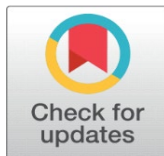
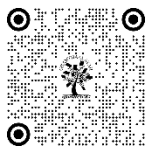


LESSONS FROM THE BHAGAVADGITA FOR MODERN MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

India's intellectual heritage has generated an extensive body of literature on fundamental issues like life, death, spirituality and the universe. When we look back at our legacy and understand it, we found that It's not just knowledge, but continuing practice of wisdom, insight, and self-discovery. One such source of timeless knowledge is the Bhagavadgita. The Bhagavadgita, the most esteemed scripture of Hindu philosophy, has made significant contributions to the philosophical, religious, and spiritual domains of Hindu thought, earning great respect and acceptance among the global intellectual community—from scientists to spiritual figures. When we refer to Hindu thought, we are talking about the Hindu lifestyle, not the religion itself. Lord Krishna delivered this teaching on the battlefield of Kurukshetra to advise Arjuna about his responsibilities as a warrior to combat for justice. This ongoing counseling, spanning eighteen chapters, covers all management strategies aimed at attaining mental balance and overcoming crisis situations. Whether it is the transformation of human personality, achieved through a genuine comprehension of spirituality, into a vibrant, joyful existence that maintains equanimity in all situations, the ethical aspect of social existence, along with idea of Lokasangraha, focused training for optimal performance- all these crucial points of management have discussed in the Bhagavadgita. This is an effort to contemplate some lessons from the Bhagavad Gita and their relevance to contemporary management practices in the current global landscape, and how they might combine with Western approaches for an improved world.

Keywords: Management, Bhagavadgita, Spirituality

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavadgita is a monumental work that combines profound philosophical concepts with everyday life through Yoga, devotion, karma, and svadharma. Bhagavan Krishna is the world's first management guru, who encapsulated spiritual philosophy for achieving performance. Throughout the entire conversation between Krishna-Arjuna, Krishna acts as a management instructor, training Arjuna to be both a trainee manager and a capable performer.

In management, it is essential to possess skills that can bring forth the maximum potential from an individual, whether in the role of a manager or as part of a team. In this context, comprehending the components of an individual's personality, the characteristics of these components, the sources of concern, and the approaches to resolution is essential. The principles of Bhagavadgita aid in comprehending one's inherent impulses and inclinations, to rouse an individual from the lethargy of passivity, and to inspire. Currently, people globally are seeking ancient knowledge that offers a development model that is stress-free, sustainable, and effective in maximizing one's abilities without confronting the ego or guiding and harnessing inner potentials appropriately. Starting a new venture or maintaining a balanced lifestyle can be quite challenging for anyone when the conditions are unfavorable or conflict with an individual's desires or values. Anyone can be affected by various fears and doubts about winning or losing, being praised

or criticized, achieving success or facing failure, just as Arjuna was on the battlefieldⁱ. Therefore, what is required in management is mental health counseling to inspire individuals to fulfill their responsibilities during times of crisis. It can be regulated solely through practice and detachment.ⁱⁱ Therefore, the description of a self-realized individual or sthitaprajna can be regarded as simply a self-regulated person in management language.ⁱⁱⁱ The dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, especially in the moments when Arjuna faces moral and emotional dilemmas, provide timeless wisdom that transcends the battlefield and applies to corporate leadership and organizational behaviour and it can be summarized in the following points.

SELF-MANAGEMENT – A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP:

When we discuss the lessons from the Krishna-Arjuna dialogue from a management viewpoint, it primarily concerns self-management, which ultimately enables one to manage others effectively. Gita focuses on individual change to initiate organizational change. Self-discipline and Self-Control which is basically discussed as self-management that combines karma, bhakti, and jnana with the idea of Yoga. The combination of knowledge, dedication, and effort elevates an individual to the pinnacle of achievement, transforming them from feelings of despair, sadness, and hopelessness to strength and excellence. It is the holistic approach to leadership integrating mind, body and soul.

