Commentary On The Bhagavad Gita Essay, Research Paper

Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita by Farhan Abbasi

This modern day translation of the Bhagavad Gita, written by Barbara Stoller Miller, focused briefly on Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War. It was a fairly short yet in depth description of Hindu beliefs and the conflicts that humans encounter when deciding which path to follow. The translation is in poetic form, and is divided between eighteen teachings, or chapters if you will. Each teaching focuses on one discipline of the mind, revealed through the Hindi god Krishna, to the man seeking knowledge at the time of his life’s most crucial stage, Arjuna.

This translation was very interested to read, especially for me, who never really have gotten the chance to read any literature that relates to myself. This book doesn’t necessarily relate to me, but it comes close in a way. My father is Indian, and my mother is Pakistani. That is about the only thing that comes close ethnic-wise to this epic. I am Muslim, so me being a monotheist logically doesn’t fully satisfy Hinduism requirements. Yet I understand the beliefs, and other than the polytheism aspect of the religion, along with some other beliefs, I agree and at times try to follow a number of the teachings that improve the human soul. For instance, on page 46, in the Third Teaching, Arjuna asks, “Krishna, what makes a person commit evil against his own will, as if compelled by force?” and Krishna answers, “It is desire and anger, arising from nature’s quality of passion; know it here as the enemy, voracious and very evil!” I generally agree with this idea, that passion really creates desire, which most of the time creates anger. A lot of people have obsession with things or people, and it is derived from their passion, which turns to desire, which becomes anger, especially when they don’t get what they really want. There are things in my life that I try to keep a distance from me. When at first I know it’s not good for me, and I find myself beginning to like it more, as if I’m developing a passion for it, I stray myself away from it. Most of the time, if it works, it helps me from a lot of possible danger in the future.

Yet even that belief, there can be a contradiction on my part, as there are a lot of in the book. If one stays away from passion, how can one strive at anything in life? Does this message preach that we as human beings should turn away our desire of going to school, for example? Also, a lot of people turn their passion of something into a work of art. Where would Picasso be without his passion for painting? Where would Mozart be without his passion for music?

Another contradiction is noticed on the same page, just a couple paragraphs below, “The senses, mind, and understanding are said to harbor desire; with these desire obscures knowledge and confounds the embodied self.” Mistake me if I’m wrong, but doesn’t knowledge come from understanding? If this is true, then understanding cannot be a cause of obscuring knowledge, since understanding causes knowledge itself.

As I read on, I didn’t know if I was getting the true meaning of the book, or just the meaning as Ms. Miller saw it. It really felt like the writing was “modernized” for western readers. I wasn’t sure if this epic was a book that defined Hinduism, or a book that used Hinduism as a pivot for its ideas. There were a lot of things that contradicted with the Hindu views, such as the term “hell” which really has no meaning in Hindu belief, yet is included as a punishment that Krishna will give if humans don’t follow his teachings. Hinduism is based on reincarnation, and hell is really a term used in more modern religions such as Christianity and Islam.

On a brighter note, I finished the book knowing that some of my past beliefs – like trying to abstain from sensual objects – are very common to the teachings provided in this book. This is very important because it is proof that although one may have a set faith in one religion or belief, it doesn’t necessarily mean that one can’t learn from other religions, or practices. As times change, so do people’s thoughts, and overtime old-age religions become the new-age thinking, as people try to look for “new” ways to lead their life, which at the time may seem empty or in need of some spiritual guidance.

To conclude, this book provided a lot of spiritual guidance, and one has to make the right decisions as to which one is desirable (hmm…a quick thought: In the book’s view, can one desire spiritual guidance from Krishna?). That is a question I will ponder…