

The Essentials of Organizational Management: A Study on the Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract

The Indian sub-continent since the ancient times has been the epicentre of rich cultural heritage. The ethos of the ancient Indian texts holds true to the present day. Some of the well-known ancient Indian texts are the Upanishads, the Vedas and the epics: Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita is an intrinsic part of the great Indian epic Mahabharata. It was written by Sage Vyasa. The Bhagavad Gita gets decoded at the battleground of Kurukshetra. It is based on the conversation between Arjuna, the warrior prince and Krishna, his charioteer. Initially, Arjuna was reluctant to fight the battle and Krishna assumed the role of an ideal mentor to counsel Arjuna to fight for the right cause. Eventually Arjuna was transformed into a determined warrior and ready to take on his rivals. At the end of the battle, Arjuna along with his brothers accomplished victory over their opponents. The eternal philosophy embedded in the verses of the Bhagavad Gita has been adorned by renowned world leaders. Organizational management has evolved since the onset of the industrial revolution. The advent of globalization has led to reshaping the management scenario in every organization across the territories. Every business house is striving hard to enhance the organizational performance to ensure sustainable growth. At a time of globalization it is imperative for organizations to look for alternative paradigms to match up to the constantly evolving management practices. Since the last few decades the Bhagavad Gita has attracted the attention of the management researchers. The present study attempts to evaluate the diverse aspects of the organizational management as reflected in the Bhagavad Gita based on the systematic review of academic literature. The finding of the present study seems to suggest Bhagavad Gita is the store house of ideal solutions to deal with the various issues related to organizational management. More specifically, it emerges from past studies that the Bhagavad Gita is an effective management tool in the field of leadership and provides sustainable solutions to overcome challenges pertaining to the constantly evolving business environment. In the present day business context, organizational leaders and management practitioners may imbibe the ethos of the Bhagavad Gita for the long term survival of their organizations. Thus, it may be said that since the ancient times, the Indian worldview as noted down in the different texts has benefited the human race and will do so for the years to come.

Key words: Ancient Indian Text, Bhagavad Gita, Organizational Management, Leadership, Business Environment

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INTRODUCTION

India since the time of the earliest civilization in the world has maintained a glorious tradition of knowledge cultivation. The distinguished brilliance of the scholars from the era of the ancient India is exquisitely described in ancient literary texts. The wisdom of the scholars of the ancient India is also depicted in the architectural creations found at the multiple locations of archaeological importance. The treasure trove of the wealth of knowledge of the Indian scholars has been acknowledged by both historians and archaeologists at large. 'The Indian sub-continent since the ancient times has maintained the legacy of rich cultural heritage' (Basu, 2018). The ancient Indian texts remind us of the fact that since ages, India has been the epicentre of knowledge cultivation. Indian philosophy is based on the ethos and values embedded in the ancient texts written by the great Indian scholars through the ages.

There are nine schools of Indian philosophy was created by the exceptionally talented scholars of the ancient past. All the nine schools of Indian philosophy explore an array of concepts that finds its application to this day. Some of the most acclaimed literary works of the scholars from the ancient era are the Vedas, the Upanishads and the great Indian epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata). According to Bowker (1997), the Vedas are literary work of scriptures endorsed by the Hindus. Tejomayananda (1994) pointed out Hindus who primarily belong to India derive their value system based on the philosophy propounded in the Vedas.

The Bhagavad Gita is part of the great epic Mahabharata. It is attributed to be the literary composition of Sage Vyasa. The entire saga of the Mahabharata revolves around the narrative of family feud between the families of two brothers. They are the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

Ultimately, the only way to settle the dues between the two families was to fight a battle. This war is commonly known as the battle of Kurukshetra.

