

## MANAGEMENT LESSONS FROM BHAGAVAD GITA

**Dr. Deoman Shrikrushna Umbarkar**

Department of Sociology

Late Vasantao Kolhatkar Arts College,

Rohana

Email-

[deomanumbarkar2014@gmail.com](mailto:deomanumbarkar2014@gmail.com)

*"Karmanye Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana Ma Karma Phala Hetur Bhurma tey Sangostva Akarmani"*

(2.47, The Bhagavadgītā)

### **Abstract :**

*The Bhagavad Gita is one of the greatest scriptures and spiritual guidance for the individual. It describes the essence of the Upanishads and is considered as the holy book of the Indian spiritual thought. It has been used as a handbook for leaders, managers and every individuals for effective management of the problems. Management is an academic discipline. Bhagavad Gita encourages us to manifest total excellence in all that we do, and in all our relationships by discovering the latent divinity within us. Taking perspectives from the Bhagavad Gita, an ancient Hindu epic, this paper presents a management grid to link the profit-orientated approach as well as purpose-orientated approach in running a business and achieve the goal. Different aspects of aptitude, attitude and motivation towards competition and business sustainability are discussed with specific extracts from this holy and sacred Indian classic.*

**Keywords:** Management, Organisations, Bhagavad-Gita.

### **Introduction :**

Today, organizations are witnessing a change and uncertainty in an increasingly dynamic and competitive marketplace. The aim of business organization is to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and long-term success over competitors. In order to be competitive in this ever-changing and volatile business environment, organizations have to be competitive and abreast with the latest updates in technology and innovation. The two terms such as creativity and innovation, play a very significant role for every business enterprise today. Peter Drucker has rightly said that, these are the new management mantras for the growth in a competitive environment without which companies no longer exists. This is the reality of today's dynamic business environment. Peter Senge, management thinker who coined the term "Learning Organisation" has quoted the Gita in two of his books "Fifth Discipline" and "Presence".

## The Bhagavad-Gita :

Bhagavad Gita is one of the oldest languages in the world and the original version is in Sanskrit language. According to Dharmaratnam (1987), the Bhagavad-Gita is a sermon given by Sri Krishna to Arjuna regarding the correct technique of life. The first English language version of the Bhagavad Gita was translated by Charles Wilkins in 1785 (Muniapan, 2005). Besides English, the Bhagavad Gita has also been translated into more than 500 world languages. The Bhagavad Gita has been written by many scholars in India and around the world in more than 1000 English language versions and commentaries. It has exercised an enormous influence, is considered to be practical. According to Hee (2007), the Bhagavad Gita, contains eighteen chapters and it has been divided into three parts: karma yoga (selfless action), jnana yoga (self-knowledge), and bhakti yoga (ways of loving).

The background for the Bhagavad-Gita is the epic Mahabharata. Sri Vyasa Muni (son of Parasara Muni) composed it. The original version of the Bhagavad Gita was written in Sanskrit language by Sri Ganesa more than 5000 years ago. It has been considered as the 5th Veda. Mahabharata is an encyclopedia of life. The central theme is dharma meaning occupational duty, righteousness and virtues. It deals not only with dharma but also artha, which is the acquisition of wealth, kama which is the enjoyment of pleasures and moksha which is the liberation. Bhagavad-Gita has 110,000 verses (Rosen, 2002). It appears in 700 verses (of which 575 are uttered by Sri Krishna) in Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata and consists of 18 chapters. It is believed that the oral version of the manuscript have been composed around 3100 B.C.E. (Hee 2007).

The Mahabharata narrates the war between two cousins; the five Pandavas and hundred Kauravas in order to claim the kingdom of Hastinapura. Sri Krishna, the champion of dharma offered to go on a peace-making mission on behalf of the Pandavas (This is a lesson to the world that peace and harmony is preferred at all costs). However the Kauravas refused to make peace and hence war became a certainty. Sri Krishna humbled himself into becoming the charioteer of Arjuna, the Pandava prince. In fact, Arjuna could choose unarmed Sri Krishna who would not engage in battle or Sri Krishna's army consisting of great warriors. Arjuna (Pandava) decided to choose Sri Krishna unarmed, while Duryodhana (Kaurava) was happy to get the large army from Sri Krishna. He (Duryodhana) felt that, without the army, and without weapons, Sri Krishna not could be of much help to the Pandavas (Subramaniam, 2001).

The entire armies (7 Pandava divisions and 11 Kaurava divisions) of both sides were assembled at the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Thus the stage was set for the Bhagavad-Gita. The sermon was given on the battlefield before the commencement of the war. The battlefield also represent our body where an unending battle is raging between the forces of good and evil – the evil always outnumbering the good (5 Pandavas against the 100 Kauravas; or 7 Pandava divisions of soldiers against 11 Kaurava divisions). On a spiritual level, the focus is on the battle between the higher self and the lower self, the war between man's spiritual calling and the dictates of the body, mind and senses for material pleasures.

