

Preachings of the Bhagavad Gita : a Management Perspective

Dr Gitanjali Bhatnagar

Professor, PTU School of TQM & Entrepreneurship

Abstract *The Bhagavad Gita, written thousands of years ago, enlightens whoever reads it with all managerial techniques. It contains valuable teachings applicable to all stages of human development. We learn to lead a harmonious and blissful life even in an era which is full of conflict, tensions and absence of motivation. The Bhagavad Gita elaborates upon the issues related to the grass root level of human thinking. Once the basic thinking of man is improved, it will automatically improve the eminence of his actions and their results. At work, the most critical question on every manager's mind is how to be effective at work. The answer to this question is found in the Bhagavad Gita, which repeatedly proclaims that "you must try to manage yourself" (Bhattathiri, 2011). The reason is that unless a manager attains a level of excellence and effectiveness, he or she will be a lost face in the crowd.*

Key words: *Spiritual, Commitment, Attitude, Positive Thinking, Decision Making*

Introduction

The most beautiful journey on earth, called life, is dotted with ups and downs, good times and bad times, fun & frolic, sorrow, meetings and partings. Every stopover on the way enlightens us about the various hues of our existence and teaches us that nothing in this world is permanent. During the course of this journey, the wise ones gain the maturity to accept people as they are, and to let go when the time is opportune. The thoughts and teachings of prominent religious texts like the Bhagavad Gita guide us at every stage of the life journey. Those who are fortunate enough to have read the Bhagavad Gita are blessed with an internal peace and seem to possess a calm, confident demeanor towards handling their personal and professional life. The distressed state of Arjun is no different from that which most people experience in life (Parthasarathy, 1992). During times of trouble and turmoil when the mind is confused and afraid, and one is not able to manage either the professional or personal front, one is often advised to read the Bhagavad Gita, to seek solace and to find the right path towards a solution for all the problems, confusions and disturbing thoughts.

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most revered of the ancient texts, popular not only among the Indians but also among scholars of other countries. The Bhagavad Gita has inspired many of our national leaders and provided them strength, moral courage and clarity of thought with which they have been able to lead the country time and again. Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is such a piece of motivation that each reading provides new understanding, new vision to ponder upon and practice. Modern management concepts like vision, leadership, motivation, excellence in work, achieving goals, meaning of work, attitude towards work, nature of individual, decision making, planning etc., are all discussed in the Bhagavad Gita (Sethumadhvan, 2002). Krishna has explained to Arjun the importance of performing his duty. A warrior is fortunate to find an opportunity to fight a righteous battle, abandoning such an opportunity will incur infamy and sin (Parthasarathy, 1992). The teachings in Bhagavad Gita provide a sharp insight and analysis to equip our minds with sufficient wisdom to handle any problem, making it highly appropriate to be adopted as part of the modern management syllabus at any business school.

Nobody can refute the fact that managing men, money and material in the best possible way is the most important and essential factor for successful management and execution of a project. Managing men is supposed to require the best management tactics and strategies. Human being is the first component in management, which speaks volumes on the role and significance of human being in the strategies of management practices. It is difficult to believe that to manage men at work the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation did not believe in intense vigilance nor did it rely on hidden cameras to plug leaks, nab wrongdoers and work-shirkers. DMRC is one of the few organisations where all executives on joining work are given their own copy of Swami Vidyaprakashananda's 'Gita Makaranda'. "To motivate employees and to encourage a positive outlook, quotes from the 'Gita Makaranda' are published in the monthly newsletter and safety bulletins of DMRC so that the message regarding value of hard work and honesty reaches everyone from the senior management to the workers and the contractors", said Anuj Dayal, Chief PRO, DMRC (Ram, 2008).

The Bhagavad Gita expounded thousands of years ago, enlightens us on all managerial techniques leading to a harmonious and blissful state of affairs. The main objective of the Bhagavad Gita is to help people cross the ocean of transmigration and reach the spiritual shore of liberation while living and working in the society. The central teaching of the Bhagavad Gita is the attainment of freedom from the bondage of life by doing one's duty. We all have grown up listening to our teachers and parents narrating the same stories: 'concentrate on your target like Arjun', 'do not get attached to the results', 'don't be greedy', 'do your duty efficiently without being attached to or affected by the results' or 'always remember the glory and greatness of the creator'. Bhagavad Gita is a great book to learn and implement management and managerial strategies from.

