

# Lessons in Management from Bhagavad Gita

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## **Abstract:**

Management as an academic discipline is a century old only. However it has gained tremendous importance. Management as a science is preoccupied with business. In the recent past it has gained application in other areas- governances, political leadership developmental issues and even ethics. It draws heavily from behavioural science, economics, (applied & analytical) mathematics, computer and science. Future log ethics, metaphysics and even physics etc. Management has become catch word for life skills. In fact it has become the key skill both for individual, society, organization (including business), manufacturing, public issue (say health, hygiene, and education) and in fact it is an all encompassing skill. The practical message of Bhagavad Gita has strong linkage to core management practices. The present study identifies the origin of the principle of management is Bhagavad Gita

## **INTRODUCTION**

Bhagavad Gita a book of 700 verses is the most widely read Hindu religious text. It was possibly composed around 500-300 BC and it took its present form around 300 AD. It is a part of the wider epic Mahabharata. The context is that at a war – the Mahabharata. Arjuna, the warrior, refuses to fight the righteous war, on the plea that it would result in numerous death including those of elders, revered ones and relatives and hence it is even better to sacrifice legitimate claims and avoid the sin. This internal debate as to what is right and what is wrong leads to a serious depression. Arjuna stands along with his Sakha-Friend-guide torn between the two warring groups and seeks guidance. The Bhagavad Gita follows- a dialogue is witnessed by Sanjaya through a divine vision and reported to Dhritarastra the blind king and this is being dictated to Ganesh by Vyasa. Layers of symbolism and allegory are involved. At the end of the dialogue Arjuna fights the war with great vigor and enthusiasm and ultimately win in the war. The broad features can easily be identified as follows:

Dialogue Format is used to debate, analyze and synthesize. Plato to Gandhi all great thinkers used the format to create classics like Republic and Hind-Swaraj. Great Teachers and counsellors have used dialogue as the most effective method. Management Gurus, Political leaders and Pundits have recognized the usefulness of the format. In fact Indian's are considered to be augmentative. Commentators in Sanskrit language have also used the format. This format-dialogue has great relevance even today for all leadership positions.

The context of the Bhagavad Gita is considered to be practical. Though serious metaphysical issues are discussed, debated, clarified and even defined- the essential context is practical problem solving – relevant eternally. Mameka dharma, the question of you and me, me and others, essentially ego ; Dharma-duty, call of the situation, ethics , right and wrong, relativity of conflicting ethics, to do or not is a practical question ; wars are not only physical ones- we constantly face warlike situations- mental-internal and organizational. In fact life is full of warlike situations and issues are common-ethical – it is

worth the sacrifice, does not really solve personal problem, cannot be won without a heavy price, are there any real victor or should one submit to wrong, unethical path, give up fight at all or fight enthusiastically.

The great message at the Bhagavad Gita is to work without attachment to the fruits of work. This can be explained in many ways – as every action has a reaction- no action goes in vain without desired effect ; the need is to do or die and not ask why one can never control the result and must submit to action to ethical action. Each one of us has to discriminate what is right and what is wrong constantly and not blinded by an ethics which commits itself to letter of ethics at the cost of spirit of ethics. This principle of working without attachment to the fruits of action is indeed considered to be the essence of karma yoga. Yoga has many shades of meaning. It is used here as a method of gaining a deeper understanding and connecting oneself with the universal or the ultimate. Yoga leads to gaining ultimate understanding and being free from conflicting thought. Karma Yoga- working without attachment to fruits of work has been universally accepted as a desirable ethos by the Indians. This ethos percolates to all walks of life including business leaders and honchos. Negatively this principle may lead to other etho that none can control the effects of his action, fate is always pre-destined and one has no escape from it.

Besides Karma Yoga- Bhagvad Gita also deals other systems of Yoga- most importantly Gyan and Bhakti- the paths of Knowledge and Devotion. Knowledge (not excluding intuitive) is a key in life. The present century is called a century of knowledge. In fact over centuries- knowledge has been a key driver of development. This knowledge besides covering various academic discipline also covers a holistic understanding of the world and even the world beyond. Developing a holistic knowledge- an universal understanding has been greatly emphasized by the Bhagvad Gita. Further this is symbolized in the Biswa Roop Darshan. This darshan summarizes the holistic vision transcending both temporal and spatial limitation of life. To be successful, to be a true leader in any fields and to be really knowledgeable and to develop true understanding each individual ought to have this holistic vision and understanding.

Bhakti Marg teaches devotion to Almighty. In fact Mameka Sarana Braja, „I take complete shelter under you“ is the last word of Arjuna to Krishna. This indicates the complete faith one develops in the counsellor, it signifies change of attitude. There are other metaphysical shades of significance. On the practical front the counselor has to develop complete confidence in the counselled. Bhakti Marg also replaces doubt, negative vibration with confidence, faith, positively etc.

