Using Spirituality and Meditation to Reinvent CSR Activities through Dana: Exploring the Potentials

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Abstract

Organized religion has been associated with generosity behaviour or dana since time immemorial. Dana in the Indian context implies giving for altruistic purposes without any expectations. However, religion is a much larger concept which includes many other dimensions such as precepts, prohibitions, world views and rituals which do not contribute significantly to dana. In this paper we propose that it is the element of spirituality (as a subset of most organized religions) that plays a key role in eliciting generosity. While the term 'spirituality' has a long history, its contemporary use separates it from religion per se and emphasizes a state of mind and an attitude. We feel that this state of mind, which often is a part of religious experience, and is well documented in almost all world religions, may play a vital role in inducing an attitude of altruism which is specific to certain actions – namely dana. It will be our attempt in this paper to bring out the relation between the three – spirituality, altruism and generosity – in order to suggest that they can play a vital role in contemporary organization practices for the betterment of society. Moreover, we will also attempt to link meditation to spirituality – as an induction process which often paves the way to spirituality – as a model that can work in modern organizational settings to benefit the employees, the organization, and finally the society. While changing the whole organizational philosophy may be too difficult – like Plato's attempt to make a philosopher king out of Dionysius II – it is possible to use organizations' CSR as an important platform where the underlying mechanism of generosity and philanthropy outlined above may be beneficially implemented. The paper will attempt to explore these potentials as well as risks in order to develop preliminary guidelines for spirituality-based CSR.

Introduction

In the contemporary context philanthropic activities are often considered from the

perspective of 'generosity.' Earlier, terms like 'charity' or 'alms' were also used. However, generosity does not include some of the negative connotations of charity or alms which assume a power relation, as well as a sense of superiority and inferiority. In spite of that, generosity still does not manage to capture the essence of the Indian term '*dana'* which we use in the context of this paper and which is not only used here as a term, but also as an attitude.

Dana, as a term, figures in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and implies 'unconditional' generosity. In that sense it implies a state of mind where one's ego is sublimated and one does not have any expectations during or after the act of giving. While such a state of mind is more of an ideal, to be strived for rather than a reality (as amply illustrated in *Katha Upanishad*, where Nachiketa's father was giving as *dana* old cows), the process itself has deeper implications for both the self and the other. *Dana*, when practiced in all earnestness requires and expects no return and by implication the other party is not felt to be at any obligation. However, in order to achieve such a state, one must be motivated by interests other than the self. Moreover, this can be said to emanate directly from a state of mind where one is at peace, at harmony and feels an intrinsic desire to share and give – altruism.

This problematizes the term – *dana* - in the context of profit-making organizations. Even if organizations can be generous, most often this is linked to CSR. While CSR is often considered to act (at least in principle) as other-centred, many theories try to point out that by benefiting others an organization benefits itself and hence should go for CSR. This goes against the grain of *dana*.

So where exactly do we locate this Indic concept within the framework of organizations and CSR? In this paper, we attempt to address the issue by pointing out that spirituality entails altruism which leads to generous or *dana*-inducing behaviour. Within this framework *dana* is without any expectation. So if CSR is to be considered within an Indic perspective spirituality must form a central radius from which the other elements might emanate. The other point, which might seem paradoxical, that we will also address – as we show the link between spirituality, altruism and *dana* – is how to induce spirituality. We will attempt to show that spirituality is necessary since it is beneficial. But this argument goes against the tenet of generosity. However, we argue, that once spirituality is accepted, because it makes sense, one is 'inside' the process and the perspective changes, one is now more motivated by altruism and other-centeredness rather than utilitarian considerations.

Thus, we attempt in this paper to create a model that looks at spirituality – which may be induced by, say, meditation – in relation to altruisms (as an attitude) that might lead to *dana* (an act). We attempt to suggest a model of how this may be possible through CSR.

