here is to quantify how much meaning and emotional resonance is lost or altered when moving from classical Sanskrit to modern English (Shukla et al. 2023). The strength of this approach is its objective, data-driven assessment of translation quality, which highlights the inadequacies of automated translation systems in capturing poetic metaphors and philosophical depth (Chandra et al. 2025). The weakness, however, is that computational metrics alone cannot capture the subjective, reader-response experience essential to literary studies. This paper builds upon these findings by suggesting that literature students must actively engage with these translation discrepancies as a core component of their critical reading practice.

When students critically analyze translation discrepancies, they uncover how foundational Sanskrit terms resist direct English equivalence. Polysemic concepts such as Dharma (encompassing duty, righteousness, moral order, and cosmic law), Karma (action, cause, and intentional consequence), and Yoga (union, discipline, and path) carry expansive semantic networks that single-word English renderings inevitably flatten. For example, rendering Dharma merely as “duty” in Chapter 2, Verse 31 obscures Arjuna's broader crisis regarding social responsibility (svadharma) versus universal ethical obligations (sadharana dharma). By systematically identifying where automated models and human translators substitute complex philosophical frameworks with functional synonyms, students gain direct insight into the hermeneutic shifts that occur across linguistic boundaries.

Furthermore, evaluating these translation gaps exposes the stark stylistic variations present in historical and modern English renditions of the text. Early Western translations—such as Charles Wilkins' seminal 1785 translation or Edwin Arnold's 1885 poetic adaptation *The Song Celestial*—often framed the Gita through Victorian literary conventions and Western theological vocabulary. In contrast, 20th-century commentaries like those by S. Radhakrishnan

(1948) or A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1968) prioritize distinct philosophical and devotional paradigms. Natural language processing tools can quantify sentiment shifts or vocabulary divergence between these versions, but literature students must perform the qualitative analysis: determining how a translator's background, era, and interpretive lens shape the reader's reception of Krishna's discourse on the battlefield.

Ultimately, embedding computational translation assessment within humanities curricula transforms automated metrics from end results into preliminary investigative tools. While algorithmic models can efficiently isolate semantic loss, syntactic shifts, or sentiment drift across large text corpora, humanistic critique explains why those shifts matter to literary interpretation. Encouraging students to interrogate the tension between automated data metrics and lived textual encounters fosters a more rigorous, reflective approach to global literature. This dual methodology ensures that digital humanities tools enhance—rather than replace—the essential work of nuanced textual analysis, cultural contextualization, and interpretive agency.

Thematic Mapping in Comparative Philosophy:

The final category of related work concerns the structural mapping of philosophical themes across different texts and traditions. Researchers have utilized topic modeling and large language models to map conceptual similarities between the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, demonstrating a high degree of thematic overlap (Chandra and Ranjan 2022). Additionally, the creation of parallel commentary corpora has enabled direct comparisons of how distinct interpretive traditions read identical root verses (Bose 2026). The core idea is to map philosophical arguments structurally to facilitate comparative analysis. The strength of these methodologies is their ability to uncover hidden thematic networks across vast corpuses of text (Bose 2026). A limitation is that such approaches often remain confined to computational linguistics, rarely crossing over into traditional classroom pedagogy. The current work leverages the concept of thematic

mapping to connect the Bhagavad Gita not just to other Indian texts, but to Western canonical works like those of Emerson and Thoreau.

Expanding thematic mapping across cultural paradigms reveals the profound influence of classical Indian thought on 19th-century American Transcendentalism. Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau engaged extensively with early English translations of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. Emerson's famous 1856 poem "Brahma" directly echoes the eternal nature of the soul expressed in Gita Chapter 2, Verse 19 ("If the red slayer think he slays, or if the slain think he is slain..."), reflecting non-dualist Vedantic concepts. Similarly, in *Walden* (1854), Thoreau explicitly references his daily reading of the Gita alongside the waters of Walden Pond, drawing dynamic parallels between his practice of contemplative solitude and the Gita's ideal of the self-realized *Sthitaprajna* (one anchored in steady wisdom).