Use the Power of Positive Thinking

Bhagavad Gita in numerous ways narrates the power of positive thinking. In one of the

chapters, Gita defines four goals for steady and methodical growth of the individual and progress of society (Bhattathiri, 2011), they are: doing one's duty; earning wealth; substance and sensual gratification (with senses under control); attaining salvation. In the mode of goodness, one possesses the understanding by which one sees a single (undivided) immutable reality in all beings; performs obligatory duty without thinking of likes and dislikes the result; enjoys sensual pleasure with senses under control; is free from attachment/unaffected by loss or win, non-egotistic, has made his mind up, and is unperturbed in success or failure; has intelligence by which one measures what is the right or wrong action and the path of renunciation, best ways to work, fear and fearlessness, bondage and freedom; has the determination by which one manipulates functions of the mind and senses for God-realization; enjoys contentment from spiritual practice ensuing in cessation of all sorrows; and enjoys contentment that comes by the refinement of Self-knowledge.

Another objective which the Bhagavad-Gita seeks to achieve is to help people overcome dilemmas in everyday life. The entire discourse of the Bhagavad Gita on the dialogue/discussion between Lord Krishna and Arjun on the battlefield is to remove doubts and confusions through positive thinking. Arjun was reluctant to fight with his relatives for gaining control over the kingdom, Krishna explained to Arjun, "If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty, and lose your reputation. People will talk about your disgrace forever. Just do your duty to the best of your capability without becoming disheartened by the thought of the outcome which may be success or failure, gain or loss, victory or defeat" (Bhattathiri, 2011).

In general, all of us, like Arjun, think and feel low not because of the dismal circumstances we are in, but we are in dismal circumstances because we think and feel low. The most powerful but least understood tool we possess is positive thinking. Positive thinking is an approach of the mind wherein a person thinks and believes that efforts utilized in the right

direction will turn out to be successful. The power of positive thinking can be understood when an individual is not happy with the outcomes, situations go wrong or are looking a bit dim, the individual has to think positive. Thinking in a positive manner, in return, attracts positive results.

Attitude Towards Work

One of the biggest problems that we face in our lives and workplace is that we don't seem to enjoy what we are doing. Today, even children say "I am bored". Young professionals want to adopt the western work culture of "weekend getaway". These days, we in India too look forward for "weekend getaways", we perceive work as drudgery and an avoidable aspect of our life. With such a perspective one can never expect the best results from any work place.

Each one of us has different inner characteristics possessing different perspectives. "Look at your own duty you should not waver, for there is nothing better than righteous war" (Parthasarathy, 1992). The Gita advocates that everyone should build a visionary perspective in his or her work. It suggests that whenever an individual does some work, he/she should not get preoccupied with the outcomes. It advises non-attachment/no expectations of the results from actions while remaining accountable for the output of one's duty. It says that by acting without attachment, an individual can accomplish distant outcomes. An attachment sprouts ego in our work and detachment releases us from the harmful energies (Pratap, 2011).

In Gita, it is explained that "You have control over your Karm, but no control or claim over the result. Fear of failure or becoming emotionally attached to the fruit of work is the greatest obstacle to success because it robs efficiency by constantly disturbing the equanimity of mind. The boundary of one's jurisdiction ends with the completion of one's duty. Do your duty to the best of your ability; abandon worry and attachment to the result. Remain calm in both success and failure. Such selfless service brings peace, contented feeling and equanimity of mind." (Bhattathiri, 2011)

To excel in execution of the work, the best way is to immerse oneself in work so much that it no longer appears as work (karma) but rather, a duty (dharma). This gives rise to a value system in the work of an individual (Pratap, 2011).

Understand Your Place in the Big Plan

The despondent position of Arjuna in the first chapter of the Gita translates a typical human situation which may come in the life of all men and women, some time or other. Krishna by sheer power of his inspiring words raised the level of Arjuna's mind from the state of confusion / inertia to the state of righteous action. Krishna counseled Arjun from the state of faithlessness to the state of faith and self-confidence in the ultimate victory of Dharma (ethical action). Arjun was made to understand his duties, responsibilities, as well as how important it is to identify what are you here for. "Those who are free from pride and delusion, who have conquered the evil of attachment, who constantly dwell on the Supreme Being with senses under control, who understand dualities of pleasure and pain (disappointment), such wise ones reach My Supreme Abode" (Bhattathiri, 2011). When Arjuna got over his despondency and stood ready to fight, Sri Krishna made him realize that he was using his spirit of intense action not for his own benefit, not for fulfilling his own greed and aspiration, but for the good of many, with faith in the ultimate victory of ethics over unethical actions and truth over untruth. Arjuna responds by emphatically declaring that all his delusions/ confusions/ inertia were removed and that he is ready to do what is expected of him in the given situation. Like the characters of Gita we all are expected to respond and perform our duties to the best of our abilities, under a given situation (Bhattathiri, 2011).