From Spirituality to Altruism to *Dana*

Spirituality can be defined in a number of ways. However, there is no such universally accepted definition of spirituality. It may be the guiding philosophy of our inner consciousness (Guillory, 2000), a typical work attitude that makes us enthusiastic about our action (Dehler and Welsh, 1994), "a process of self enlightenment" (Barnett et al., 1999, p. 563), "a worldview plus a path" (Cavanagh et. al., 2001, p. 6), "access to the sacred force that impels life" (Nash and McLennan, 2001, p. 17), and "the unique inner search for the fullest personal development through participation into transcendent mystery" (Delbecq, 1999).Therefore, the term spirituality in its definition is multifaceted. None the less, what emerge are concepts like transcendental experiences, direction, discovery, realization and a sense of peace. As is clear from the definitions provided above, religion does not necessarily form a part of spirituality. However, since time immemorial, spirituality was documented usually in the context of organized religion.

While differentiating spirituality from religion, it can be said that spirituality is a personalized feeling or attitude of interconnectedness without being related to the beliefs, rituals and practices of traditional religious institutions (Karakas, 2009). Spirituality is a much more generalised concept in the sense that it can exist outside the realm of religion (Zullig et al., 2006). While religion is a set of behaviours, traits and doctrines, spirituality refers to personal beliefs and values through which one finds meaning in life (Westgate, 1996; Fry, 2003). It is much diverse and its range is much wider as it encourages any kind of expression of interconnectedness and, is more inclusive and universally applicable than religion which has a tendency to become dogmatic and exclusive (Klenke, 2003; Marques et al., 2005). Therefore, though, spirituality can be an appropriate and healthy topic of discussion in workplace, religious discussion might not be accepted by all at a workplace because of its exclusive nature (Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Kale, 2004).

Spirituality often leads to a sublimation of ego, to a sense of being at harmony with the world, and has often been found to lead to a deeper understanding of others, empathy, and then a desire to serve others - altruism. This is amply illustrated by most spiritual foundations where service to others plays an important role. Altruism is closely associated with spiritual experiences and spiritual cognition (Huber and MacDonald, 2012). Self-transcendent positive emotion which is a key component of spirituality is closely related to altruism (Krebs, 1991; Kristeller and Johnson, 2005). People with spiritual orientation tend to extend their helping hands not only towards loved ones but also to strangers (Saroglou et al., 2005). Experience of interconnection and oneness may give rise to compassion and altruism leading to a change in perception about self and others. One's self importance gradually gives rise to loss of ego – other centeredness. Thus, the decentred self perceives itself as a part of the greater community and hence, moves towards performing altruistic acts

(Vieten et al., 2006). When it comes to economic choice and decision making, it is generally observed that more spiritual people act more compassionately and altruistically towards strangers. These findings suggest that pro-social behaviour is often motivated by an underlying spirituality (Batson and Shaw, 1991).

When defining what spirituality means to them, individuals use words that refer to notions of loving connection with others and altruism (Greenwald and Harder, 2003). Similarly, self-identified spiritual individuals describe that spirituality makes them feel loving and respectful towards others (Woods and Ironson, 1999), that they feel more "compassionate love" for close others and strangers (Sprecher and Fehr, 2005). They report behaving more altruistically and feeling more empathy (Saroglou et al., 2005), and they are more likely to believe that kindness and generosity should be extended to all people (Saroglou et al., 2005).

Spirituality provides people with a sense of worth, fulfilment and the belief to reach their potential and as a result of this people start seeking other such opportunities that may give rise to the same feelings of satisfaction. It is possible that pro-social behaviour and altruism gives rise to such positive emotions. Therefore, more spiritual people tend to act more altruistically towards others (Bonner et al., 2003)