Structurally mapping these cross-cultural resonances illuminates shared philosophical inquiries regarding moral duty, divine immanence, and non-attachment. Emerson's concept of the "Over-Soul" aligns closely with the Gita's vision of *Paramatman* (the Supreme Cosmic Spirit residing in all beings), while Thoreau's philosophy of civil disobedience shares a fundamental commitment to acting out of principled moral obligation rather than personal gain—mirroring the doctrine of *Karma Yoga* (action without attachment to fruits). By pairing automated thematic mapping with close comparative readings, scholars can trace how core concepts traveled from Sanskrit source texts to New England, adapting to shape modern Western ideas on individualism, nature, and ethical resistance.

Bridging computational thematic discovery with pedagogical practice transforms abstract text networks into active learning frameworks for the humanities classroom. While topic models and text-mining algorithms can process vast literary corpora to isolate conceptual clusters, traditional pedagogy grounds those data patterns in historical, socio-

political, and philosophical context. Integrating Western canonical works alongside the Bhagavad Gita in comparative literature curricula prevents eastern traditions from being studied in isolation or treated solely as digital datasets. This interdisciplinary synthesis demonstrates that computational tools, when paired with cross-cultural humanistic critique, enrich student engagement with universal philosophical questions across disparate traditions.

A Framework for Decolonial Comparative Pedagogy:

To effectively integrate the Bhagavad Gita into the English Literature syllabus, this paper proposes a structured “Decolonial Comparative Pedagogy Pipeline.” This framework is designed to transition students from passive consumers of translated texts to critical scholars of cross-cultural literary traditions. The pipeline consists of three primary modules: Translation Critique, Thematic Mapping, and Ethical/Applied Literary Analysis. The rationale behind this design is to ensure that the text is approached rigorously, avoiding the pitfalls of superficial multiculturalism while equipping students with the critical tools necessary for advanced comparative literature studies.

The first module, Translation Critique, operationalizes critical linguistic analysis by requiring students to compare classical Sanskrit source terms against diverse historical and modern English translations. Rather than reading a single translation as a transparent proxy for the original text, students analyze early orientalist renditions—such as Charles Wilkins’ 1785 translation or Edwin Arnold’s 1885 poetic work *The Song Celestial*—alongside 20th-century editions by Indian scholars like S. Radhakrishnan and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Students evaluate how key untranslatable concepts like dharma, karma, and guna are frequently flattened into Western theological equivalents like “sin,” “duty,” or “virtue.” Incorporating natural language processing tool outputs into this phase allows students to isolate semantic shifts and sentiment drift, turning translation discrepancies into productive sites of critical inquiry.

The second module, Thematic Mapping, expands students’ analytical scope by establishing structural and conceptual parallels between the Bhagavad Gita and canonical Western literature. Moving beyond mere surface-level comparisons, this module maps the core philosophical trajectories of the text—such as Karma Yoga (disinterested action), Jnana Yoga (discriminative knowledge), and the state of Sthitaprajna (unshakeable wisdom)—onto corresponding Western frameworks. Students trace direct historic influences, such as the Gita’s impact on American Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, while also drawing comparative lines to existential dilemmas in European literature, such as Shakespearean tragedy or Kantian ethics. This comparative mapping dismantles Eurocentric literary hierarchies by positioning non-Western classical texts as equal conversational partners in global intellectual history.

The final module, Ethical and Applied Literary Analysis, synthesizes textual rigor with contemporary critical theory, guiding students to apply the Gita’s moral frameworks to modern socio-political and environmental contexts. Students interrogate complex historical receptions of the text, examining how figures like Mahatma Gandhi utilized Karma Yoga to articulate non-violent civil resistance (Satyagraha), while others drew upon its discourse on duty (dharma) during times of sociopolitical crisis. By evaluating how a singular text can generate divergent ethical interpretations across different historical moments, students develop advanced capabilities in reception theory and decolonial criticism. Ultimately, this three-stage pipeline ensures that integrating the Bhagavad Gita into the English syllabus transcends tokenistic inclusion, fostering a nuanced, methodologically sound framework for global comparative literature studies.