Nehru eloquently expresses in his *Discovery of India* that during times of crisis, when the mind grapples with uncertainty and is conflicted by responsibilities, it increasingly seeks the Gita for illumination and direction, as it serves as a poem of turmoil - encompassing political and social upheaval, and even more so, the inner turmoil of humanity. To manage various circumstances, to guide a team, to make the right choices, it is crucial for a manager to fortify their mind, as only a resilient and brave mind can face challenges successfully, as demonstrated by Arjuna. Krishna states that managing the mind is harder than managing the wind^{iv}, and for those who have mastered their mind, it becomes their greatest ally. Self-motivation and self-transcendence form the foundation of this self-management, which requires commitment to action as an obligation while relinquishing the outcomes, thus ensuring complete engagement of both mind and heart. This self-management is a combination of karmayoga, bhaktiyoga and jyanayoga –

(a) In terms of karmayoga, the anticipation of rewards should not serve as the driving factor. The objective ought to extend beyond the personal desire for financial gain. The achievement of perfection and excellence in one's work is a pursuit to reach a greater spiritual level, governed by dharma. This is basically about managing emotions and focus in work. Emotional intelligence is very important in management in decision making during challenges, which inspire the entire team.^v

(b) Empathy and Understanding is one of the aspect significant for Managers or Team leaders. Krishna's empathy towards Arjuna and his addressing of the personal concerns with compassion and wisdom establish the requirement of leaders, the capacity to understand the emotional and professional challenges of his team and to address them with proper guidance to help in build trust and loyalty. The connection between the leader or manager and the employees should resemble love and friendship similar to Krishna-Arjuna, which facilitates convincing them with ease. Bhaktiyoga explains this aspect of a person. Love and devotion must serve as the foundation for the work ethic, eliminating the division between personal good and collective good.

(c) Jnanamarga suggests that an individual should possess observational and analytical abilities, along with business acumen, enabling them to make timely and appropriate decisions. Because the genuine essence of action is mysterious, there is knowledge to be gained regarding action, knowledge to be gained regarding forbidden action, and knowledge that must be understood about inaction.^{vi}

Thus, it is referred to as the true well-being of a person, where all aspects—physical, moral, and spiritual, or in other terms, connotation, cognition, and emotion—are addressed, ultimately benefiting the entire team or organization. Therefore, in the teachings of the Bhagavadgita, work-life and work-ethics are intrinsically spiritual yet materially manifested, which makes work inherently spiritual and devoid of a distinct identity, meaning it is not separate from the process of life. This holistic concept of self-management is the foundation of transformational management practices.

Detachment from Results (Nishkama karma): It is the belief that Nature dictates performance. We cannot abstain from activity even for an instant as Gita says one cannot even uphold one's own body.^{vii} The Bhagavadgita teaches that life ought to be viewed as an ongoing sacrifice to God, while also adhering to the law of Karma, which implies that our present actions affect the future, since every action yields two types of outcomes – a visible or immediate result, and an invisible result manifested as samskaras. The kingdom did not compel Arjuna to engage in battle, but living as a sacrifice aligned with God's intention in nature motivated him to act for the benefit of society or humanity. Actions are always

better than inaction; therefore, one should carry out actions as a responsibility, without attachment.^{viii} The Bhagavad Gita states that the one who perceives inaction within action and action within inaction is the truly wise among people; he practices yoga and performs all deeds (Gita-4.18). One must rise above the fears associated with outcomes, whether favorable or unfavorable; hence, the Bhagavadgita describes Yoga as equanimity, which involves letting go of attachment and maintaining balance in both success and failure while performing an action (Gita-2.48). The theory of self-transcendence entails giving up minor personal benefit and egoism, emphasizing the importance of placing a higher goal grounded in trust, harmony, and cooperation. It involves transcending personal identity to create a work environment by effectively directing the feelings of employees in a cohesive manner, aimed at a larger goal of collective endeavor. Such an individual is referred to as *sthitaprajna* – a person of unwavering wisdom (Gita-2.55).