Thus, when one is empathetic, one tends to understand, share and enter the feelings and thoughts of others. Therefore, empathy, as an attitude and mindset, gives rise to compassion. A compassionate individual exercises sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings and misfortunes of others. Altruism, as behaviour, is originated by compassionate feeling. It refers to a disinterested and selfless concern for the well being of others. When altruism turns into action, it can be termed as *dana* or generosity. Altruistic generosity makes one devote oneself for the cause and benefit of others. This process can be illustrated in the diagram below:
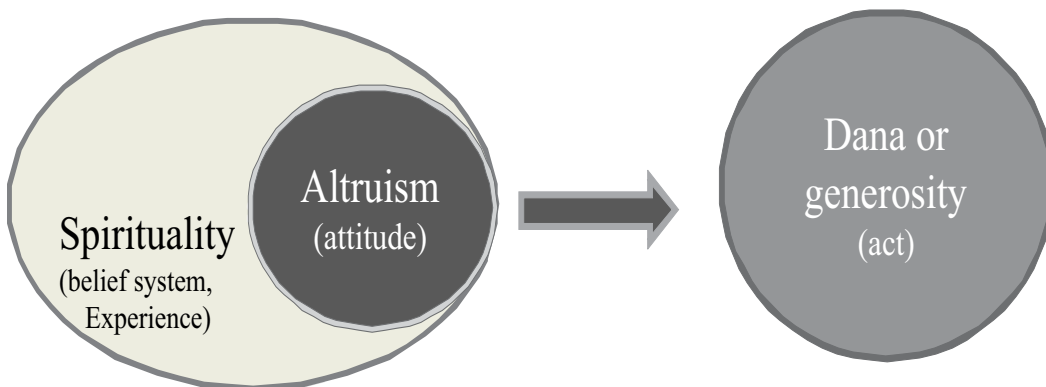
Spirituality at Workplace

While the Indian tradition, through its theory of Karma, proposes an ideal and detached attitude towards work, actual practice is very different. Most Indian organizations do not follow such principles. However, recent studies have started looking with interest at spirituality at workplace (Beheshtifar and Zare, 2013). This may not necessarily be induced only by humanitarian interests. In fact most organizations adopt humanitarian policies only when they do not conflict with their profits. The same ideology is at work here as well, since studies find that spirituality may actually benefit organizations and its employees (Biberman and Whitty. 1997).
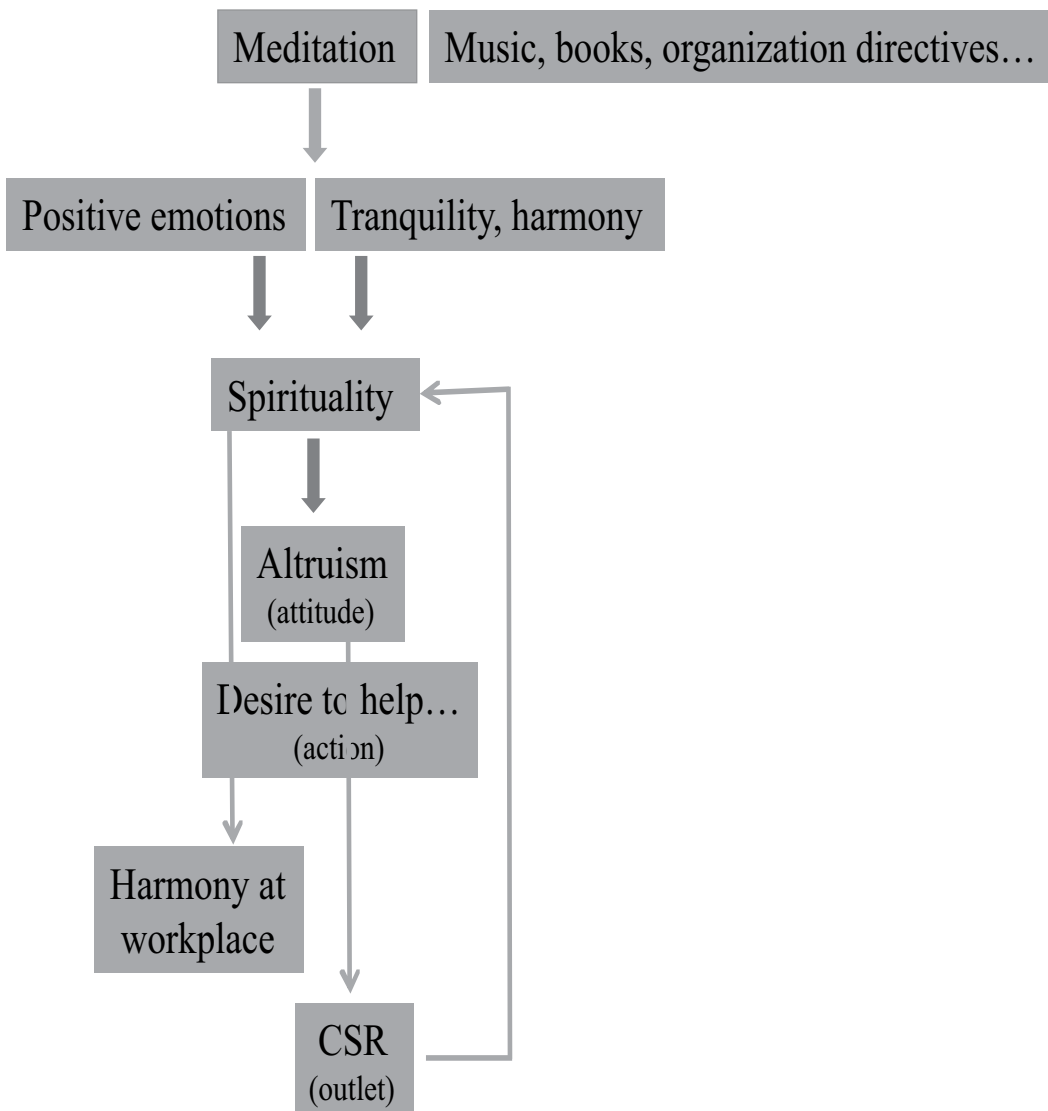
In a world where work is fragmented, spirituality at workplace may provide a sense of meaning and purpose to work, an interconnected relation with the co-workers and a consistency with the values, ethics and beliefs of the particular organisation (Behestifar and Zare, 2013). Workplace spirituality makes employees more committed towards their work and at the same time it gives joy, happiness, enjoyment and job satisfaction which ultimately enhances performance level (Reave, 2005). Research has shown that if the spiritual dimension of employees is addressed, it results in a reduction in stress and improved creativity and problem solving ability (Tischler *et al.* 2002). When one finds meaning and purpose at work, it increases involvement and one can identify oneself with the organisation which also results in increased joy and satisfaction (Kolodinsky *et al.* 2008). Reave (2005) summarizing seven studies by Emmons (1999) reports "a significant correlation between spirituality and mental health indices of life satisfaction, happiness, self esteem, hope and optimism, and meaning in life". Spirituality increases honesty and trust at workplace which results in better commitment level and creates an atmosphere of cooperation (Burack, 1999).