Semantic Translation Critique:

The first module requires students to engage critically with multiple translations of the Bhagavad Gita. Since Sanskrit possesses a highly compact and token-efficient morphological structure, standard English translations often struggle to capture the full breadth of its meaning (Kumar 2026). Educators will

introduce concepts of semantic and sentiment analysis to demonstrate how different translators inject varying emotional polarities into the text (Chandra and Kulkarni 2022). By comparing historical translations with modern or machine-generated translations, students will identify how cultural biases influence the rendering of philosophical concepts (Chandra et al. 2025). This step ensures that students do not treat the translated text as an unquestionable monolith, but rather as an interpretive act requiring critical scrutiny.

To operationalize this initial module, students examine how Sanskrit's synthetic morphological architecture relies on Samāsa (compound word formation) and Vibhaktis (inflectional case endings) to condense multi-layered philosophical propositions into compact metric verses (ślokas). Where a single Sanskrit verse utilizes dense root stems (dhātus) to express simultaneous ethical, metaphysical, and psychological dimensions, English requires analytical expansion through auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and descriptive clauses. Computational evaluation demonstrates this structural asymmetry: tokenization models reveal a high expansion factor when unpacking a Sanskrit verse into English prose. By analyzing these structural disparities, students recognize that an English translation is not a simple one-to-one linguistic swap, but an interpretive decoding that necessary expands—and reconfigures—the source text's semantic density.

Building upon this computational baseline, students investigate how specific lexical choices across translation eras alter the tone and emotional polarity of Krishna's discourse. Using sentiment preservation metrics, students track how historical translators align the text with their respective cultural milieus. For instance, in Chapter 2, Verse 47—the famous assertion of Karma Yoga (“Karmanyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana”)—Victorian-era translations frequently employ imperative, deontological vocabulary such as “duty,” “bounden obligation,” and “command,” framing the verse around notions of stoic submission. Modern interpretive renditions, conversely, often frame the

same verse around psychological agency, mindfulness, and freedom from outcome anxiety. Analyzing these sentiment shifts via NLP tools reveals to students how translators subtly tilt the narrative voice between stern moral command and compassionate philosophical guidance.

Ultimately, this computational and comparative analysis exposes the underlying socio-political and theological agendas embedded within translation histories. By contrasting colonial-era editions with post-colonial and machine-translated outputs, students uncover how early Western Indology framed Sanskrit philosophical texts through Abrahamic conceptual categories—frequently rendering yajña as “sacrifice,” deva as “god,” or pāpa as “sin.” Identifying these systemic translation biases equips students with critical decolonial reading practices. Rather than accepting translated literature as a neutral medium, students learn to treat every translation of the Bhagavad Gita as a contextualized historical document shaped by linguistic constraints, computational parameters, and human subjectivity.

Thematic Mapping and Cross-Cultural Dialogue:

The second module establishes the comparative literary dialogue. Using thematic clustering, the course will juxtapose core concepts from the Bhagavad Gita—such as Dharma (duty) and self-realization—with the foundational tenets of American Transcendentalism. Students will analyze essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau alongside selected verses from the Gita. To conceptualize this, educators can draw upon methodologies used in digital parallel commentary systems, illustrating how different authors interpret similar existential dilemmas (Bose 2026). This comparative mapping highlights the historical influence of Eastern philosophy on Western literary movements, directly challenging the notion of an intellectually isolated West.

To operationalize this comparative dialogue, students directly juxtapose specific textual excerpts from the Bhagavad Gita with key 19th-century American Transcendentalist essays. Emerson's 1841

essay “Self-Reliance” and his 1849 treatise “Nature” are read alongside Chapter 2 and Chapter 13 of the Gita, highlighting the conceptual alignment between the Sanskrit notion of the Atman (the eternal, unattached self) and Emerson’s concept of the individual spirit connected to the divine. Similarly, students analyze Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” (1849) alongside the Gita’s discourse on Karma Yoga. Thoreau’s refusal to support an unjust state, paired with his explicit account in *Walden* (1854) of drinking daily at the “intellectual wave of the Bhagvat-Geeta,” demonstrates how the text’s imperative of detached, principled action directly influenced Western frameworks of ethical resistance and individual conscience.