The above are only indicative path. More contextual issues, practical messages can be identified through a re- reading of Bhagvad Gita and numerous writings on Bhagvad Gita and writings of corporate leaders etc. whether Bhagvad Gita was originally compared with usage for management is besides the debate. There is no doubt the Bhagvad Gita has been found useful by the many throughout age beyond religion and philosophy.

The core management issues involve organization, the act and skill of dealing with situation people, organization and matter etc. It always has been objective In business it involves maximization of pursuit. Health management would involve organizing all activities relating to health to maximize life benefits. Managing a spots team would involve the goal of winning. Every objective involves ethical issues, right or wrong issues irrespective of situation. Ethical issues are in fore front today, be it science-

politics, medicine, war, religion or any other aspect of life. Maximization of the individuals end is just of posed against the good of all, good at the maximum, inclusion of all etc.

Management ultimately boils down to man- management. Man-managements demands a deeper understanding of man, concept of man, holistic understanding of man and, concept of man, holistic understanding of man, and meaning of life. Man- management involves life skills. Man-management involves recognition psychological- behavioural problem, problems arising out of modernization, industrialization, globalization, IT- communication revolution, social medias- These problems are of isolation, loss of goals of life, overemphasis on material goals of times, loss of spiritual values and concerns, management relationships, alienation, communication etc. Modern problems of stress, strain digression etc. effect health and life of individuals, society and mankind.

Money management, Resource Management, Production Management etc. are key management skills ever since Marx's over emphasis on material foundation of civilization gradually world is revolving under economic foundation and all other aspect of life has been sub- ordinate to economic foundation. Culture, Philosophy and even Religion has been subordinated to economic considerations and explanation. Economy is the supposed to substructures and culture to be super structure. Science is also subordinates to material- economic consideration. In management also management material has even pushed life-mind-spirit to subordinate position. The revival and re-emergence of these values post a challenge of holistic management views and practices.

Management by decision or decision making is the core of management- what decision to make always involves choices, it involves process. It enriches confusion-reason is not always a guide. Even intuition is involved. Management by objective is also considered to be the core objective emerges from desire- even desires are confusing. Most of the time desires are tagged with ethical issues. Conviction in the desire is primary objectives would define the process - the methods and the organization activities for achieving the same. Management by doing- by organizing, by appropriate skill is also core to the science of management. Management also means getting things done- this does not exclude doing things oneself. Management by leadership essentially involved PERSONALITY of the leader. Work is indeed an extension of the personality. The Right man of the right job is core to management. This involves a deep understanding of other human being- understanding them- identifying their talent and ability and assigning them the job accordingly. The concept of Business Management is dominated by business objectives- maximization of profit. Yet it also involves wealth creation, decratization of technology, inclusive growth environmental issues and above all ethical consideration.

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH:

A large number of studies that have been conducted by scholars and researchers on different aspects of management perspectives through Bhagawat Gita in India and abroad are reproduced in brief as under:

Sudhakar Reddy (2009) in his paper, —Business Principles from the Bhagavad Gital, undertook a conceptual study to highlight the relevance of Bhagavad Gita to business practices. The objective of the paper was to attune the Western model of efficiency, dynamism and striving for excellence to the ideals of the Indian holistic attitude of lokasangraha – for the welfare of many, for the good of many and to develop India centric management skills. On examining the modern management concepts in the light of

the Bhagavad Gita, the researcher identified the fact that to attain sound mental health, a manager should try to possess and maintain internal constancy, mental peace, a calm mindset and a positive poise even in adverse situations and should stay away from the feelings of greed, envy, egotism, suspicion and anguish as advocated by Bhagavad Gita. India centric concepts developed by the researcher envision a leader with visionary perspective and dedicated to work for the sake of work without attachment to results. The study concludes that Bhagavad Gita advises the managers to handle the business issues from the grassroot level of human thinking because once the basic thinking is improved; it will automatically enhance the quality of the actions and results.

Shiv K. Tripathi (2007) in his research work, “Managing Business as a Spiritual Practice: The Bhagavad Gita way to Achieve Excellence through Perfection in Action”, did a conceptual study to identify ways to supplement western framework of management principles and functions by incorporating the principles of three paths of human salvation recommended in the Bhagavad Gita . The intent of the study was to establish interrelationship among various components of business universe and to propose management functions which are based on principles of Karma Yoga (Path of Action), Bhakti Yoga (Path of Dedication) and Gyan Yoga (Path of Knowledge). The framework developed by the study advocates that pre-eminence of knowledge, knowledge of organisation, self and laws of nature is required to achieve excellence in action, action which is for the gain of the whole creation and which should not contravene the laws of nature. The researcher asserts that the essentials of any action should be clarity of the objective behind action, knowledge of the instruments of action, co-ordination of different efforts for the action, dedication and devotion to action and non attachment to results of the action as preached by Bhagavad Gita . The research work concludes that a management model developed on the basis of Indian Vedanta will certainly be more effective than western models.