Thus, there is enough evidence to suggest that spirituality at workplace may actually benefit organizations. Since we have already illustrated the logical connection between spirituality and *dana*, this actually allows us to create a model where spirituality may be used not only to benefit the organization and its employees, but also the society through its CSR activities. Thus the three Ps of CSR, production, people and planet can be addressed by linking spirituality to CSR (*dana*) through altruism.

This leads us to the next problem. How can spirituality be induced in an organization? Organizations thrive on power relations and hierarchy. Under such circumstances, a bottom up approach seems untenable. Both history (for instance kings like Ashoka or Samudragupta) and recent examples (J.R.D. Tata and Warren Buffett) suggest that spirituality must be induced from the top as an organizational ideology. It may be made effective through meditation, music, directives, underlying organizational guidelines and

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so on. In fact, meditation has been found to induce spirituality and lead to higher spiritual experiences (doc) and is also beneficial for organizational productivity. In this paper, for this reason, along with organization ideology, we propose meditation as an induction strategy.

We also propose that such a spiritually oriented organization, in the long run, will become altruistic and these impulses are best relieved through CSR in the form of various kinds of dana – service to humanity and to society. We illustrate this in the diagram below.

Meditation	Music, books, organization directives…

Positive emotions	Tranquility, harmony

Spirituality

Altruism
(attitude)

Desire to help…
(action)

Harmony at workplace

CSR
(outlet)

Spirituality, CSR and Dana

The real meaning and concept of CSR is subject to debate. Moreover there is no standard definition to CSR. Corporate Social Responsibility has always been linked to Individual Responsibility (Be´ Nabou and Tirole, 2010). Any citizen across the world is looked forward to be socially responsible and morally and ethically sound. This nature of a true citizen is always sought in all companies. It can be said that CSR is an extension or larger dimension of the responsible, moral and ethical nature of a citizen which in some or the other way serves and gives back to the society. But the fundamental question is, "Are the companies ready to do away with their profit and growth for the betterment of the society?" It's perceived that in a global market where there is cutthroat competition ethical business approach is a dream. Is it that the notion of CSR a dream, a system which can only be found in a utopia? To understand the concept of CSR, we have to study the history of CSR.