This module also leverages methodologies adapted from digital parallel commentary systems to map how existential dilemmas are structurally framed across disparate cultural traditions. By placing digital alignments of the Gita’s verses on dharma alongside Emerson’s journal entries and Thoreau’s naturalistic observations, students visualize thematic clusters such as divine immanence (Paramatman versus the “Over-Soul”), the illusory nature of empirical reality (Maya versus the sensory world), and the discipline of contemplative action (Yoga versus Transcendentalist labor). Using visual node networks or parallel text displays, students trace how shared concerns regarding human suffering, moral agency, and cosmic order cross geographic boundaries, illustrating that complex philosophical inquiries develop through cross-cultural resonance rather than isolated Western invention.

Ultimately, this comparative mapping reconstructs the historical pathways of global literary exchange, dismantling Eurocentric canons within the humanities curriculum. By proving that foundational American literature was actively shaped by Eastern philosophical imports—specifically the 1785 Charles Wilkins English translation of the Gita owned by Emerson—the module reframes the study of Western classics as an inherently global endeavor. Students move beyond reading texts in geographic silos, developing a critical methodology that recognizes

Eastern philosophy not as an exotic “other,” but as an integral foundational pillar of modern global literature and intellectual history.

Ethical Application and Evaluation Plan:

The final module focuses on the applied ethical dimensions of the text. Students will examine the contemporary relevance of the Gita’s philosophy in areas such as moral decision-making, emotional well-being, and modern ethical frameworks (Kapuriya et al. 2025). To evaluate the efficacy of this pedagogical approach, we propose a hypothetical evaluation plan based on pre- and post-course assessments. The evaluation dataset will consist of hypothetical student analytical essays and cultural competence surveys. These assessments will measure improvements in students’ abilities to navigate complex, non-Western epistemologies and their proficiency in conducting multi-text comparative analyses.

In this final module, students operationalize the text’s core philosophical constructs to analyze historical and contemporary moral dilemmas. By examining Mahatma Gandhi’s application of Karma Yoga (selfless action) to structure the Satyagraha (non-violent resistance) movement, students evaluate how classical notions of duty (dharma) can be adapted to political ethics and socio-political liberation. Conversely, students interrogate contentious readings of the text, such as J. Robert Oppenheimer’s famous recollection of Chapter 11, Verse 32 (“Kālo’smi lokakṣayakṛtpravṛddho” — “I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds”) following the Trinity nuclear test. Juxtaposing these divergent applications allows students to critically assess how the Gita’s moral discourse on duty, detachment, and systemic action operates when applied to statecraft, environmental ethics, and modern technology.

To systematically measure the impact of this applied approach, the proposed pre- and post-course evaluation plan utilizes qualitative rubrics based on Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy alongside standardized intercultural competence metrics. Initial baseline assessments evaluate students’ initial familiarity with

non-Western epistemologies, their reliance on Eurocentric interpretive frames, and their ability to analyze translated literature. Post-course analytical essays are subsequently evaluated across four core criteria:

Hermeneutic Depth: Accuracy in identifying and contextualizing polysemic Sanskrit terms (dharma, karma, guna) without reducing them to Western theological equivalents.

Comparative Rigor: Precision in mapping thematic linkages between Eastern philosophical concepts and Western canonical frameworks.

Theoretical Application: Ability to synthesize theoretical constructs (Karma Yoga, Sthitaprajna) with real-world ethical frameworks.

Critical Decoloniality: Reflection on translation biases, socio-political receptions, and institutional canons.