Each business organization as well as each individual has a unique slot in the jigsaw puzzle of the universe. The goals of an organization and its departments may keep changing with time. Generally each one of us has inborn talents and skills which need to be discovered, honed and put to use for achieving personal and organisational purpose. It is the responsibility of the

leader to ensure that employees have a sense of belonging and identify themselves with renewed focus and commitment. Each person is required to be fitted into the right slot, while fulfilling his own role, in harmony with the big overall organizational plan (Bhatnagar, 1997).

Developing Values Among Individuals

Krishna made Arjun understand a great psychological truth that whatever a leader does the masses follow, whatever standards he sets his followers emulate them. When a teacher of the institute is undisciplined the students become the same way. When the head of the family is lazy and lethargic the other members of the family develop similar traits. Therefore, for the well being of a state or family, the head of the unit must lead the way. He must set a high standard for his followers to rise to and reach (Parthasarathy, 1992). Fearlessness, purity of inner psyche, non-delusion, forgiveness, truthfulness, absence of anger, charity, control over mind and senses, tranquility, compassion for all creatures, freedom from greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, nonviolence, sacrifice, equanimity, contentment, austerity, charity, are the diverse values preached and emphasised by Krishna in the Gita. Lord Krishna, in one of the chapters, says that “the mind and intellect of a person become steady when he is neither elated by getting desired results, nor perturbed by undesired results. Restless senses, O Arjuna, forcibly carry away the mind of even a wise person striving for perfection”(Bhattathiri, 2011). A spiritually underdeveloped employee is very costly to the organization. This is why people who build successful organizations pay great attention to their employees' developmental needs.

In Gita, it is stated categorically that “the senses are said to be superior to the body, the mind is superior to the senses, the intellect is superior to the mind, transcendental knowledge is superior to the intellect, and the Self is superior to transcendental knowledge. Thus, knowing the Self to be superior to the intellect, and controlling the mind by the intellect”(Bhattathiri, 2011). In the present

era of omnipresent corruption and scams, it becomes the moral duty of schools, colleges, religious institutions, parents to inculcate values among individuals to overcome evils of the society.

In today's scenario, the corporate world conducts personal transformation programs to help in the development of effective, quality people. Reiki, vipassana, yoga, sudarshan kriya, silva mind control, transcendental meditation, hypnotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming and sidhha samadhi yoga are some of the systems gaining popularity in corporate circles. (Bhatnagar, 1997)

Make the Best Use of the Present Moment

We all have grown up listening to the phrase “Life is not a destination to be arrived at. What counts is what you are doing with it right now” (Bhatnagar, 1997). When Arjuna became bewildered upon seeing people he loved and respected as his opponents in the battle field, Lord Krishna made Arjun understand that they have only two choices: fight for their right as a matter of duty or run away from war and accept defeat in the name of peace and nonviolence. Lord Krishna said: “If you will not fight this righteous war, then you will fail in your duty. Considering your duty as a warrior you should not waver like this. There is nothing more auspicious for a warrior than a righteous war. Just do your duty to the best of your ability without becoming discouraged by the thought of the outcome. You have control over doing your respective duty, but no control or claim over the result” (Bhattathiri, 2011).

As students, we all wanted to be recognized as one of the best student in school or college, but at the same time we never put in our best efforts to attain that position. Like Arjun all of us generally think of all possible outcomes even before starting the task. We need to understand not to waste time in imagining outcomes of the work. 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 or anxiety for the future. In fact, the way the world works means that

events do not always respond positively to our calculations and hence, expected fruits may not always be forthcoming. So, the Gita tells us not to mortgage present commitment to an uncertain future (Bhattathiri, 2011).

Utilizing Alternatives Wisely

Resources are increasingly becoming scarce, which augments the challenge of managing them. There will always be trade-offs between alternatives. This is why it is important to learn how to choose wisely and utilise resources optimally. In Gita, Arjun and Duryodhana both went to seek Krishna's support for the famous battle. Lord Krishna offered two options: one can opt for his army and the other one can take him. Duryodhana chose Krishna's large army for help while Arjun selected Krishna's presence and wisdom. Therefore, unlike Duryodhana, a good manager should never fail to see the bigger picture. Evaluation of alternatives is critical to making decisions; this demands patience, wisdom, and managerial skills (Pratap, 2011). People are ignorant of the supreme self within, ignorance gives rise to delusion, often they are confused and confounded. The mind is infested with doubts and indecisions. Krishna advised Arjun to use his intellect to subdue these negative forces and pursue the path of action (Parthasarathy, 1992).

