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A Study on Relationship between Principles of Management and Bhagavad Gita

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Mind is very restless, forceful and strong, O Krishna, it is more difficult to control the mind than to control the wind ~

Arjuna to Sri Krishna

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest contributions of India to the world is the *Bhagavad Gita*, or *Holy Gita*—an ancient epic poem in Sanskrit whose title translates to “The Song of the Divine One” and is considered by many to be one of the first revelations from God.

The story is about Arjuna, who became depressed when he realized he had to fight his relatives on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. To help Arjuna in his moral dilemma, lord Krishna preached the *Bhagavad Gita*, which can be a powerful catalyst for transformation. The story has all the management tactics necessary to achieve mental equilibrium and to overcome any crisis situation. In days of doubt, this divine poem will support all spiritual searching. It will contribute to self-reflection and deepen one’s inner process. With it, life can become dynamic, full and joyful, no matter the circumstance.

For all achievements, management’s task is to make people capable of joint performance, to make their weaknesses irrelevant, as management guru Peter Drucker says. It creates harmony in working together—equilibrium in thoughts and actions, goals and achievements, plans and performance, products and markets. It resolves situations of scarcity; be they in the physical, technical or human fields, through maximum utilization with the minimum available processes to achieve the goal. Lack of management causes disorder, confusion, waste, delay, destruction and depression. Managing people, money and materials in the best possible way, according to circumstances and environment, is the most important and essential factor for an organization.

Following are some thoughts inspired by some of the principles in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

There is an important distinction between effectiveness and efficiency in managing.

Effectiveness is doing the right things.

Efficiency is doing things right.

The general principles of effective management can be applied in every field, the differences being more in application than in principle.

A manager’s functions can be summed up as:

- Forming a vision

- Planning the strategy to realize the vision
- Cultivating the art of leadership
- Establishing institutional excellence
- Building an innovative organization
- Developing human resources
- Building teams and teamwork
- Delegating, motivating and communicating
- Reviewing performance and taking corrective steps when necessary

Thus, management is a process of aligning people and getting them committed to working for a common goal to the maximum social benefit. In other words, it's the search for excellence.

The critical question in many managers' minds is how to be effective in their job. The answer to this fundamental question is also found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which repeatedly proclaims that "you must try to manage yourself."

Although it was written thousands of years ago, the *Bhagavad Gita* enlightens people on all managerial techniques, leading them away from conflicts, tensions, poor productivity, absence of motivation, etc.

The modern Western management concepts of vision, leadership, motivation, excellence in work, goal achievement, meaningful work, decision making and planning, are all discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, while Western management too often deals with problems at the material, external and peripheral levels, the *Bhagavad Gita* tackles the issues from the grass roots level of human thinking. Once the basic thinking of humans is improved, it will automatically enhance the quality of their actions.

Western management philosophy is based on materialism and on a perennial thirst for profit, irrespective of the quality of the means adopted to achieve that goal. This phenomenon has its source in the abundant wealth of the West and so "management by materialism" has caught the fancy of all the countries the world over. India has been in the forefront in importing these ideas, mainly because of its centuries-old indoctrination by colonial rulers, which has inculcated in its population a feeling that anything from the Western world is good and anything Indian is inferior.

1. Utilization of available resources

The first lesson of management science is to choose wisely and use scarce resources optimally. During the curtain raiser before the Mahabharata War, Duryodhana chose Sri Krishna's large army for his help, while Arjuna selected Sri Krishna's wisdom for his support. This episode gives us a clue as to the nature of the effective manager—the former chose numbers, the latter wisdom.

2. Work commitment

A popular verse of the *Gita* advises detachment from the consequences or results of actions performed in the course of one's duty. Being dedicated to work means "working for the sake of work, generating excellence for its own sake." If we are always calculating the date of promotion or the rate of commission before putting in our efforts, we aren't detached. We're working only for the extrinsic reward that may or may not result.

Working with an eye only to the anticipated benefits means that the quality of performance of the current job or duty suffers (through mental agitation or anxiety for the future). Events don't always respond positively to our calculations, hence expected fruits may not always be forthcoming. The *Gita* tells us not to mortgage present commitment to an uncertain future.

Some people might argue that not seeking the business result of work and actions makes one unaccountable. In fact, the *Bhagavad Gita* is full of advice on the theory of cause and effect, saying that all people are responsible for the consequences of their deeds. While advising detachment from the avarice of selfish gains in discharging one's accepted duty, the *Gita* doesn't absolve anybody of the consequences arising from discharge of his or her responsibilities.

Thus, the best means of effective performance management is simply the work itself. Attaining this state of mind, called *nishkama karma*, is the right attitude for work because it prevents the ego from dissipating attention by speculating on future gains or losses. The mind can be one's friend or enemy, the cause of both bondage and liberation.

3. Motivation and self-transcendence

It's been presumed for many years that satisfying basic needs of workers—adequate food, clothing and shelter etc.—are key factors in motivation. However, it's a common experience that the dissatisfaction of employees and managers is identical—only the levels of dissatisfaction and composition vary. It should be true that once the basic needs are more than satisfied, managers should have little problem in optimizing their contribution to the organization and society. But more often than not, it doesn't happen that way.

This situation is explained by the theory of self-transcendence propounded in the *Gita*. Self-transcendence involves renouncing egoism, putting others before oneself, and emphasizing teamwork, dignity, cooperation, harmony and trust; potentially sacrificing basic needs for higher goals. The ego spoils work and the ego's the centerpiece of most theories of motivation. People don't need a theory of motivation, but a theory of inspiration.