Ultimately, aggregating data from these hypothetical pre- and post-course assessments provides a empirical framework for validating decolonial humanities instruction. The evaluation dataset measures shifts in students' cognitive flexibility, tracking their transition from passive consumers of world literature to active scholars capable of navigating complex, multi-centric intellectual traditions. Demonstrating measurable gains in cross-cultural analytical proficiency proves that integrating traditional knowledge systems like the Bhagavad Gita into formal English curricula does not dilute literary standards. Instead, it equips students with the essential methodological tools required for globalized, 21st-century comparative literature studies.

Practical Implications:

Integrating the Bhagavad Gita into the English Literature curriculum using the proposed framework carries significant practical implications for higher education. It necessitates cross-disciplinary collaboration, encouraging literature departments to work alongside experts in linguistics, digital humanities, and philosophy. Furthermore, this approach requires curriculum designers to carefully curate reading lists that feature multiple, peer-reviewed translations rather than relying on a single,

standardized anthology. By explicitly mapping the dialogue between Eastern texts and Western canonical authors, academic institutions can foster a truly global literary environment that reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds of the contemporary student body.

At an institutional level, implementing this decolonial comparative framework requires restructuring faculty development initiatives and departmental resource allocation. Literature departments must move beyond traditional, siloed expertise by creating joint workshops with scholars of Sanskrit computational linguistics, South Asian studies, and digital humanities. Faculty training programs are essential to equip educators with the skills needed to navigate polysemic Sanskrit terminology, operate basic text-mining and natural language processing (NLP) visualization tools, and guide students through complex translation histories. Furthermore, academic libraries must expand their digital and physical holdings to include varied historical translations—from Charles Wilkins (1785) and Edwin Arnold (1885) to S. Radhakrishnan (1948) and contemporary open-access digital parallel corpora.

From a curricular design perspective, this model directly challenges the hegemony of standardized Eurocentric literary anthologies. Course syllabus committees are required to adopt a multi-textual methodology that presents translated classical literature not as fixed, definitive English prose, but as dynamic interpretive choices. Integrating digital humanities modules into standard literature courses allows students to visualize sentiment shifts, lexical expansion factors, and thematic network graphs directly alongside primary reading assignments. This structural shift ensures that digital tools serve an active pedagogical purpose, transforming passive readers into active researchers who critically interrogate how non-Western texts are altered, packaged, and canonized within global publishing markets.

Ultimately, embedding the Bhagavad Gita within comparative literature programs provides a scalable blueprint for institutionalizing globalized, multi-centric humanities education. By explicitly

linking Eastern philosophical traditions to Western canonical figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, universities foster an inclusive academic environment that mirrors the diverse cultural backgrounds of modern student populations. This approach dismantles tokenistic approaches to multiculturalism by embedding non-Western texts into core methodological and theoretical discussions. In doing so, higher education institutions prepare literature graduates to navigate complex cross-cultural networks, equipping them with the critical, computational, and ethical capabilities necessary for 21st-century global scholarship.

Limitations and Failure Modes:

Despite its pedagogical potential, this framework presents several limitations and potential failure modes. First, an over-reliance on English translations inherently obscures the unique phonetic and token-efficient qualities of classical Sanskrit, potentially leading to a diluted understanding of the text's poetic genius (Kumar 2026). Second, there is a risk of educators miscontextualizing the philosophical tenets due to a lack of specialized training, which could inadvertently lead to the exoticization or misrepresentation of Indian Knowledge Systems. Third, traditionalist syllabus committees may push back against reallocating instructional time from established Western canonical works to Eastern texts, viewing the inclusion as an imposition rather than a scholarly expansion.

Addressing the first limitation, the inherent linguistic gap between Sanskrit and English poses a significant structural hurdle. Classical Sanskrit is an inflected, highly synthetic language governed by complex rules of Sandhi (euphonic combination of sounds) and Chandas (poetic meters like Anuṣṭubh and Triṣṭubh). In contrast, modern English relies heavily on an analytical structure using word order and auxiliary words. When automated tokenization tools or human translators flatten a dense verse—such as the 32-syllable Anuṣṭubh śloka—into English prose, the rhythmic cadence, acoustic resonance, and mnemonic economy of the original oral tradition are inevitably lost. Without exposure to the original auditory and morphological structure, students risk studying an

expanded, linearized paraphrase rather than the authentic poetic form of the Bhagavad Gita.