As the ancient text suggests, the Bhagavad Gita gets decoded during the time when the battle of Kurukshetra which was fought between the stalwarts of the warrior class was about to commence. Prior to the battle Pandavas chose Krishna to take part in the battle from their side. He was assigned the role of Arjuna's charioteer in the war. Kauravas chose Krishna's army to be part of their infantry. On the day when the battle was about to begin, Sri Krishna revered by the Hindus as the incarnation of the Almighty, was driving the chariot of Arjuna, the warrior prince in the battle ground. The two armies were about to engage into the historic battle which the humankind had ever witnessed. Arjuna, the otherwise fearless warrior encountered with a possible emotional breakdown after seeing his own blood relations on the other side of the battle front. At this juncture Arjuna decided otherwise i.e. to not to fight the battle and conveyed his thoughts to his charioteer, Krishna.

It was only through an intriguing conversation that Krishna answered Arjuna's question on a wide range of range of issues. While answering the questions Krishna mentored and counselled Arjuna to take the right decision and fight the battle as his duty. Eventually Arjuna, the warrior hero along with his brothers won the battle. The victory for virtues was established. The literary work which was written aeons ago is still popular among the people. The Bhagavad Gita has also been widely adorned by famous world leaders.

Organizational management is all about dealing with people, machine and the environment at large. Theories on modern management practices were developed ever since the advent of the

Industrial Revolution in the Western part of the world. In the modern day context of the competitive business environment accompanied with rapid increase in globalization, deregulation policies and digitalization has thrown open new challenges for the industries both in terms of retaining their market share and secure stable growth in the long run (Dalken, 2014).

The notion of learning organization and the prevalence of knowledge economy are growingly gaining importance in the given highly complex and uncertain business environment (Naachimuthu, Rekha, & DuttPendyalala, 2011). Any business firm gets influenced by both external and internal factors which determine its success or failure outcomes. The work environment of any business firm gets immensely influenced by the prevalent ethical and moral values practices in the organizational setting (Anbalagan and Dhanalakshmi, 2011). Therefore, it has become the imperative for every organization to entrust the crucial responsibility to organizational leaders to remain afloat in the turbulent business environment. Past studies suggest there are a number of positive outcomes for high job satisfaction of the employees. As observed by Bolino and Turnley (2005), increased job satisfaction leads to decreased workplace absenteeism, reduced turn over intentions and lesser deviant workplace exhibited behaviour. Higher degree of organizational commitment is also an outcome of job satisfaction which employees experiences in the organizational settings and ultimately results into enhanced intention to remain with the organizations (Chinomona and Dhurup, 2015). It is the people who make the organization and it is the individuals whose life gets influenced by the products or services offered by the industries. The crucial aspect of the entire scenario is to deal with managing people and resources in such a manner that the organizational goals are accomplished.

It was during the 1980s that researchers turned towards the Indian ethos to deal with the management issues (Thomas and Pillai, 2005). A number of researchers have explored the field of management based on the Indian philosophy perspective (Chakraborty, 1993, Dayal, 1997, Sinha, 1990; Sinha, 1992; Sinha, 1980; Panda and Gupta, 2007; Thomas and Pillai, 2015). Previous studies appears to indicate that the encouragement expounded on the principles of spirituality and religion in business management can lead to a wide range of benefits in the diverse areas such as creativity, honesty, trustworthiness and loyalty which will gradually lead to enhanced corporate and organizational performance (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Muniapan, 2009; Muniapan, 2010; Muniapan and Satpathy, 2013). Workplace spirituality is found to be associated with Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) (Rastgar, Zarei, Davoudi and Fartsah, 2012). It will seemingly assist the organizational members and business firms to deal with various challenges faced on a daily basis in a better way. It would also ensure better organizational climate and higher levels of productivity (Parthasathi, Reddy, & K.V.S, 2017). Of late it is noted workplace spirituality and spiritual determinants of leadership is gaining the momentum to become an emerging field of study (Fairholm, 1996; Fry, 2003) by the researchers across the geographical territories.

