

Management Thoughts and Srimad Bhagavad Gita

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ABSTRACT

Holy Gita is one of the greatest contributions of India to the world. It comprises 700 slokas, a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna at the battle of Kurukshetra. Realizing the fear and emotional dilemma of Arjuna for fighting against his kith and kin as well as his gurus, Lord Krishna urges him to stand up for righteousness and truth, and to perform his duty with sincerity and integrity. A vigilant study of Bhagavad Gita leads us to important principles and lessons which must be inherited by managers and executives of present era to perform their duties in an effective and efficient manner. The paper attempts to re-examine some of the modern management concepts and thoughts in the light of Bhagavad Gita by reviewing literature of studies present on different aspects of management with reference to Bhagavad Gita.

Keywords: Arjuna, Bhagavad Gita, leadership, Lord Krishna, management thoughts

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INTRODUCTION

Management has become an essential part of daily life, no matters we are managing at our home, office or somewhere else. Management comes into existence whenever there is a group of people coming together for some common goal. Management is a process of planning, organizing, staffing and controlling various activities and resources to achieve the desired objectives. It is concerned with getting things done through and with the people efficiently and effectively. It ensures maximum output with minimum or effective utilization of resources. However, the most critical part of management is effective utilization of resources. The managers concern is about how to become effective. Though various management thinkers of the day have propounded various philosophies or approaches of management like F. W. Taylor's Scientific management, Henry Fayol's principles of management, etc. the answer to this question lies in our holy books like Bhagavad Gita which says 'you must try to manage yourself'.

The Bhagavad Gita which was written thousands of years ago, give us solutions to various daily life problems as well as to lead us a harmonious life in place of conflict, tensions, poor performance, lack of motivation etc., which has become common in today's organizations.

Bhagavad Gita also reflects the modern management concepts of motivation, leadership, decision making, etc. [1]. Where, the modern management thoughts concern the material and external problems, on the other hand, Bhagavad Gita is concerned with human thinking. The quality of actions of an individual can be enhanced, if the his/her basic thinking is improved.

The modern management which is based on materialism concentrates on making employees (and the manager) to become more efficient by offering those more to work more, produce more, and sell more. The employees have become hirable commodities now, which can be used,

replaced or even can be discarded. The employees also adopt unreasonable means to get maximum benefits for themselves from the organizations. This practice has led to a worse situation. There have become differences between management and the employees. In this way, modern philosophy of management has failed in ensuring betterment of individual life and social welfare. Hence, there is a need to redefine modern management in the light of its objectives, scope and content in order to develop an employee as a human being, not as a mere wage earner. With this, the management can become an effective tool in social and national development.

The paper attempts to re-examine some of the modern management concepts and thoughts in the light of Bhagavad Gita.

MANAGEMENT THOUGHTS AND BHAGAVAD GITA

Numerous studies have been conducted by various researchers on different aspects of management from Srimad Bhagavad Gita in India and abroad. In the following section, management thoughts, principles or lessons which are essential for the success of an individual as well as of an organization are discussed after thorough review of studies available on the issue.

Utilization of Scarce Resources

Optimum utilization of scarce resources is the most important thought of management. As in Mahabharata, Duryodhana selected Lord Krishna's large army while Arjuna chose Lord Krishna's wisdom. It reflects the nature of effective manager, where, the former chose the numbers while the latter, wisdom [1, 2]. The managers should strive to effective utilization of resources like human resources, capital resources, physical resources etc. they should set and fix priorities, eliminate time gaps between tasks, keep a balance of politeness and productive time in inner office communications and speed up by doing

many small tasks, one right after another, rather than a few long tasks. Multi-tasking should be avoided.

Work Commitment

Bhagavad Gita advises that one should detach himself or herself from the fruits or results of actions performed in the course of one's duty [1–3]. One should be dedicated to work which means, working for the sake of work, and getting excellence in it. If we are concerned more about our monetary benefits only, without putting our efforts, it will affect quality of work, and will never lead to excellence in work. Hence, the best means of effective performance management is the work itself. One should not speculate future gains for the sake of present commitment. *Nishama karma*, i.e. working without expecting future gains, is the right attitude to work [4]. Bhagavad Gita also preached that clarity of objective behind any action, knowledge of instruments of action, co-ordination amongst different efforts for the action, dedication and devotion to action and detachment to results of action are the essentials of any action [5]. Results and outcomes are matter of future and work is a matter of present and Bhagavad Gita taught us to get lost in work for ever and enjoy doing it [6].

Motivation: Theory of Self-Transcendence

For many years, it has been believed that to satisfy the lower order needs of employees, i.e. their food, clothing and shelter are the key factors in motivation. However, it may happen that the highly paid employee may show higher dissatisfaction or poorer self-actualization than a lower paid employee. A highly paid director may find difficult to optimize his contribution to the organization as well as society, while a lower paid employee may demonstrate higher levels of self-actualization despite poor satisfaction of his lower-order needs. This situation is explained by the theory of self-

transcendence propounded in the *Gita*. Self-transcendence involves abandoning egoism, putting others before oneself, emphasising team work, dignity, co-operation, harmony and trust - and, indeed potentially sacrificing lower needs for higher goals, the opposite of Maslow [1]. Hence, there is need of not only theory of motivation but also a theory of inspiration. Detached involvement in work is a state of mind where employee starts feeling presence of the Supreme Intelligence guiding the individual intelligence. Such persons believe in supremacy of organizational goals as compared to narrow personal goals.