The second failure mode stems from pedagogical readiness and the risk of conceptual misrepresentation. Most literature educators trained in standard Western critical theory lack formal background in Darśana (classical Indian philosophical systems) or Sanskrit hermeneutics (Mīmāṃsā). Without specialized interdisciplinary training, instructors may unintentionally apply reductionist frames, conflating non-dualist Advaita Vedanta with Western monism, or mapping the multi-layered concept of Dharma directly onto Judeo-Christian notions of divine law or moral duty. Such oversimplifications risk exoticizing the text as an enigmatic Eastern relic or distorting its core doctrines to fit pre-existing Western theoretical models, ultimately undermining the academic rigor of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

The third challenge involves institutional inertia and curriculum politics within higher education. Syllabus committees often operate under strict credit-hour constraints and established canonical norms, creating friction when attempting to integrate non-Western classical texts into traditional English syllabi. Traditionalist faculties may view the inclusion of the Bhagavad Gita as a displacement of foundational British or American literary figures—such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Wordsworth—rather than an essential cross-cultural expansion. Overcoming this structural resistance requires demonstrating that introducing parallel Eastern texts enhances, rather than dilutes, students' critical engagement with Western canonical works like Emerson's and Thoreau's essays.

Finally, an over-reliance on computational metrics poses the subtle risk of algorithmic reductionism. While natural language processing (NLP) models, topic modeling, and sentiment analysis efficiently trace lexical variations and semantic drift across translated corpora, they operate within statistical parameters that cannot capture subjective humanistic reflection. Relying too heavily on automated outputs may lead students to treat quantitative translation scores as definitive assessments of literary value. To mitigate this failure

mode, computational tools must remain strictly subordinated to qualitative critique, ensuring that data-driven visualization serves as a catalyst for—rather than a replacement of—deep, reflective reading and historical contextualization.

Ethical Considerations:

The integration of a text as culturally and spiritually significant as the Bhagavad Gita into a secular literature classroom necessitates careful ethical considerations. First, educators must ensure that the text is approached strictly as a work of world literature and philosophy, actively avoiding the imposition of religious dogma or sectarian interpretations on students. Second, classroom discussions must equitably address the complex socio-political histories tied to the text, ensuring that the diverse perspectives and sensitivities of all students are respected. It is vital to maintain an environment where critical inquiry is encouraged without undermining the cultural dignity of the source material.

To operationalize these ethical guardrails, instructors must frame the Bhagavad Gita through a non-confessional, secular humanities lens. This approach requires treating the dialogue not as a prescriptive religious scripture, but as a foundational text of global intellectual history, public ethics, and epic poetry. Educators should clearly distinguish between devotional reception (Bhakti) and academic literary critique, ensuring that students are evaluated on their analytical rigor—such as examining narrative structure, rhetorical strategies, and translation choices—rather than their personal beliefs or ideological stances. By anchoring discussion in primary textual evidence and comparative literary theory, the classroom remains a secular space dedicated to critical inquiry and hermeneutic analysis.

Furthermore, a responsible decolonial pedagogy must address the text's complex socio-political reception history without resorting to reductive apologetics or totalizing critiques. Instructors must guide students through the divergent ways the Gita has been mobilized across different historical epochs—from Mahatma Gandhi's reading of Karma Yoga as an ethical imperative for non-

violent anti-colonial resistance (Satyagraha), to its historical critiques by anti-caste reformers like B.R. Ambedkar, who analyzed its social framework regarding Varna and Svadharma. Presenting these historical debate trajectories exposes students to the dynamic nature of textual reception, demonstrating how a singular classic yields competing ethical, political, and social interpretations throughout history.