A steady rise in the growing number of literatures on the Bhagavad Gita and organizational management seems to suggest the significance of the pearls of wisdom contained in the Bhagavad Gita holds true to this day. From the perspective of the Bhagavad Gita, the essentials of management are cultivating self-discipline skill to focus on perseverance, non-attachment from the outcomes of labour and commitment towards the duty (Hee, 2007). The ethos of the Bhagavad Gita offers essential insights beneficial for the modern day management thought and business practices at a global stage (ChinnaNatesan, Keeffe & Darling,

2009). The strong association between the human race and work has been illustrated in a lucid manner in the different chapters of the Bhagavad Gita (Mulla and Krishnan, 2007). Management researchers over the period of time have examined the words of wisdom written in the Bhagavad Gita from various aspects such as leadership, emotional intelligence, decision making and so on. Thus, an in-depth insight into studies related to the Bhagavad Gita and organizational management will give a better picture to understand the significance of the ancient Indian thoughts in the modern day context.

Objective

The present paper makes an attempt to examine the diverse aspects of the organizational management as reflected in the ancient Indian text, the Bhagavad Gita. More specifically the present study also makes an effort to evaluate the various strands of leadership in organizational management from the viewpoint of the Bhagavad Gita.

Methodology

The present study follows systematic review (Pettricrew and Roberts, 2006) of academic literature on the Bhagavad Gita. Additionally, for the purpose of the present paper academic literary works on the Bhagavad Gita and organizational management were also considered.

Findings & Discussion

Bhagavad Gita

The Indian sub-continent since the ancient times has been the ideal epicentre of rich cultural heritage. One of the priceless gems that the Indian scholars have gifted to the world is the Bhagavad

Gita. It is attributed to be the literary work of Sage Vyasa. The Bhagavad Gita uncovers the essentials of the Indian philosophy in simple and comprehensible language that permeates individuals' mind and make them aware of the doctrine of daily life (Easwaran, 1985). Initially written in Indian languages the Bhagavad Gita was later translated into a number of other languages spoken across the globe. The Bhagavad Gita was first translated into English by Sir Charles Wilkins in the year 1785 (Hee, 2007).

The Bhagavad Gita is an ancient Indian text which is a part of the Bhishma Parva (Chapter 25 to 42) of the renowned Indian epic Mahabharata (Parthasathi, Reddy, & K.V.S, 2017). It comprises of 700 slokas or verses (Hee, 2007). The Mahabharata is predominantly based on the narrative of family feud between the two lineages. The main protagonist of the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna and his brothers were commonly referred as the 'Pandavas'. Their rival counterparts were known as the Kauravas. In the Mahabharata, all the prominent personalities were aware of the aftermath of the war, it was only the ultimate option left for the Pandavas to take the step back and show reluctance to fight the battle to deal with the Kauravas (Chakraborty and Chakraborty, 2006). No words of negotiation could convince the Kauravas to come into terms with the Pandavas. So resorting to the battle lines was the final option left with both the sides. Prior to the onset of the battle of the Kurukshetra, the Pandavas took refuge in Krishna's wisdom over his army and designated him to be Arjuna's charioteer (Buck, 2000). While the Kauravas chose Krishna's army to be on their side during the course of the battle. On the first day of the battle, Arjuna after seeing his blood relations on the other side of the arena of war had an emotional breakdown.

Arjuna was reluctant to take part in the ferocious battle. It was at that prime juncture that Krishna assumed the role of an ideal mentor and

counselled Arjuna to fight for the right cause. The Bhagavad Gita is the compilation of dialogues exchanged between Krishna, the charioteer and Arjuna, the prince where Krishna described the key aspects of life, significance of one's responsibility and the appropriate way to deal with different functionaries (Mulla and Krishnan, 2006) in one's lifetime. Eventually, Arjuna was transformed into a determined warrior and ready to take on his rivals. At the end of the battle, Arjuna along with his brothers accomplished victory over their opponents.

Radhakrishnan (1966) aptly narrated that the lessons imparted through the chapters of the Bhagavad Gita to be universally applicable. The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are conveyed in a simple language that can be understood by any individual (Basu & Mukherjee, 2018). The concept of Karma Yoga as illustrated in the Bhagavad Gita is found to be positively linked higher life satisfaction (Mulla and Krishnan, 2006). According to Mahadevan (2008), the Bhagavad Gita is an ideal tool, for enhancing the motivational level. Mahadevan (2008) explains citing the backdrop of the context as to how Arjuna, the prince hero underwent transformation from an aggrieved state of mind to the fearless warrior who took on his opponents and eventually accomplished victory over his opponents. Basu (2018) defined the Bhagavad Gita as an ideal thought provoking text that can contribute in enhancing the level of motivation in individuals. It indeed fascinates scholars of the present era as to how the insightful sayings in the ancient scripture, Bhagavad Gita hold true to this day.