### **Bhagavad-Gita : Management Guidelines :**

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

- Effectiveness - doing the right things.
- Efficiency - doing things right.

The general principles of management is applied in every organization, but the difference lies in application. The Manager's primary function is planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating and controlling. Specifically, the functions can be summed up as:

- Formation of a vision
- Planning the strategy
- Develop leadership.
- Establishing organizational/ institutional excellence.
- Establishing a creative and innovative organisation.
- Training and development of human resources.
- Team building and accomplished the task through teamwork.
- Delegation, motivation, and communication.
- Reviewing the performance of the employee and taking corrective steps when required.

Thus, management is a process of aligning people goal with the organizational goals. Employee has been motivated to be committed to work for the maximum social benefit. The managers' are always in a dilemma how to be effective and effectively accomplished the assigned task. Bhagavad Gita elaborates that "you must try to manage yourself."

### **Work Commitment :**

A popular verse of the Gita advises "During the time of one's duty, one should be detached from the fruits or results of actions performed in the course of doing the task. Being dedicated work has to mean "working for the sake of work, generating excellence for its own sake." The managerial implications of it is that, calculating the date of promotion or the rate of commission/profit before putting in our efforts, then such work is not detached. It is not "generating excellence for its own sake" but working only for the extrinsic reward (promotion, profit, good book of the boss) that may (or may not) result.

Working only with an eye to the anticipated benefits, means that the quality of performance of the current job or duty suffers - through mental agitation of anxiety for the future. In fact, in most of the cases we do not get the results the way we are expecting. So, the Gita prescribes we should not mortgage present commitment for the outcome in uncertain

future.

Some people may 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, making the doer responsible for the consequences of his deeds. While advising detachment from the avarice of selfish gains and greediness in discharging one's accepted duty, the Gita does not absolve anybody of the consequences arising from discharge of his or her responsibilities.

Thus the best means of effective performance management is the work itself. Attaining this state of mind (called "nishkama karma") is the right attitude to work. It prevents the ego, the mind, from dissipation of attention through speculation on future gains or losses.

### **Self-Motivation and Self- Transcendence :**

According to Maslow's Need hierarchy theory of motivation, lower order needs of workers such as - adequate food, clothing and shelter, etc. should be satisfied first. These are the key factors in motivation. In the workplace, the job of the clerk and of the Director is identical. but only difference lies in their scales (salary) and composition (Structure). It is true that once the lower-order needs are satisfied, the Director will be optimizing his contribution to the organisation and society. But it does not happen like that. ("The eagle soars high but keeps its eyes firmly fixed on the dead animal below.") On the contrary, a low paid school teacher, may well demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction as well as self-actualisation despite little satisfaction of his/her lower-order needs (food, shelter and clothing).

This situation is explained by the theory of self-transcendence propounded in the Gita. Self-transcendence involves renouncing egoism, putting others before oneself, emphasising team work, dignity, co-operation, harmony, respect and trust – and, indeed potentially sacrificing lower needs for higher goals, the opposite of Maslow's theory of motivation.

"Work must be done with detachment." It is the ego that spoils work and the ego is the central aspects of most theories of motivation.

Rabindranath Tagore, the great Indian poet, says working for love is freedom in action. A concept has been described in the Gita as "disinterested work". In this context, Sri Krishna says, "He who shares the wealth generated only after serving the people, through work done as a sacrifice for them, is freed from all sins. On the contrary those who earn wealth only for themselves, eat sins that lead to frustration, misery and failure."

Mental equanimity or Nirdwanda can be achieved with detachment with the work. This attitude of the individual leads to presence of the supreme intelligence which is guiding the embodiment of individual intelligence. This de-personified intelligence can be achieved only when one work selflessly, and sincerely to achieve the organizational goals.

### **Work Culture :**

Sri Krishna describes on two types of work culture – a) Daivi sampat or divine work culture and b) Asuri sampat or demonic work culture.

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

Work ethic should be conditioned with ethics in work. In this context, “yogah karmasu kausalam” should be understood. “Kausalam” means skill or technique of work. It is an indispensable component of a work ethic. According to Bhagbad Gita “Yogah” is defined as “samatvam yogah uchyate” meaning an unchanging equipoise of mind (detachment.) . Equable mind or equipoise is the bed-rock of all actions, and the emphasis has been laid upon how to attain this equipoise. Gita evolved the goal of unification of work ethic with ethics in work. The ethical process can enable one to attain an equipoise. The guru, Adi Sankara (born circa 800 AD), says that how to maintain calmness of the mind in success and failure. The calm mind in case of failure in life lead to deeper introspection and what necessary steps one has to undertake to avoid such failure in future.