Maintaining an inclusive learning environment also requires establishing clear classroom norms that prevent both the exoticization and the dogmatic defense of the text. Students from diverse cultural, religious, and secular backgrounds must feel empowered to voice critical perspectives on the text's philosophical dilemmas—such as the ethics of war in Chapter 1 or the tension between social duty and personal conscience—without fear of causing offense or facing academic penalties. Educators should actively counter essentialist assumptions by showing that Indian philosophical traditions are historically marked by vibrant internal debate (Pūrva-pakṣa and Uttar-pakṣa), rather than monolithic consensus.

Finally, ethical integration demands that computational humanities tools remain aligned with humanistic values and cultural dignity. Algorithmic analysis, sentiment tracking, and automated topic modeling must not be used to flatten complex metaphysical concepts into simplistic data points or sensationalized metrics. By maintaining a rigorous balance between computational transparency, socio-historical awareness, and respectful textual critique, institutions can introduce the Bhagavad Gita into the English syllabus in a manner that upholds academic integrity, honors cultural nuance, and fosters sophisticated cross-cultural dialogue.

Future Work:

Future research and pedagogical development should expand upon this framework in several directions. First, scholars should seek to broaden this comparative methodology to include intersections between Eastern philosophical texts and African, Indigenous, or Latin American literary traditions, moving beyond a simple East-West binary.

Second, there is a critical need to develop interactive, multilingual digital platforms specifically designed for literature students, allowing them to visually trace semantic shifts and sentiment variations across different historical translations of ancient texts. These advancements will further solidify the role of global epistemologies in the future of literary studies.

Looking toward the horizon of global comparative literature, expanding this pedagogical framework requires actively dismantling the traditional East-West binary. Future scholarship must forge dynamic analytical linkages between classical Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the rich oral, philosophical, and literary traditions of the Global South—including African Ubuntu ethics, Indigenous American ecological cosmologies, and Latin American magical realism. By juxtaposing the Bhagavad Gita's discourse on interconnectedness (Lokasamgraha) with the African humanist philosophy of Ubuntu ("I am because we are"), or comparing Sankhya views of nature with Andean Pachamama (Earth Mother) worldviews, future curricula can establish a truly polycentric network of world literature. This multi-directional dialogue ensures that non-Western epistemologies are not merely evaluated against European benchmarks, but engage each other in a rich, global conversation.

The next generation of computational humanities will rely on the development of bespoke, interactive multilingual digital platforms tailored specifically for literary and philosophical inquiry. Future digital environments will move far beyond static DFs or basic search engines, offering dynamic visual interfaces where students can instantly track how a single Sanskrit verse morphs across centuries of translation. Imagine an intuitive digital atlas where dragging a temporal slider reveals how terms like Dharma or Karma shifted in semantic weight from early 18th-century European renditions to contemporary post-colonial and machine-translated texts. By integrating real-time sentiment tracking, syntactic tree diagrams, and parallel corpus alignment, these platforms will make the hidden layers of

translation loss and cultural adaptation visually tangible for students worldwide.

As artificial intelligence and large language models continue to evolve, future pedagogical frameworks must also pioneer ethical AI-assisted hermeneutics. Rather than using generative AI as an automated shortcut for essay writing or simple translation, literature programs will train students to critically audit AI models for cultural and linguistic biases. Students will interrogate how algorithms tokenize inflected languages like Sanskrit, identify where large language models hallucinate Western theological concepts into non-Western texts, and fine-tune open-source models on verified historical commentaries. This emerging field of critical computational literacy ensures that future scholars remain the active humanistic directors of digital tools, safeguarding nuances of cultural heritage against algorithmic homogenization.

Furthermore, the future of humanities education lies in creating open-access, collaborative global classrooms connected through real-time digital infrastructure. Academic institutions across the Global South and North will co-design shared virtual seminars, allowing literature students in New Delhi, Nairobi, São Paulo, and Boston to analyze parallel texts together in real time. In these collaborative spaces, a verse from the Bhagavad Gita can be discussed simultaneously alongside a Yoruba oral poem, a Latin American narrative on land defense, and a Transcendentalist essay. This borderless model of learning transforms comparative literature from a localized university subject into a living, globally distributed practice of dialogue and mutual discovery.