Bhagavad Gita & Organizational Management

Management may be defined as the embodiment of knowledge that enables individuals to deal with workplace situations. The purview of management comprises of humans, machines

and the environment at large. Though the initial framework of the management remains the same but with the passing of time it keeps evolving. So, firms have to work hard and ensure they are able to maintain the perfect balance of people, machine and the environment.

The Bhagavad Gita in the recent times has garnered renewed interest among the researchers not only from the field of philosophy, theology and literature but also from the domain of management. The essence of the Bhagavad Gita encourages organizational executives to realize there cannot be parallel winner and losers given in any situation. It is only through enlightening the inner self that executives can alter their world outlook and as an effective outcome their degree of success will be enhanced (Chinna Natesan, Keffee & Darling, 2009). According to Parthasathi, Reddy, & K.V.S (2017), the Indian scripture Bhagavad Gita is the ideal treasury offering sustainable solutions to different challenges faced by organizations with each passing year. As indicated in the academic literatures a reasonably high number of researchers have explored the Bhagavad Gita from the management perspective. The recurrent themes of such studies for example, are examining the ethos of Karma Yoga (Narayanan and Krishnan, 2003; Menon & Krishnan, 2004; Sriramgarajan and Bhaskar, 2011; Rastogi and Pati, 2014) contributing to work efficiency and the impact of the Gunas on workplace effectiveness (Kaur and Sinha, 1992; Narayan and Krishnan, 2003; Ammineedu, 2008; Agarwalla, Smriti, Seshadri, Bhagvi, Krishnan, 2015).

Indeed such studies validate the momentousness and the applicability of the Bhagavad Gita in the new era organizations (Parthasathi, Reddy, & K.V.S, 2017). It is also noted in the recent past that western scholars are taking deep interest to understand the crux of the Bhagavad Gita in the contemporary times. A Business Week Special

article (Engardio and McGregor, 2006) appears to show that the Bhagavad Gita may be accepted as the most popular Eastern Literature among the professionals in the field of management in the western part of the world.

Muniapan and Sathpathy (2013) explored the Bhagavad Gita from the diverse aspects of organizational management such as corporate ethics and governance along with human resource management. Basu and Mukherjee (2018) suggested Bhagavad Gita to be an ideal tool for the purpose of decision making. Interestingly, Parthasathi, Reddy, & K.V.S (2017), stated the Bhagavad Gita can be seen more as a well-articulated example of operations management as it takes place in the backdrop of the battlefield and largely revolves around on the job and situational decision making. As interpreted by Freshman (1999), workplace spirituality or Karma Yoga takes towards the path of intuition which ultimately leads towards creativity. Sen (2012) stated Hindu scriptures offers diverse range of interventions to enhance the level of ethical practice in individuals' professional life. Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been examined from the frame of reference of 'dharma' as elaborated in the Bhagavad Gita to cultivate the seeds of holistic development in the minds of the organizational members (Sen, 2012). Bhagavad Gita as a contextual framework of leadership has captured the attention of the researchers in the field of leadership.

The Bhagavad Gita may be interpreted from the different aspects of organizational management but it the literary text as a glaring example of the leadership theories sets it apart from the other ancient texts. Therefore, the growing numbers academic work appears to suggest the Bhagavad Gita is the store house of ideal solutions to deal with divergent issues prevailing in the context of organizational management.

Paradigms of Leadership in the Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita is a legendary example of leadership. The author in that book has beautifully described the leader and follower relationship. Moreover, the outcome of effective leadership is uplifting the morale of the follower to venture out and set the course of action. In the organizational context, leaders have to make sure that employees are satisfied with their assigned job roles and motivate them to accomplish the desired work goals within definitive time frame (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). Specific leadership skills are needed to assume the role of an effective leader (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta and Kramer, 2004). The present day situation of the organizations across the globe is volatile. The turbulent nature of the business scenario is compelling the industries to absorb the fast paced evolving environment as an intrinsic part of firms' growth strategy. Rapid changes in the organizational world are found to be associated with the increase of risk and conflict along with decrease in the level of job satisfaction among the staff (Leong, Furnham and Cooper, 1996; Ford, Ford and D'Amelio, 2008; de Poel, Stoker & Zee, 2012).