Process is more important than outcome: The focus of a leader should be on being process-oriented instead of goal-oriented. It is possible through the advice of Nishkama karma as Krishna told to Arjuna. When we adhere to the dictates of nature concerning our actions and recognize that we possess a right only to the action itself, and not the outcome, it results in a focus on the process instead of the goal. Krishna emphasizes the importance of performing one's duty while remaining detached from the results. The outcome should not be the goal of any action, as the Bhagavadgita explains that if we manage the process correctly, the result will come naturally. This is certainly accurate from a management viewpoint. This reduces stress, increases resiliences, and helps foster a growth-oriented, process-driver culture. Simply focusing on the goal will not yield the desired outcome unless one pays attention to the employees' performance, resources, sound decision-making, motivation, evaluation, etc.^{ix}

Training for optimal performance and effectiveness. Effectiveness: Performing the correct actions at the correct time, and efficiency, meaning performing actions correctly, form the core of management studies. In the Bhagavadgita, we observe these two elements in the depiction of Arjun's character, who was already capable, yet his effectiveness was questioned because of his perplexing state of mind during the decision-making moment. To enhance both efficiency and effectiveness, the Bhagavad Gita introduces the idea of accomplishing tasks as a means of worshipping the Lord. It acts as a gift or service to God, making the doer a channel for the Lord's work, in which the performer continuously endeavors to improve oneself.

As work is seen as a manifestation of commitment to the Lord, labor performed with total dedication transforms into a source of joy, a form of play. Viewing duty as a source of joy, individuals appear more dedicated to it, resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency in work-life quality. Simple rewards or rigid regulations cannot achieve these outcomes; instead, we must grasp human personality and psychology from a comprehensive perspective. Grasping human behavior at this profound level with its spiritual perspective will aid in training or inspiring dedicated efforts. The approach of boosting employee performance by tapping into their sense of loyalty or dedication to the greater purpose of organizational and social welfare (*lokasamgraha*) is significant.

Team selection, delegation and Empowerment: The Bhagavadgita identifies four distinct types of devotees based on their mindset or motivation related to their objectives. Every individual in this world possesses their unique perception of life and their responsibilities. Some individuals worship God due to their hardships; others seek to understand God, driven by a desire for knowledge; some pray to God with the intention of obtaining material wealth, while others embody wisdom. Among these, the most admirable is the wise man, who is always aligned with me and possesses unwavering devotion; he holds a special place in my heart.^x From a managerial viewpoint, this can be quite beneficial for choosing suitable candidates. The first type of individuals consists of those who wouldn't have had opportunities elsewhere and would greedily look for any opportunity, they get. They are present because of a lack of other options, so they shouldn't be seen as suitable for the role; we need individuals who are there by choice, not because they lack alternatives. The second category of individuals searching for the job purely for the sake of acknowledgment. These individuals are likewise not liberated from their ego and uniqueness, having comprehended their existence solely in an external manner. Nevertheless, certain individuals may be driven to pursue any career solely for financial gain or material wealth; therefore, fueled only by greed rather than by responsibility, which is the primary barrier to effective and efficient performance. Only a limited number of individuals qualify for the position, possessing a vision and a profound comprehension of life that goes beyond the materialistic dimensions of their character. A person like this can be valuable for the organization or as a team member and can contribute effectively and efficiently to the overall performance of the team. The Bhagavadgita distinguishes three types of performers based on their personality characteristics, namely those

of sattvika, rajasika, and tamasika nature. The sattvika artist is considered exceptional, devoid of ego, dedicated, energetic, unaffected by triumph or defeat, and sincere.^{xi} The second type of performer can be described as mediocre, driven by greed, chasing wealth, engaging in violence, lacking good behavior, passionate, and prejudiced.^{xii} Some individuals lack control over their temperament, being vulgar and arrogant, deceitful, prone to theft, lazy, frustrated, and unaware of their responsibilities, representing the worst kind of performer^{xiii}. Therefore, it is essential for the manager or any higher authority in management to continuously monitor all diverse groups of employees, as they can remove the unreliable ones and advance the deserving ones based on their performance. As Krishna encourages Arjuna to fulfill his role, managers should delegate task based on their strength and ask them to take ownership of their work. Trusting help employees to take their responsibilities and ownership. An effective way to motivate individuals is to have faith in their capabilities, as illustrated by Arjuna, whom Krishna trusted to uphold dharma against adharma among the five brothers.