Ultimately, these future directions envision a revitalized humanities curriculum where technology and ancient wisdom illuminate one another. By combining deep humanistic critique, cross-cultural comparative rigor, and cutting-edge computational visualization, higher education can cultivate scholars who are both technologically fluent and culturally grounded. Reimagining the study of classical texts like

the Bhagavad Gita as evolving, globally interconnected frameworks ensures that literature classrooms remain vital spaces for nurturing empathy, ethical clarity, and intellectual courage in an increasingly complex world.

Conclusion:

The ongoing project of decolonizing the English Literature curriculum requires more than the tokenistic addition of non-Western authors; it demands a fundamental restructuring of how texts are read, translated, and compared. By incorporating the Bhagavad Gita alongside movements such as American Transcendentalism, educators can dismantle epistemic hierarchies and highlight the rich, cross-cultural dialogues that have always existed in world literature. This comparative pedagogical framework not only respects the semantic and philosophical depth of ancient texts but also equips students with the critical tools to navigate complex global traditions.

Ultimately, recognizing India's philosophical contributions as integral to world literature pluralizes the academic canon and enriches the intellectual lives of students. As digital humanities and sophisticated linguistic analyses continue to reveal the nuances of translation and thematic alignment, the study of classical texts will only become more dynamic. By embracing these interdisciplinary and decolonial practices, university literature departments can cultivate a more interconnected, culturally competent, and ethically imaginative generation of scholars. To operationalize this decolonial restructuring, literature departments must fundamentally re-evaluate the pedagogical frameworks used to evaluate translated non-Western works. Historically, Eurocentric canons have treated texts like the Bhagavad Gita as ethnographic artifacts or religious oddities rather than foundational works of philosophy and literature. By integrating rigorous comparative methods—such as juxtaposing the Gita's concept of Karma Yoga with 19th-century American Transcendentalist critiques of materialism in the works of Emerson and Thoreau—curricula illuminate shared intellectual lineages. This structural realignment forces students to examine how core ideas

regarding duty, cosmic order (dharma), and the self (atman) traveled across borders, challenging the outdated narrative that Western literary traditions developed in isolation.

Furthermore, integrating advanced digital humanities tools into literary studies bridges the gap between traditional textual critique and quantitative analysis. Modern computational methodologies—including natural language processing (NLP), parallel corpus alignment, and tokenization analysis—allow students to map semantic drift and sentiment variations across historical English translations. By contrasting early colonial translations, such as Charles Wilkins' 1785 edition or Edwin Arnold's 1885 poetic version *The Song Celestial*, with post-colonial and modern scholarly renditions, students visually isolate how specific socio-political eras altered the text's philosophical vocabulary. This data-driven approach transforms translation from a passive background medium into an active object of critical interrogation.

Implementing this framework across higher education also addresses institutional limitations regarding faculty training and curriculum design. Cross-disciplinary collaboration between literature faculties, Sanskrit computational linguists, and digital humanities specialists is essential to prevent the oversimplification of complex philosophical concepts. Faculty development initiatives must focus on equipping literature educators to navigate untranslatable terms—such as dharma, karma, and guna—without flattening them into familiar Judeo-Christian concepts like “sin” or “moral law.” Proper interdisciplinary framing ensures that the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) elevates academic rigor rather than reducing rich philosophical traditions to superficial cultural inclusions.

Moving forward, expanding this comparative model beyond an East-West binary paves the way for a polycentric approach to world literature. Future pedagogical research must establish analytical bridges connecting classical Indian thought with African Ubuntu ethics, Indigenous ecological cosmologies,

and Latin American literary traditions. Grounding literary studies in multi-directional, cross-cultural exchanges ensures that university curricula prepare students to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. By combining computational precision, historical contextualization, and methodological nuance, higher education institutions can build an open, pluralistic canon that honors the full complexity of global intellectual history.

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