A large number of scholars has examined the Bhagavad Gita from the point of view of leadership and management (Chakraborty, 1993; Chakraborty, 1995; Chakraborty, 1997, Chakraborty, 1999; Chakraborty&Chakraborty, 2008; Sharma, 1996; Sharma, 1998; Sharma, 1999; Sharma, 2002; Sharma, 2003; Krishnan, 2001; Krishnan, 2003; Kejriwal and Krishan, 2004; Satpathy, 2006; Satpathy, 2007; Muniapan, 2005; Muniapan, 2006, Muniapan, 2007; Muniapan, 2009; Muniapan, 2010; Muniapan and Dass, 2008; Muniapan and Dass, 2009; Muniapan and Sathpathy, 2010; Muniapand and Shaikh, 2007; Satpathy and Muniapan, 2008; Parashar, 2008; Muniapana and Sathpathy, 2013). The steady rise in the number of studies over the last

few decades exploring the Bhagavad Gita from the leadership perspectives seems to give a clear picture of its implication in present-day's world of business.

According to Sinha and Singh (2014), by inculcating the twenty six virtues of the wise people as mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita would enhance individuals' leadership skills. Any person who assumes the role of a leader by nurturing the virtues as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita will be in a position to conquer his/ her enemies (internal and external), establish long term friendship with their honest counterparts and will always be in a position to remain loyal to others (Sinha and Singh, 2014). The Bhagavad Gita was interpreted in line with the trait theory of leadership by emphasizing the fact that leadership is the functionary of the individuals' nature (Alok, 2011). As pointed by Hee (2007), the Bhagavad Gita provides effective moral advice and lessons on leadership. Alok (2011) studied the tenets of leadership as elaborated in the Bhagavad Gita and suggested that the Bhagavad Gita approach of leadership may rejuvenate business firms as an ideal work environment by advocating countenance of Svadharma or performing one's own duty within the egalitarian workplace culture and morally boosting impact.

The Bhagavad Gita has also been explored by the researchers from the point of view of the transformational leadership approach. Basu (2018) studied the Bhagavad Gita from the context of transformational leadership and described Krishna as the transformational leader and Arjun to be his ideal follower. Past studies suggest transformational leadership is positively associated with Svadharma and Sattava (Kejriwal and Krishnan, 2004; Mehra and Krishnan, 2005; Narayanan and Krishnan, 2003). The growing number of academic studies appears to show the expanding purview of

Bhagavad Gita from the context of leadership theories. Thus, it seems to emerge from the past academic literature, Bhagavad Gita is an effective tool in the field of leadership and provides sustainable solutions to organizational leaders to overcome the challenges pertaining to the steadily evolving business environment. In the contemporary business context, to ensure strategic growth and for the purpose of long term survival organizational leaders and management practitioners may imbibe the ethos of the Bhagavad Gita for their own benefits and for the betterment of the organizations at large.

Conclusion

The Bhagavad Gita approach towards organizational management may contribute in reducing job related stress and issues pertaining to workforce burnout in the era of turbulent knowledge economy. As an endeavour to achieve sustainable growth from the context of the Indian ethos, organizational leaders' needs to cultivate within themselves the teachings illustrated in the ancient Indian texts like the Bhagavad Gita. Thereby, incorporate such said lessons in the organizational settings to meet with the present day industrial needs. The lessons imparted through the invaluable literary work Bhagavad Gita have enlightened the human race to nurture prosperous insight into the different aspects of life since the age-old times. Interestingly, the sermons of the Bhagavad Gita hold true to this present day. Thus, it may be said that since the ancient times, the Indian worldview as illustrated in the number of literary texts has benefited the human race and will continue to do so for the years to come.

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