In any business staying ahead of competitors is the most crucial task. A mobile giant like Bharti Airtel has always focused on evaluating alternatives, for example revamping its pricing strategies at regular intervals in order to stay ahead of competition. The company charged different rates for outgoing calls, SMS, and international calls, depending on the plan the subscriber has subscribed for. It is indeed essential for each organisation and each manager to act wisely to select/evaluate alternatives for the best outcome. Industry experts feel that these actions are necessary to compete in the intensifying competition in the pre-paid cellular card segment in India in the 21st century.

Focus on Work Commitment

In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna, in a

popular verse, advises “your right is in action only, never to the fruit; let not the fruit of action be your motive nor let your attachment be to inaction” (Parthasarathy, 1992). If an individual always keeps calculating rewards, recognitions, the date of promotion or the rate of commission before putting in efforts, then such work is not detached. It is not “generating excellence for its own sake” but working only for the extrinsic reward that may (or may not) result. The best way to perform is to attain *nishkama karma*. The Gita suggests that this state prevents the ego and mind from dissipation through speculation on future gains.

To help employees make the best use of their capability, the leader of the organisation has to encourage employees to identify and assign tasks to themselves. For juniors to work in harmony with the departmental plans, it has to be ensured that human resources are trained in time to drive desired results. 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, making the doer responsible for the consequences of his deeds. While advising detachment from the avarice of selfish gains in discharging one's accepted duty, the Gita does not absolve anybody from 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 because it prevents the ego, the attention of mind from speculation on future gains or losses (Bhattathiri, 2011).

Learning The Decision-Making Processes

“The human mind runs wildly in all directions seeking the pleasures of the world. Full of desires and agitations, it cannot even concentrate. Therefore, one must first reduce desires by controlling sense, mind and intellect through practicing *karma* (action), *bhakti* (devotion), and *jnana* (knowledge). These three actions would help relieve individual mind from preoccupation with the world. Having the senses, mind and intellect controlled, with

liberation as the goal, the sage, free from desire, anger and fear, is verily liberated forever" (Parthasarathy, 1992).

When Arjuna fails to convince himself to wage war against his elders, Krishna assists him in making a decision. In eighteen chapters, seven hundred verses, the Bhagavad Gita devotes itself to one task – making one decision. Lord Krishna through his conversation with Arjun enables him to undertake a voyage of self-discovery so he can master the art of making a complex decision in the face of conflicting values. The Gita talks about the righteous decision-making process throughout the book. It says that in the midst of a tempest, one needs to take decisions, and those should be righteous. In difficult circumstances, one should be guided by the principle to refrain from thoughts that may make them weak, either physically or psychologically. Faith in self and dharma (ethical action) guides the way to making better decisions. This will not only streamline the process and minimise the use of resources, but also ultimately lead to better outcomes (Pratap, 2011).

Whether it is any organisation or life of an individual, a decision is a choice among the alternatives. As soon as an individual chooses one alternative, it means the other alternative is relatively less important. Selection of an alternative is based on individual's logic, emotion and experience. At times the selected option is acceptable to other members of the team. One has to stand firm for the choice, resist opposition from people and circumstance. Generally, such conflicts are part of decision making. However, thinking about decisions from the perspective of conflict resolution is going about it the wrong way. Conflict resolution is like happiness; the more you chase it, the less likely you are to get it. Thus, Arjun was made to understand the larger perspective of the solution to the problem. Lord Krishna suggested Arjun to understand problems in the right perspective to manage them. This is the greatest management lesson that one can learn.

Wider Spectrum of Task

In general, Bhagavad Gita is full of advice of

cause and effect of *karma*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. Lord Krishna told Arjun that all of us are responsible for the consequences of our deeds. The Gita, while advising detachment from the selfish gains by discharging duty, does not absolve anybody from the consequences arising from discharge of their responsibilities (Sethumadhvan, 2002). To pull Arjun out of his state of inaction, Krishna appealed to him to perform without attachment and reach the supreme (Parthasarathy, 1992). In general, Krishna's *updesha* in the Gita revolves around the philosophy of assessing individual strengths and developing inner faculties, so that one can face and conquer the challenges in life. Each one of us needs to develop a strong intellect to withstand the onslaughts of an agitated mind and to direct actions properly (Parthasarathy, 1992).

The phrase "Don't worry, be happy" may well be a modern term, but the secret of achieving this lies in the Gita. The Gita 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 mollifies 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' companions of diabetes, high blood pressure and ulcers (Sethumadhvan, 2002).