As per the Bhagavad Gita, motivation to work should be intrinsic, and not determined by external expectations of rewards. However, it contradicts with modern management theories according to which motivation comes from needs of individuals e.g. Abraham Maslow's need hierarchy theory of motivation suggests that an individual has different levels of needs. Once the basic needs of a person like need of food, clothing and shelter are fulfilled, the individual desires for safety and security. This is followed by the needs for social affiliation, need for esteem or recognition, and need for self-actualization. The need for recognition and acknowledgement for one's contribution within the organization is what motivates an individual to perform better [1, 7].

Work Culture

Bhagavad Gita states about two types of "*daivisampat*" or divine work culture and "*asurisampat*" or demonic work culture [1]. Daivi work culture - involves fearlessness, purity, self-control, sacrifice, straightforwardness, self-denial, calmness, absence of fault-finding, absence of greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of envy and pride. On the other hand, Asuri work culture - involves egoism, delusion, personal desires, improper performance,

work not oriented towards service. For getting excellence in work, integration of work ethics with ethics in work is required. For this purpose and for the betterment of the society, Bhagavad Gita stresses upon Daivi work culture.

Leadership

Bhagavad Gita talks about transformation leadership. Arjuna got motivated, energized and acted in accordance with Sri Krishna's instructions, after hearing *Bhagavad Gita*. Transformational leaders (HR managers) exhibit charisma, encourage followers to question their own way of doing things, and treat followers differently but equitably based on follower need. Modern HR managers and consultants can benefit from the philosophy of *Bhagavad Gita*, which can serve as a guide in HRM. To be successful, a leader or a manager must understand the characteristics of his subordinates and must know how to take best advantage of opportunities [8, 9]. He must empower his subordinates through three steps: *bhakti* - where manager should establish relationship with employees, *Yukti* - where manager should focus on the development of the intellect of the subordinates just like Krishna transformed Arjuna and *Mukti* - where manager should give more and more freedom to employees in the work [10]. The success of an organization lies where manager keeps a larger vision comprising good of mankind and welfare of society [9]. By the synthesis of *Bhagavad Gita* philosophy, beliefs, attitudes and values with Western thought and techniques, Indian managers would be able to fulfill their Indian cultural specific roles not only in Indian corporate scene but in the world corporate scene also [9]. The quality of leadership will improve drastically and hence the quality of management, when the managers or leaders can develop a sense of equanimity [6]. The visionary leader must be a missionary, extremely

practical, intensively dynamic and capable of translating dreams into reality. This dynamism and strength of a true leader flows from an inspired and spontaneous motivation to help others [1].

Work Results

The theory of detachment as given by the Gita explains that if work results turn out to be success, the entire credit shouldn't be assumed by single person (doer), similarly for negative results also, the entire blame shouldn't accrue to the doer. The former attitude results into moderating arrogance while the later prevents demotivation. Both these attitudes strengthen the doer psychologically [1].

Sri Krishna's advice with regard to temporary failures is, "No doer of good ever ends in misery." Every action should produce results. Good action produces good results and evil begets nothing but evil. Therefore, always act well and be rewarded.

Sound Mental Health

A managers' sound mental health is very much necessary for smooth functioning of the organization. Sound mental health is the state of mind where, he/she is able to maintain a calm and positive self-control or regain it when disturbed due to presence of external and internal causes of work and social life [1]. Some of the inhibitors in the way of sound mental health are greed (for power, position, money, etc.), resentment or jealousy (for others' achievements, success or rewards), egotism (of one's own status or achievements), anger, frustration etc. (through competition). All these factors cause mental imbalance and person is forced to indulge into immoral activities like tax evasion, clever financial reporting, etc. Bhagavad Gita advocates that in order to gain sound mental health, a manager should try to possess and maintain internal constancy, mental peace and a calm mindset even in adverse situations and

should try to avoid greed, envy, ego, suspicion and anger [2, 11, 12].

Surrender to the Supreme

Bhagavad Gita advises to surrender ourselves to Lord. One should not doubt the existence of Almighty. Spirituality leads to social harmony and also helps human beings in realization of the objective of their very existence [2]. A business can lead towards excellence through transformation of thought process through spiritual learning [13].

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Modern management theories and thoughts deal with materialistic approaches for managing the organizations, while the Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the importance of managing oneself. As per Bhagavad Gita, all human efforts should be directed towards 'welfare of all beings.' It can be achieved by selfless actions. Lord Krishna transformed the mind of Arjuna from the state of dilemma to one of the righteous action. He advised that his actions should not be for his own benefit but for the welfare or goodness of many.

Though western or modern management thoughts and concepts cannot be discarded completely, however, the need of the hour is to modify them in accordance with the ideals of Bhagavad Gita. Management should be redefined to underline the development of the worker as a person, as a human being, and not as a mere wage-earner. With this changed perspective, management can become an instrument in the process of social and indeed national development.

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