

LESSONS ON MANAGEMENT FROM THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Megha Nair Pillai¹

Abstract:

Mythology defined as ‘the study of myths’ has the most profound effect on the lives of Indians in the name of tradition and culture. We Indians have given the world a plethora of texts and scriptures to impart spirituality, inculcate the purpose of life and educate about the soul. Mahabharata, considered to be the greatest treaties on Warfare and Management has been embraced by the world with open heart. The Bhagavad Gita simplifies the purpose of life by giving our souls a direction to follow and a path to tread. It is with this purpose that the author is trying to imbibe management lessons for better understanding and practice.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita, Management, Mythology, Knowledge

I. Introduction

The origin of the universe as per various scripts and texts of the past is based on the legend that there are three gods who represent three gunas (qualities). Lord Brahma (Rajas) – The creator of the Universe; Lord Vishnu (Satva) – The protector of the Universe; Lord Mahesh (Tamas) – The destroyer of the Universe.

The Bhagavad Gita is a 700 verse Hindu scripture that advocates Lord Krishna’s doctrine of doing one’s duty without coveting any reward. It was written by Sri Ved Vyasa as a part of Mahabharata since it is a narrative dialogue – song between Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Arjuna is instructed by Lord Krishna to fulfil his duty and establish the seed of Dharma in the world.

In today’s world, most people expect to be rewarded in some form or the other for a job well done. In fact, rewards act as a source of motivation to enhance the productivity of an individual which in turn proves beneficial for the organisations growth. Hence, to inculcate values of The

¹ Asst. Professor, Patuck – Gala College of Commerce & Management, 100, Rustomba Patuck Marg, Vakola, Santacruz East, Mumbai – 400055, Phone: 9773234078, Email: megha.nair@patuck.edu.in

Bhagavad Gita in today's world will either be met with laughs, considered as blasphemy or simply be ignored with the thought 'We aren't here to do charity, we are here to run a company.' Well, this thought is agreed upon by many but there are certainly some lessons one can learn to ease our life's tensions and mysteries.

The Bhagavad Gita is divided into three different parts or 'Yoga's' viz. Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga. The focus primarily rests on Karma Yoga as it talks about dealing with one's actions.

II. Six Lessons Learnt

Lesson 1: Learn to manage your own self

The Gita starts with a distraught Arjuna lamenting to Lord Krishna about the loss of his near and dear ones even before the war has started. He wishes to put down his weapons and surrender to the Kauravas so that he can avoid bloodshed and let peace prevail.

On this Lord Krishna counsels, him on his duty as a Kshatriya and as a warrior. He enlightens him with the knowledge of Karma Yoga or Selfless Action as a start to the purification of his soul.

Lord Krishna states that any employee or employer cannot deliver results until and unless they know themselves, their true potential, skills or capabilities. One must delve deep into our consciousness to understand what our true worth is. If people are broad minded and always open to new experiences, challenges and learning then nothing can stop us from achieving our goals or perfection in work. But if we close our minds, limit our selves or attach oneself to materialistic pleasures or people then we are giving a sorry excuse to avoid the work and retreat into a shell.

Hence, it is important for a leader to be disciplined in 3 qualities to prove ones worth and declare that he/she can be leaders of high calibre. The discipline of learning, the discipline of equanimity and the discipline of speaking effectively collectively influence one's calibre to showcase our leadership qualities.

Lesson 2: Sankhya Yoga – “Nothing is more purifying than knowledge”

“A real knowledge of the self is realisation of god within one’s own heart.” Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to seek knowledge within first and then seek knowledge from the world.

Similarly, when one works in a corporate environment, they should try to understand the task given to them by oneself then relate to the training provided. A major chunk of the working population in office are educated with degrees to make them employable in organisations.

Knowledge is like our soul; it is omnipotent, ever-lasting and cannot be destroyed. We all have heard that Half knowledge is dangerous. Hence, it is imperative that we communicate our thoughts to others only after careful consideration and after having complete information. Words are like magic; they can inflict the most grievous injury as well as healing the most painful tragedies.

Lesson 3: Facing your Demon’s and Choosing one’s battlefield

Desire leads a man astray. Each one of us has been allocated our own battlefield filled with personal demons to conquer and vanquish. It is always advisable to discover one’s inner real nature before he enters the battlefield of his work environment. One should decide one’s profession or task as per one’s nature rather than fulfilling tasks that have been thrust upon by force. If we understand our own strengths and weakness, then we can control our actions & our tasks which will result in one’s efforts being crowned with glory. On the other hand, the work done by force will lead to demotivation, disinterest and the task not being done effectively and efficiently. It may lead to problems and failures and mismanagement in the organisation. Hence, a wise leader shall allocate work to his employees only if they are capable of it and not for the sake of getting it done.

Lesson 4: Work is Worship

“Work is Worship” is the essence of Karma yoga. Each one of us must perform action every single minute. Karma yoga is the art of living and acting in a disciplined spirit supported by the Divine inspiration. A true worker should act in the world established in evenness of mind undisturbed by the ups and downs, success or failure, pain or joy. If an employee or employer is constantly worried about his work, hates the workplace or focuses only on promotion, he will not be able to put his heart to the task at hand which may lead to failure and disappointment.

Focusing continuously on the future by ignoring the present may lead to building of expectations. If these expectations are not fulfilled, then it will lead to chaos and dissatisfaction.

Lesson 5: Ignorance, Anger and Greed

Most have heard of the phrase “Ignorance is Bliss”. It may be true for some but on the whole Ignorance gives birth to desire which is insatiable. Anger crops up if desire remains unfulfilled and Greed is a result of fulfilled desires.

As a leader, one should understand that we cannot gain everything in this world. Everyone has limits and there is only so much a person can achieve. If we learn to accept this fact and act accordingly, it can lead to a better organisation.

Charity starts from home. We have seen great many real-life instances of corporate houses giving back to the society. This not only helps them build trust among its stakeholders but also generates positive goodwill which can help them gain a positive response in the stock market.

Lesson 6: The benefits of a Stable Mind

When a leader clouded by desires exploits his colleagues and subordinates, he is digging his own grave for the future. When a person of stable mind who embraces Transformational Leadership, and takes decisions with the help of steady wisdom, he is crowned with glory.

Hence, it is important that every decision taken or every action performed should be a product of the calm and steady mind.

III. Takeaway

A few thoughts from The Bhagavad Gita on Leadership and Management...

1. Efficiency is doing things right
2. Effectiveness is doing the right things

Any leader's actions can be summarised as follows:

1. Should be a Visionary
2. Should formulate an effective strategy to achieve the vision

3. Should encourage subordinates to grow in the organisation
4. Should establish standardisation and excellence within the organisation
5. Should be an innovative leader
6. Build a strong network of employees
7. Should encourage delegation of authority and idea sharing
8. Review and build upon the lacunae of the organisation

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