Lord Krishna said, "Fearlessness, purity of inner psyche, perseverance in devotion of self-knowledge, charity, sense restraint, sacrifice, study of scriptures, austerity, honesty, nonviolence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, equanimity, abstaining from malicious talk, compassion for all creatures, freedom from greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, splendor, forgiveness, fortitude, cleanliness, absence of malice, and absence of pride are some of the qualities of those endowed with divine virtues, O Arjuna." (Bhattathiri, 2011)

“The wise, united to knowledge, renouncing the fruit of action, liberated from the bond of birth, indeed reach the state beyond evil”(Parthasarathy,1992). Assimilation of the ideas of the Gita leads us to the wider spectrum of “*loka samgraha*” (general welfare) but there is also another dimension to the work ethic - if the “*karma yoga*” (service) is blended with “*bhakti yoga*” (devotion), then the work itself becomes worship, a “*seva yoga*” (service for its own sake.) Along with *bhakti yoga* as a means of liberation, the Gita espouses the doctrine of *nishkamya karma* or pure action, untainted by hankering after the fruits resulting from those action. Modern scientists have now understood the intuitive wisdom of that action in a new light (Sethumadhvan, 2002).

Importance of Social Good

Gita also offers perspectives on how to manage certain things in life, understand complex things that we go through. Krishna helped Arjun understand the importance of working with the spirit of sacrifice, its importance for the welfare of human beings. It comprises actions performed selflessly, in a spirit of surrender and sacrifice to a higher goal in life. Such actions set the wheel of progress moving towards the ultimate destination of peace and bliss (Parthasarathy,1992). It also offers direct ideas and sets us in a state of contemplation.

Lord Krishna said “treat alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and then defeat, then get ready for the battle” (Parthasarathy,1992). Krishna prepared Arjun to look at the battle scene as an opportunity to serve the great cause of resurrecting righteousness in his country. The fact remains that while doing great work, all of us need a great amount of energy and motivation. A person may run out of energy and motivation when he is doing something for personal gains, but he will always be driven by higher energies when he is able to see the larger interests of the world. Krishna taught Arjuna to fight against his elders, not with the intention of sheer personal pursuits of materialism, but for *Lok-kalyan*: the good of many, with a firm belief in the virtue of ethics (*dharma*)

over unethical actions. Moreover, work done for personal gains delivers a certain set of benefits which may outweigh the cost, but works done for the common good reap a quantum of benefits so great that it overthrows all the costs. Thus, the margin always remains high in the actions of *Lok-kalyan*. Sensing the responsibility of the work, a manager should ideally be able to evade negative mental states like greed, anger, jealousy, hate, and suspicion (Pratap,2011).

Empathy for One Another

While clarity of intention and awareness gets us onto the path to success, empathy and compassion help us to gain support of others. Both in Bhagavad Gita as well as in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, friendliness (*maitri*) and kindness/compassion (*karuna*) are two attitudes that are encouraged in working with others (Kaipa, 1998). When an individual begins to see himself in others and feel for others genuinely, others too reciprocate similar feelings. Time and again, we all have experienced that affection (*vatsalyata bhava*) and warmth for people always brought positive results. In case of conflicts, kindness and compassion are able to diffuse that tension and create some 'openness' to an amicable solution.

Empathy is like "walking in another's shoes." It implies the imaginative act of being the other person. Empathy is the foundation for emotional intelligence. By being kind and empathetic when you could be harsh, you can build lasting relationships with your colleagues, employees and customers. The practice of empathy really requires demonstrating openness, mutual respect and trust in relationships. Deep listening, not just to the words but the meaning behind the words, is the foundation for an empathetic relationship. Sharing from the heart and feeling the pain of the other nurtures relationships. Empathy begets more empathy and is the source of a creative partnership (Kaipa,1998).

Bhagavad Gita is a message addressed to each and every human individual to help him or her to solve the vexing problem of overcoming the present and progressing

towards a bright future. Within its eighteen chapters is revealed a human drama. This is the experience of everyone in this world, the drama of the ascent of man from a state of utter dejection, sorrow and total breakdown and hopelessness to a state of perfect understanding, clarity, renewed strength and triumph (Bhattathiri, 2011). Holy Gita has become a secret driving force behind the unfoldment of one's life. In the days of doubt, this divine book will support all spiritual search. This divine book will contribute to self reflection, finer feeling and deepen one's inner process. Then, life in the world can become a real education—dynamic, full and joyful—no matter what the circumstance. May the wisdom of loving consciousness ever guide us on our journey. What makes the Holy Gita a practical psychology of transformation is that it offers us the tools to connect with our deepest intangible essence and we must learn to participate in the battle of life with right knowledge (Bhattathiri, 2011).

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