Visionary and Transformational Leadership: A leader should have the vision and the ability or quality to face every challenge by transforming himself as per situation and also to lead by example and Integrity so that he can transform others with his vision and influence. As personal management comes before personnel management, the qualities of leadership involve managing time, stress, anger, fear, and self-control^{xiv}, alongwith the ability to adept and interact with individuals who may approach him in distinct ways based on their position, status, mindset, etc. If we view Lord Krishna as the management coach or team leader and Arjuna as the mentee, the charismatic nature of Lord Krishna alongside his remarkable ability to inspire a troubled individual illustrates that a leader must be visionary enough that their simple presence can uplift fellow team members. The use of the sun's parable in illuminating the world^{xv} to explain the idea of the Self in relation to the non-self, meaning the self-illuminates the world, can serve as an example of a leader presenting himself as a model or visionary. As per circumstances, the manager must possess the capability to tackle challenges, mirroring Lord Krishna's assertion that whenever righteousness wanes and unrighteousness prevails in society, I manifest in various forms throughout time to safeguard the virtuous, to annihilate the wicked, and to firmly establish dharma.^{xvi} Followers emulate the leader, as the Bhagavad Gita states that whatever actions a superior individual performs, others tend to replicate those actions. Whatever he presents as authoritative, a common individual follows that.^{xvii} This is transformative management where Arjuna has transformed himself as per teachings of Management Guru Krishna.

CONCLUSION

In above discussion, we have seen Lord Krishna has articulated the spiritual philosophy in an affirmative manner, highlighting its importance for the effective functioning of both an employer and an individual, along with the successful accomplishment of tasks. He states that every action or performance connected to the body, senses, and mind is driven by five fundamental causes: the physical body (adhistana), the agent (karta), various types of senses (karana), their specific functions (cesta), and the divine (daiva).^{xviii} Daiva is the key concept to grasp because it encompasses aspects that are not visible to us. Nature exerts a significant influence not only on human life but also on his energies, abilities, and diverse accomplishments, regardless of how notable or minor the performer may be in any area or part of the globe. As we are a part of nature, we must always be prepared to accept the consequences in any form without impacting our responsibilities or duties. Therefore, we can infer that the Bhagavadgita has demonstrated its universally applicable spiritual practical philosophy as advantageous, offering a different perspective on management theory within the contemporary context. Its role in today's management landscape focuses on recognizing, understanding, and utilizing emotions, knowledge, and actions in both personal and professional spheres for effective performance. Current management theories that view emotions and relationships as obstacles and structure their organizations around the material dimensions of human personality have been shown to be incorrect. With the concept of social goodness rooted in natural personal transformation, the Bhagavadgita illustrates how emotion and motivation can significantly improve a performer's effectiveness. Even though it occurs against a backdrop of war, the lessons imparted by Lord Krishna to enhance Arjuna's morale, confidence, and effectiveness, as well as to inspire him and resolve his inner conflict, provide comprehensive insights into management—such as self-management, crisis handling, stress management, conflict resolution, anger management, transformational leadership, motivation, and goal setting. The Bhagavad Gita exemplifies a framework for transformational management through Arjuna's experience. This is extremely beneficial, given the cultural framework of Indian society along with the global context in managing societal welfare with the aim of promoting the well-being of everyone in a productive and proficient way.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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ⁱ भगवद्गीता, 1.28: कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्निदमब्रवीत्।

दृष्टेदमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम्॥

ⁱⁱ Ibid., 6.35: असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम्।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते॥

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., 18.51-53: बुद्ध्या विशुद्ध्या युक्तो धृत्यात्मानं नियम्य च।

शब्दादीन्विषयांस्त्यक्त्वा रागद्वेषौ व्युदस्य च।॥51॥

विविक्तसेवी लघ्वाशी यतवाक्कायमानसः।

ध्यानयोगपरो नित्यं वैराग्यं समुपश्रितः॥52॥

अहङ्कारं बलं दर्पं कामं क्रोधं परिग्रहम्।

विमुच्य निर्ममः शान्तो ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते॥53॥

^{iv} Ibid., 6.34: चञ्चलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाधि बलवद्दृढम्।

तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम्।

^v Ibid., 6.6: बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः।

अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत्॥

^{vi} Ibid., 4.7: यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारता।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्।

^{vii} Ibid., 5.7

^{viii} Ibid., 2.47: कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचना।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥

^{ix} Ibid., 2.47

^x Ibid., 7.16-17

^{xi} Ibid., 18.26

^{xii} Ibid., 18.27

xiii Ibid., 18.28

xiv Ibid., 2.63

xv Ibid., 13.33

xvi Ibid., 4.7-8

xvii Ibid., 3.21

xviii Ibid., 18.14/15)