4. Work culture

An effective work culture is about vigorous and arduous efforts in pursuit of given or chosen tasks. Sri Krishna elaborates on two types of work culture—*daivi sampat*, or divine work culture, and *asuri sampat*, or demonic work culture:

- *Daivi work culture* involves fearlessness, purity, self-control, sacrifice, straightforwardness, self-denial, calmness, absence of fault-finding, absence of greed, gentleness, modesty, and absence of envy and pride.
- *Asuri work culture* involves egoism, delusion, personal desires, improper performance, and work not oriented towards service.

A mere work ethic isn't enough. A hardened criminal may exhibit an excellent work ethic. What is needed is a work ethic conditioned by ethics in work.

It's in this light that the suggestion, *yogah karmasu kausalam*, should be understood. *Kausalam* means skill or technique of work, which is an indispensable component of a work ethic. *Yogah* is defined in the *Gita* as an unchanging equipoise of mind—detachment. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a leader of the Indian Independence Movement and a social reformer, said that acting with an equable mind is yoga.

5. Work results

The *Bhagavad Gita* further explains the theory of detachment from the extrinsic rewards of work in saying:

- If the result of sincere effort is a success, the entire credit shouldn't be appropriated by the doer alone.
- If the result of sincere effort is a failure, then the entire blame doesn't accrue to the doer.

The former attitude reduces arrogance and conceit, while the latter prevents excessive despondency, demotivation and self-pity. Thus, both these dispositions safeguard the doer against psychological vulnerability, the cause of the modern managers' sicknesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure and ulcers.

Assimilating the ideas of the *Gita* can lead people to the wider spectrum of *lokasamgraha* (general welfare), but there's also another dimension to the work ethic: If the *karmayoga* (service) is blended with *bhaktiyoga* (devotion), then the work itself becomes worship, a *sewayoga* (service for its own sake).

Along with *bhakti* yoga as a means of liberation, the *Gita* espouses the doctrine of *nishkamya karma* (pure action) untainted by hankering after the fruits resulting from that action. Modern scientists now understand the intuitive wisdom of that action in a new light.

Sound mental health is the goal of any human activity. Sound mental health is that state of mind that can maintain a calm, positive poise—or regain it when unsettled—in the midst of all the external vagaries of work life and social existence. Internal constancy and peace are the prerequisites for a healthy, stress-free mind.

Some of the impediments to sound mental health are:

- Greed—for power, position, prestige and money
- Envy—regarding others' achievements, success and rewards
- Egotism—about one's own accomplishments
- Suspicion, anger and frustration
- Anguish through comparisons

The driving forces in today's businesses are speed and competition. There's a distinct danger that these forces cause erosion of moral fiber, that in seeking a goal, people encourage immoral means (i.e., tax evasion, illegitimate financial holdings, hiding the truth, deliberate oversight in an audit, etc.) This unethical behavior is what I call the Yayati syndrome.

In the book *The Mahabharata*, there's a king by the name of Yayati who exchanges his old age with the youth of his obliging youngest son for a thousand years to revel in the endless enjoyment of flesh. However, he found the pursuit of sensual enjoyments ultimately unsatisfying, and came back to his son pleading him to take back his youth. This Yayati syndrome shows the conflict between extrinsic motivation intrinsic motivations.

II. CONCLUSION

The despondency of Arjuna in the first chapter of the *Gita* is typically human. Sri Krishna, by sheer power of his inspiring words, changes Arjuna's mind from a state of inertia to one of righteous action, from the state of what the French philosophers call *anomie* (alienation), to a state of self-confidence in the ultimate victory of *dharma* (ethical action).

When Arjuna got over his despondency and stood ready to fight, Sri Krishna reminded him of the purpose of his new-found spirit of intense action, which wasn't for his own benefit, nor for satisfying his own greed and desire, but for the good of many, with faith in the ultimate victory of ethics over unethical actions and of truth over untruth.

With regard to temporary failure, Sri Krishna says, "No doer of good ever ends in misery." Every action produces results. Good action produces good results, and evil begets nothing but evil. Therefore, if you always act well you'll be rewarded.

My purpose isn't to discard the Western model of efficiency, dynamism and striving for excellence, but to tune these ideals to India's holistic attitude of *lokasamgraha*—for the welfare of many, for the good of many. There is indeed a moral dimension to business life. What we do in business is no different, in this regard, than what we do in our personal lives. The means don't justify the ends. Pursuit of results for their own sake is ultimately self-defeating.

SCHOLARS SAYS ABOUT BHAGAVD GITA

"When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to *Bhagavad-Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the *Gita* will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day."

Mahatma Gandhi

"The *Bhagavad-Gita* deals essentially with the spiritual foundation of human existence. It is a call of action to meet the obligations and duties of life; yet keeping in view the spiritual nature and grander purpose of the universe."

Prime Minister Nehru

"From a clear knowledge of the *Bhagavad-Gita* all the goals of human existence become fulfilled. *Bhagavad-Gita* is the manifest quintessence of all the teachings of the Vedic scriptures."

Adi Shankara

Yoga has two different meanings - a general meaning and a technical meaning. The general meaning is the joining together or union of any two or more things. The technical meaning is "a state of stability and peace and the means or practices which lead to that state." The *Bhagavad Gita* uses the word with both meanings. Lord Krishna is real Yogi who can maintain a peaceful mind in the midst of any crisis."

Mata Amritanandamayi Devi

"The *Bhagavad-Gita* has a profound influence on the spirit of mankind by its devotion to God which is manifested by actions."

Dr. Albert Schweitzer

"The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a true scripture of the human race a living creation rather than a book, with a new message for every age and a new meaning for every civilization."