

“My Heritage” Essay Submitted at Bhartiya Samaj of Central Florida’s website (www.BSCFL.com)

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Submitted Essay:

When I was younger, my mother would take me to a local Svādhyāya Kendra, a place where Hindus gather to self-study and teach scriptures, like the Bhagavad Gita, to each other as a part of their self-transformation. My mother’s purpose in taking me to Svādhyāya was to instill Hindu values into my life early on, so I understand the magnitude and breadth of my culture. Of the many valuable things that were taught, the Gita stood out to me as one of the most important. In light of a recent controversy where an author was banned from India for condemning certain aspects of the Gita, the vital nature of the text became evident to me, and I discovered it to be important to spread the true message of this scripture from a Hindu perspective without any false interpretations that paint the Gita in a misconstrued light. Additionally, the desire to learn what drives so many Hindus, like me, to adhere to the Gita has sparked my interest in delving deeper into the meaning and implications of the text, thus, leading me to self-study the Gita.

As a first-generation Indian American it is easy to forget about the meaning behind many of the rituals, festivals, rites, and practices in Hindu culture. I had a misconception that Hindu practices were all more obligatory in nature, where no one knew why they were reading or doing certain things; however, after studying the Gita I gained a deeper understanding of why we, Hindus, do many of the things we do. The Gita is an ancient scripture that allows Hindus around the world to become enlightened by the words of God and live righteously in unity with their divine brothers and sisters. Through this small book full of the lord’s extraordinary thoughts, I have learned a myriad of lessons that have shaped who I am today. For example, the Gita has taught me to overcome any obstacle by always choosing the righteous path no matter how obscure the line between right and wrong may be. My mother and gurus like Sujata auntie have furthered my understanding of the tenants in the text by elaborating on the shlokas. They have taught me to see the Gita as a life guide instead of as a scripture. Teachings such as these have helped me grow into the person I am today.

From the Gita, I have learned to be selfless, sublime my ego, and sharpen my intellect. These values have trickled over into my life in many forms; one of the most prominent being community service. From volunteering at the chemotherapy center at Lakeland Regional Hospital to planning food drives for VISTE, I have learned to stick to my roots which are deep-seated in the teaching of the Gita. Even in the most trivial aspects of life, the scripture has the ability to disillusion and inspire growth in individuals. From my study and application of the sacred text, it can be concluded that the Gita is a scripture that not only serves as a life guide to attain moksha but also as a cultural backbone. The text has taught me that Hindu practices for Indian Americans like me have dual purposes: to bring about enlightenment and bring you closer to your heritage. Overall, in a world where western ideals have the power to culturally metamorphize traditional belief systems, the solidification of my cultural backbone is of the utmost importance to me.