Swami Someswaranada (2005) in his book, —Business Management- the Gita Way”, stressed that the management should be redefined and should be culturespecific since we lack strong foundation in management of organisations. The author suggested that in India a leader can be successful when he knows his subordinates well and for that he has to understand the characteristics of Indian psyche and the focus should be on workmen and masses. According to the author, the Indian wisdom offers theory P (P for Parent) where manager goes through the three steps of empowering the subordinates: Bhakti- where manager should establish relationship with employees, Yukti- where manager should focus on the development of the intellect of the subordinates and Mukti- where manager should give more and more freedom to employees in the work. The author believes that profits are a must for a company but the method of earning it should be to serve maximum number of people in a better and still better way. All the chapters and concepts are laced with illustrations and examples, and on their analysis many models for solving various problems faced by the organizations have been propounded. The author concludes that the Gita tries to solve the problems of business by solving the problems of the people because real power lies with the people, not with money or knowledge and a businessman should think in terms of giving a lead and direction to the industry with a mission to help the country to grow because our growth is sustainable when we grow along with others.

E. Ajanta Chakravarty (2005) in his book titled, —The Gita and the Art of Successful Management”, brought out an interesting study of Gita in the context of management of modern enterprise. The purpose of the book was to explore the management base of Hinduism as enshrined in Gita. The researcher

deemed the warrior as an executive and the Sarathi as a manager and deduced that the success of the warrior depends on the vision and analyzing skills of the sarathi, who knows how to take best advantage of the opportunities. Gita describes different forms of Yoga and according to the author, Yoga is a philosophical system that treats all life as a management enterprise. The study surmised that a manager, to be successful, should take realistic vision of the totality and should rise above narrow, short term and individualistic motives. He should be able to clarify the subordinate's ideas, encourage and motivate him, increase his knowledge, guide him the way Krishna transformed Arjuna, who was dispirited, directionless, confused and in agony. The study concludes that the organization will thrive only when manager keeps a larger vision comprising good of mankind and the welfare of society and in the end like Arjuna, one should be above all doubts towards the duties and rise in enlightenment.

Arun Kumar (2004) in his published research work, "Management Leadership through Bhagavad Gita", made an in-depth study with a view to explore, identify and formulate the wisdom of Bhagavad Gita in the field of leadership and team building, philosophy of life, work ethics, decision-making, motivation, communication and human relations in business and in the affirmative industry. A closed ended opinion poll questionnaire was developed by him to find out the opinion of consultants, managers and supervisory engineers working in Indian and multinational corporations within the National Capital Region regarding the possibility of management leadership through Bhagavad Gita. Though the concept of 'Nishkama Karma', doing good deeds without any expectation of reward, recognition, appreciation or gratitude, the central teaching of Gita, was rejected by the good majority in the opinion polls. The concept of 'Nishkama Karma' might be acceptable if it is explained as process-oriented instead of reward-oriented. Process education stresses the process through which results are obtained and not the results themselves. A comparative analysis of western model of Management Leadership and Bhagavad Gita model of Management Leadership leads to the conclusion that Bhagavad Gita model is absolutely superior to the western model and a successful management model for any country must be culture specific. It was concluded that 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. The selective review of literature provides a clear research gap. Articles have been written from theoretical aspects. It has not been tested in the corporate world. It is now significant to apply the directives of Bhagavad Gita to handle the management programmes of the present day.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Having indicated aspects of Bhagavad Gita and management we must answer whether they are linked and does Bhagavad Gita answer questions Management raises. Can Bhagavad Gita be also a guide for Business Management? Our answer is in the affirmative.

Bhagavad Gita involves a holistic understand of man-material-life including all special and temporal consideration. Management and Business Management is a part of this holistic scenario and understanding of the holistic understanding help manager and Business Managers-

Just as Bible is a guide to the man and Business Management in a Christian Society, Bhagavad Gita also acts as guide for Indians predominantly.

Most of Indians including non-hindus are aware of the fundamentals of Bhagavad Gita whether they have read Bhagavad Gita or not. In other words Bhagavad Gita is a part of the ethos of Indians Bhagavad Gita though considered to be religious text. It is predominantly a practical guide to life and not a religious guide. It deals with life more than the Beyond.

The context of Bhagavad Gita transcendstime, the war context is allegorical and is applicable universally without limitation of space and time. In other wards it is highly relevant today as guide for questions of Management and Business Management in particular.

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