The equanimity can be attained by detached with the results of the work done. This leads to one need not have to expect the incentive from the work done. To the contrary, concentration on the task for its own sake leads to the achievement of excellence – and indeed to the true mental happiness of the worker. Thus, while organizational theories of motivation may be said to lead us to the bondage or extrinsic rewards(Power, status, promotion etc), the Gita’s principle leads us to the intrinsic rewards of mental, and indeed moral, satisfaction. The 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 should not be appropriated by the doer alone.
- If the result of sincere effort is a failure, then too the entire blame does not accrue to the doer.

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

Assimilation of the ideas of the Gita leads us to the wider spectrum of “lokasamgraha” (general welfare) but there is also another dimension to the work ethic - if the “karmayoga” (service) is blended with “bhaktiyoga” (devotion), then the work itself becomes worship, a “sevayoga” (service for its own sake.)

### **Manager's Mental Health :**

Sound mental health is the very goal of any human activity. It is the state of mind which can maintain a calm, positive ,poise, or regain it when unsettled, in the midst of all the external turbulence of work life. Internal happiness and peace are the pre-requisites for a healthy stress-

free mind. Some of the impediments for sound mental health are :

- **Greed** - for power, status, position, promotion, prestige and money.
- **Envy** - regarding others' achievements, success, rewards.
- **Egotism** - about one's own achievement and accomplishments.
- Suspicion, anger , Depression, Failure and frustration.
- Anguish through comparisons.

In Mahabharata, a king named as **Yayati** who, in order to revel in the endless enjoyment of flesh . He exchanged his old age with the youth of his o youngest son for a thousand years. However, at last, he found all the sensual enjoyments ultimately not fulfilling his desire for the youth. He came back to his son , and requesting him to take back his youth. This “yayati syndrome” shows the conflict between extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation.

The driving forces in today's businesses are speed , competition and success. As a result, these driving forces cause erosion of the morality in order to achieve the goal. One permits oneself immoral means such as tax evasion, illegitimate acquisition of wealth and financial holdings, deliberate oversight in the audit, too-clever financial reporting and so on. This phenomenon may be called as “yayati syndrome”.

#### **Management –Practicing what they preaching :**

Sri Krishna in the Gita says “Whatever the excellent and best ones do, the commoners follow”. The visionary leader must have vision and mission, dynamic, foersightedness and courage. As a result he can translate dreams into reality. This dynamism and self belief of a true leader flows from an inspired and spontaneous motivation to help others. "I am the strength of those who are devoid of personal desire and attachment. O Arjuna, I am the legitimate desire in those, who are not opposed to righteousness," says Sri Krishna (10th Chapter - Gita).

#### **Bhagavad Gita is New Mantra for US Businesses :**

Big businesses of the United States are embracing Indian philosophy. Top business schools have introduced "self-mastery" classes that use Indian methods to help managers boost their leadership skills and find inner peace in lives dominated by work. India-born management guru and strategists also are helping transform corporations. Academics and consultants such as C.K. Prahalad, Ram Charan, and Vijay Govindrajan are among the world's hottest business gurus.

Tulsi Gabbard, is an Indian–origin American politician and member of the Democratic Party who has, also gifted her own copy of the Hindu Holy Book "Bhagavad Gita" (same copy that she used to take the Oath of Office) to Narendra Modi when he was on a visit to New York on September 28, 2014. Another is the belief that companies should take a more holistic approach to business, it takes into account the needs of shareholders, employees, customers, society and the environment as a whole. Organisations can simultaneously create value and



social justice." The concepts such as "emotional intelligence" and "servant leadership" are in vogue. Corporate philanthropy can be viewed as a competitive advantage for attracting and retaining top talent.

### Conclusion :

Modern managers can derive a lot from *Bhagavad Gita* as it holds the key to holistic success. We are living in an era of ambiguous , uncertainty ,competition, and turbulent environment. There is rapid shift from industrial society to knowledge society. This transition brings together some important implications to management that the primary source of wealth is human capital. Innovative organizations whether radically or incrementally, adopt their own strategy to be ahead from their competitors. For achieving high levels of innovativeness, companies must first convert their culture into more participative one. So, HR professionals play a strategic role as they are the driver for the change in the organizations. The HR manger have to come up with right solutions, right tools, as well as with right systems in order to utilize the human capital to its fullest extent, to its highest use. So, that the impact of employee decisions has visibility for overall business results . *Gita*, as a sacred and revered spiritual script has a unique value proposition, applicable and implications for the business and business manager, in order to gain triumph at both physical and mental levels.

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