

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is an influential and important scripture in Hindu culture, as it is an aid to attain *moksa*, or self-realization. This scripture is highly regarded by cultural and political nationalists in Europe, American and India and people like Mahatma Ghandi used the *Gita* as a main source of inspiration to situations like the independence movement in India (Edgerton ix).. Like that of Christ in Christianity, the Buddha in Buddhism, or Allah in Islam, Hindus believe that Krsna is our real self (Easwaran 28). Krsna, who is the speaker of the *Gita* is incorporated in many aspects of this scripture. Some scholars say that the *Bhagavad-Gita* should be looked at as a religious, devotional poem (Edgerton 106). This “devotional poem” was recorded to be compiled into 700 verses divided into eighteen sections. This scripture has been devoutly followed by some Hindus, and has been looked at by some scholars to be a metaphorical text that has become to be known as a key Sanskrit scripture of Hinduism.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is contained in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, an influential scripture that is often called the great epic of India. The *Mahabharata* is much larger than that of other texts; it is the longest composition of literature of the ancient world as it contains approximately 100,000 couplets (Katz 2). This epic poem is considered to be the first to articulate the concept of *bhakti*, or devotion to God. The specific focus of *bhakti* in the *Mahabharata* is towards Visnu who is incarnated into a human form. Acts of devotion towards Krsna are seen not only within the *Mahabharata*, but more importantly in the *Gita*. “The Song of God” is advice from Lord Krsna to Arjuna on the battlefield in the Kuruksetra War fought between the five Pandava brothers and 100 Kauravas. As Arjuna’s charioteer, Krsna guides him in his decision making, helping the five brothers win the war. Through the *Gita*, Arjuna became Krsna’s disciple as he took his teachings, applied them to his own life, and shared them with others. In parallel to the

Pandava/Kaurava battle, Krsna insists that we must actually fight the battle against the suffering that we have within ourselves.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* was produced in the framework of the *Mahabharata* “to bring a solution to the *dharmic* dilemma of a war” (Buitenen 5). This creation of scripture that came from this milieu provides a “religious and philosophical context...which can be dealt with” (Buitenen 5). Hindu interpretations of the *Gita* suggest that as Arjuna had done, if we are able to let the Lord into our hearts, he can outline the highest goal of knowing our true self. This self contains two aspects which are explained in the *Gita*. The two principles are the “soul” or “self” and the “non-soul” (Edgerton 140). The soul does not have any qualities; it is unitary and does not change or partake in action. The “non-soul” or *prakrti* (material nature) is what performs actions, and changes unlike the “soul” (Edgerton 140). In this text, *prakrti* is explained to be developed throughout the body and as part of God. These elements of the self are discussed by Krsna in the *Gita* to his student Arjuna and is discussed that through *bhakti* (devotion) is one able to achieve this part of self.

Devotion to God is not discussed in the beginning of the *Gita*; however the “middle chapters of the work it gradually becomes more prominent” (Edgerton 173). Some scholars have indicated that the *Bhagavad-Gita* explains that God cancels *prakrti* as an aid and benefit to his devotees and brings them salvation through divine grace (Edgerton 174). The *Gita* opens up devoted worship to everyone; highest realization is not selected to certain classes (Rodrigues 163). So long as Krsna or any other deity is sincerely worshiped can a person be “rendered a saint through devotion” (Rodrigues 162). One clear example of a man who lives his life to devote himself to God is Arjuna.

In the *Gita*, Arjuna is related to other people that have the tendency to want to lead a life for their selves, not taking into account of what the Lord wants. This scripture contains teachings of Krsna to Arjuna that mention the selfish desire that can threaten a person's life if one were to not take care of it. Krsna is mentioned to have ultimate control over all universal affairs and it is only through him can a purified materially contaminated consciousness be achieved. Material nature, or *prakrti* "works under [his] direction" as it works eternally through his control. *Prakrti* is developed throughout the body, senses and mind, and is believed to be a part of God's own nature (Edgerton 141). Because of this, Krsna urges through Arjuna that he is to give him devotion to the significant and real life that he has given; particularly through meditation.

Karma yoga (selfless action), *jnana* yoga (spiritual wisdom) and *bhakti* yoga (love and devotion) are three types of meditation that are mentioned in the *Gita*. Some scholars suggest that the central principle to attain *moksa* is "action characterized by indifference...but it is always an indifference in action" (Edgerton 166). *Kama*, or attachment to actions creates a bondage to the "laws of causality," but the highest attainment of the self can be made without this bondage to actions (Rodrigues 161). *Jnana* yoga on the other hand means "discipline of knowledge" and involves the concentration and meditation to know the Self (Edgerton 166). In the *Gita*, Krsna identifies himself with the highest realization, or absolute reality. The last yoga mentioned in this scripture is *bhakti* yoga which means love and devotion; by "devoted love of God one can attain knowledge...and so indirectly the salvation which comes thru this knowledge" (Edgerton 173). The *Gita* stresses that through these stages, a follower is then able to be free from *karma* to gain *moksa*; as long as their actions do not liberate them. One must act without attachment from the outcome that comes with it. Through these stages can one reach full awareness towards Krsna, who in the *Gita* identifies himself with this ultimate realization.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* provides a clear description of Krsna as man, God, and Brahman as the absolute reality and redefines the yoga paths to attain the highest stage/goal of Hindu spiritual endeavour: *moksa*. The *Gita* explains to its readers that it is important for one is to find reason; to trust in God through devotion in order to reach this state of spiritual endeavour. This important Hindu scripture is “justified by the fact that millions of men have found religious comfort...and salvation thru it;” and it is because of this reason among many other factors has the *Bhagavad-Gita* become known to be a key Sanskrit scripture of Hinduism (Edgerton 194).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

Buitenen van J.A.B. (1981) *The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Edgerton, Franklin (1972) *The Bhagavad Gita*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Katz, Ruth (1989) *Arjuna in the Mahabharata*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Rodrigues, Hillary (2006) *Introducing Hinduism*. UK: Routledge.

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Noteworthy Websites Related to the Topic

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita/

<http://www.bhagavad-gita.us/>

http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/D_0307.htm

<http://www.asitis.com/>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sbe08/index.htm>

<http://www.krishna.com/taxonomy/term/49>

http://www.atmajyoti.org/gi_bhagavad_gita_intro.asp

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