

For Immediate Release – November 12, 2020

Vancouver scholar offers first ‘decolonized’ English translation of famous ancient scripture

Author says revered sacred text more relevant than ever

Vancouver, BC – Ten years in the making, a new English version of the world’s most translated – and mistranslated – ancient Indian scripture could be the purest because it does not include colonial, western or Christian distortions.

Written more than 5,000 years ago – some calculate 7,500 years ago – the *Bhagavad Gita* is considered the ultimate guide on how to navigate life’s struggles and dilemmas and find meaning within existence. It is the central and enduring sacred text of Hindu and other eastern cultures that can be found in households worldwide.

The book also has prevailing global influence as a “leading book of yoga,” and a following that includes Arianna Huffington who recently wrote: “The *Bhagavad Gita* is a source of wisdom in this crucible time.”

Translated hundreds of times

Considered a literary masterpiece with universal appeal, the *Gita* has been translated hundreds of times in 75 languages since 1785. It even provided the premise of the multi-star Hollywood movie, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*.

When local Vedic (Hindu) scholar and linguist Jeffrey Armstrong embarked on being the first Canadian to translate the *Gita* into English, he thought he was doing a straight Sanskrit-to-English translation. Through his research, he discovered that previous western versions had distorted the *Gita* with concepts, words and theories that do not exist in Sanskrit or Indian cultures.

Armstrong spent 10 years “decolonizing” the text to capture it accurately. *The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive: A Radical Translation* released this week on Amazon, timed with Diwali celebrations. Armstrong says the book’s teachings are more relevant than ever.

“As we navigate a changing world amidst a global pandemic, climate change, and universal calls for social justice, the *Gita* offers guidance and lessons that are timely, including about ethical and moral dilemmas, politics, and cooperating with nature,” said Armstrong, vice-chair of the Vedic Friends Association and scholar with the British Board of Dharmic Scholars.

A few of the Christian words and concepts that Armstrong avoids in his translation include: God, heaven, hell, soul, and sin. “These words and concepts cannot be used as synonyms for Vedic and yogic words and philosophies. I offer the *Gita* in its true essence where I keep key Sanskrit words and use English to support their true meaning and intent.”

For example, the word “soul” originated with the Greeks and is defined as the essence of a human being who has one lifetime followed by consequences. *The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive* replaces “soul” with the correct and intended Sanskrit word, “atma,” which means “the invisible, immortal being with no beginning or end.”

Testimonials

Dr. David Frawley – American Hindu scholar who was awarded India’s third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan, by the Indian government:

“There has long been demand for a version of the Gita that corrects distortions. With this translation by Jeffrey Armstrong, who deeply understands the connotations and subtle connections of the Sanskrit terms around which the Gita revolves, we finally have an extensive and profound English version of the Bhagavad Gita.”

Professor Ved P. Nanda: Head of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), a North American non-profit organization that aims to preserve and promote Hindu ideals and values. The University of Denver’s international law department is named after Nanda, who is an awarded adjunct professor at the university. The Indian government awarded Nanda its third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan:

“Jeffrey Armstrong has produced a master translation, carefully preserving its intended meaning. The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive: A Radical Translation enables the reader to unlock the profound messages which are obscured by other versions.”

-30-

About Jeffrey Armstrong

Jeffrey Armstrong is an award-winning author, linguist, and poet. He has been teaching the Vedas for more than 40 years. He also had a successful 15-year career as an executive in Silicon Valley and public speaker addressing Fortune 500 companies. His other books include *Spiritual Teachings of the Avatar*, and *Karma: The Ancient Secret of Cause & Effect*.

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