



CV Hindu Cultural Society

Information Sheet



The Bhagavad Gita – An Introduction

The Bhagavad Gita is the essence of the Vedas and the Upanishads (the oldest and most universal Hindu scriptures), which have been beautifully condensed into 700 concise Shlokas (verses). It is renowned as the jewel of ancient India's spiritual wisdom, and was spoken by Lord Krishna on the great battlefield of the Mahabharata approximately 5200 years ago.

The Mahabharata is an epic tale which started with two brothers: Dhritarashtra and Pandu. Pandu had five children – Yudhishthira (the eldest), Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. These were the Pandavas. Dhritarashtra had one hundred sons and one daughter. The eldest of these sons, were Duryodhana and Dushasana. Pandu passed away and the Pandavas were brought up by Dhritarashtra along with his sons – known as the Kauravas. The Kauravas were unable to tolerate the intelligence and bravery of the Pandavas. When they grew up the decision was taken to divide the kingdom so that each group of cousins would rule a half each.



The Kauravas soon became jealous of the wealth, prosperity and happiness of the Pandavas, and Duryodhana wanted the whole kingdom to himself. With the advice of his cunning uncle Shakuni, he invited Yudhishthira to a game of dice, and using weighted dice cheated to win the game. Yudhishthira lost all his wealth, his brothers and even the wife of the Pandavas – Draupadi. It was eventually decided that they should all go to live for twelve years in exile in the forest, and for one year in hiding. During this period the whole kingdom was left under the control of the depraved Duryodhana.

Having successfully completed these 13 years, the Pandavas approached the Kauravas for their share of the kingdom. However, Duryodhana refused to give them any land at all. Having tried all means of negotiation, the only option left was to go to war against the Kauravas. Both Duryodhana and Arjuna went to seek the help of Lord Krishna (the incarnation of Lord Vishnu) from the kingdom of Dwarka. Lord Krishna offered either his huge army, or just Himself, with no weapons, taking no active part in the battle. Arjuna chose to have Lord Krishna's presence by his side, and asked Him to become his charioteer.

The war was due to pit cousin against cousin, uncle against nephew, teacher against student. As the battle was to commence, Arjuna asked Krishna to take the chariot to the centre of the battlefield, between the two armies. Lined up on the opposite side he saw many of his nearest and dearest. He became unsure of the righteousness of his cause – there would be no victory in slaying his own kith and kin. He laid down his weapons, and refused to fight.

Here commences the Bhagavad Gita, as Lord Krishna addresses the despondency of Arjuna

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