Since the first seed of CSR was sown in the later decades of twentieth century, the manifestation of the conception underwent many alteration and adaptation. The first generation of CSR addresses the question, "Can corporations be responsible in ways that do not detract from and may add commercial value to their business?" Such CSR activities were mere exemplification of philanthropy and are considered the most traditional form of CSR. The second generation of CSR concentrates on CSR as an integral part of long term business strategy. But the third generation CSR not only addresses issues like poverty, exclusion and environment degradation but also focuses on partnership with civil society and advocates for change in public policy (Zadek, 2001).

The earliest definition of CSR was suggested by Bowen in 1953 who proposed that "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Carroll, 1999). With the development of philosophies, ideologies, socio-economic and environmental concerns, the definitions have changed radically. CSR which started off as a mere giving activity has now embodied a wide range of responsibilities from bringing about positive changes in the lives of millions to the protection of environment, from human rights to animal welfare and from development of science and technology to the preservation and integration of heritage. In this sense, where the act of giving is not driven by ethical strictures, government policies, or as a mere form, CSR can become spiritually oriented and serve communities in the spirit of giving *dana*.

Though there has been a significant change in the philosophy and manifestation of CSR activities, many endeavours on the part of the companies are now rendered as "failed system" (Smith and Singer, 2012). One of the most important reasons of this failed system is the lack of spirituality at all levels of organization. Literatures suggest that very less thought

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is employed in determining what is wrong and what is right and in many cases strategies are made to augment CSR metrics at the least possible cost. In the absence of thoughtful reflection, there is no goal beyond the immediate results produced by any action (Hollenburg, 2008).

Many studies have been conducted in the fields of spirituality and CSR and such studies have indicated that spirituality has a positive relationship with CSR (Poulton and Barnes, 2012). A study conducted by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) to determine the relationship between spirituality and CSR specified that "Spirituality, along with hope, gratitude, and generosity, was a significant positive predictor of whether or not an individual placed value on multi-fiduciary considerations when making consumer decisions" (cited in Kolodinsky et al, 2010). So we can say that CSR having a spiritual approach is the need of hour. Besides, it does not in any way lead to loss for organizations (McWilliams and Siegel, 2000). Rather it makes organizations happier and more harmonious.

A different attitude is required altogether: an organizational application of positive psychology which shifts the organizational focus away from an exclusive obsession with corporate profits or shareholder wealth to positive individual virtues among their decision makers (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). A positive approach to organizational ethics can yield a living ethical code that with authentic leadership can create an organizational response that truly manifests its responsibility to society (Verbos, et al., 2007). Louis W. Fry (2003) proposed a three-fold model which addressed spiritual leadership. According to him, the leader should create a vision that gives organisational members a sense of meaning and purpose. Secondly, he or she should establish an organisational culture based on the value of altruistic love whereby leaders genuinely care for others and endeavour to create a sense of community where individuals feel understood and appreciated. This, in turn, encourages hope and faith. In an organisational context, hope/faith is the source of absolute belief that the vision articulated by the leader will be realized along with reward/victories accompanying this outcome. By summarising the hypothesised relationships between these components, Fry (2003) constructs an intrinsic motivational causal model of spiritual leadership. In this model, the leader articulates a compelling vision that produces a sense of calling, that is, gives followers a feeling of making a difference and a life that has meaning beyond the ego-self. Hope/faith adds conviction that the vision, and any corresponding rewards, is attainable regardless of setbacks and results in action/performance by followers to achieve the vision. Altruistic love, given from the organisation and received from followers pursuing a common vision removes fears, anger, a sense of failure and pride, and creates a culture where individuals have a sense of communal membership (Cécile and McGhee, 2011).

As we have argued above, this is not to be considered an idealistic dream. There is ample

evidence to suggest that spirituality can actually benefit organizations, employees and the society at large. However, as illustrated above, it can happen only through a top down approach. Moreover, such a model will work in two different ways. In addition to spirituality inducing *dana* behaviour, it has also been reported that the experience of serving others often acts in the reverse way, inducing empathy and then spirituality (Huber and MacDonald, 2012). Thus, if put to operation, the people at various levels may start off without spirituality, but may end up with spirituality which will sustain their sense of harmony, empathy, altruism and *dana*. This is illustrated in the diagram below:

Positive emotions		Tranquility, harmony

Spirituality

Altruism (attitude)

CSR (outlet)
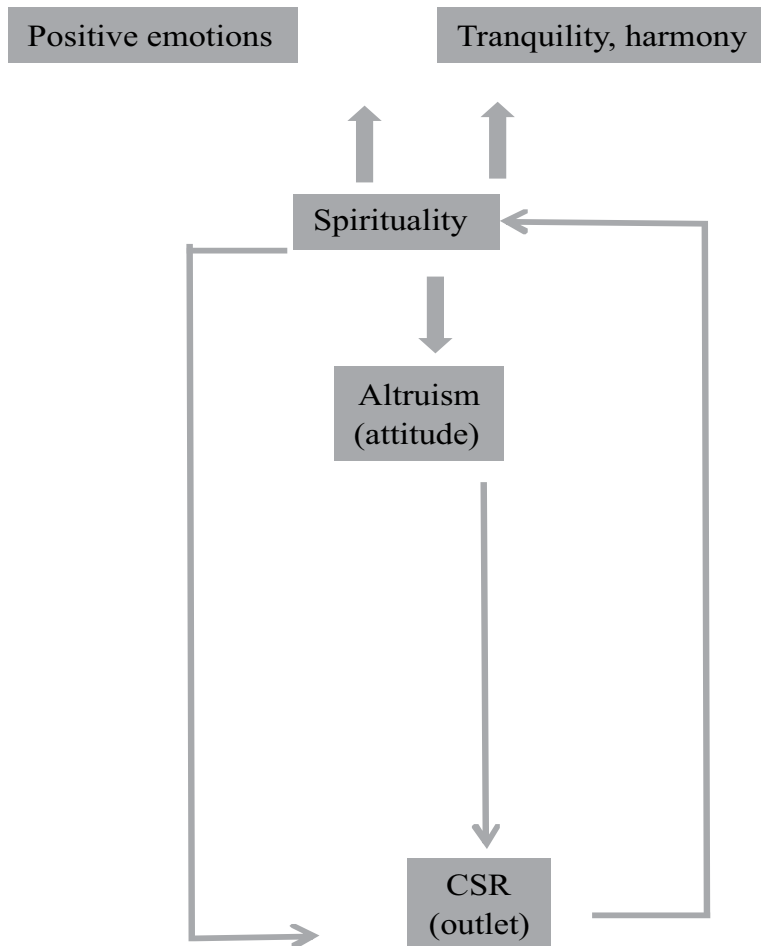
At the end we propose a more complete model, based on the Indic concept of *dana*, of how spirituality can be integrated into an organization and can manifest in better quality of life for its employees and betterment for the society. While the model, when we see it from

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outside is utilitarian – to be used because it is 'profitable' – is actually deeply spiritual when practiced. This is so, because once one experiences spirituality, for the employees, the acts become altruistic, *dana*-oriented, and no longer utilitarian.

ORGANIZATION/MANAGEMENT

EMPLOYEE

E=ethics
S1= spirituality
S2= satisfaction
P=productivity
H=harmony

The fundamental element in *dana* which makes it a powerful mechanism to address all logic behind the failed system is spirituality. The Gita also advocates *Satvik dana* and this type of *dana* in all senses is the embodiment of an ideal and quintessential CSR. *Satavik dana* is made as without expecting anything in return, to deserving persons with respect and humility and at the right place and time; and this kind of giving brings about a harmonious change within the organization, within the employees and within the others who are at the receiving end of the new 'secure system.'

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