

KARMA YOGA: THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Deep down every individual in an organization wants to derive maximum satisfaction through his or her performance. It happens only when he/she excels in the role in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness. Research proves that the effectiveness of the work depends not only on the external motivating factors like incentives but it is connected to the 'inner world' of the person. It is here, culture comes into the picture because, it has a major role in shaping the values and morals of a person. The doctrine of Karma Yoga can be regarded as the core of the Indian philosophy of work. It explains the relationship between humankind and work. In his dialogue with Arjuna, Krishna explains the significance of work in human life and right way of doing it. He also emphasizes that only by doing it in right way one can excel; therefore, Karma Yoga can be called as 'Science of Human Excellence'. The present paper is an attempt to bring out the two dimensions of Action (Karma) - Independent and Interdependent explained in Bhagavad Gita.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Bhagavad Gita is embodiment of traditional Indian Wisdom about the eternal truths and laws that govern the Universe and also human life. The 'Song of God', as the name suggests, expounds the voice of God himself, the principles & pillars which shape entire mechanism and structure of the creation. The intimate knowledge of Gita bestows the follower with those kinds of tenets which have relevance in every dimension of life and can be applied to every context. Organizations and organizational life is no exception.

Keywords: Effective Action, Personal Effectiveness, Collective Effort Yajna, Brick in the Wall

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Bhagavad Gita is not just a religious text or a holy book of Hindus. It can be called as a hand book for living life. It makes several prescriptions about how an individual has to view life, how to look within and how to deal with situations in life. Thus, in brief, it is a compass to a meaningful life (Rastogi & Pati, 2014). Eternal truths are those truths which have solution for every puzzled situation we face in life. They are equally and unendingly applicable for every sphere of life. Although the ancient wisdom of India profoundly believes that the end goal of every individual is to attain salvation or moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death and every text is treated as a path illuminator towards attaining moksha, still as the truths explained in these texts are eternal, they provide guidance for dealing with mundane life also.

What is required is a deliberate effort to interpret the teachings in the text to the various situations and circumstances in life. The present article is based on few tenets of Gita described in Karma Yoga – the III chapter - about 'action' and interdependence between different elements in the nature.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT WORK

Purpose of this study is to throw light on the concept of 'Action (Work)' and why and how it has to be performed. It is well known that in today's business world, there are many Indian organizations with millions of people working for them but, due to dearth of indigenous management theories, people who are Indian by nature are being governed by the management principles developed by West. If the management has to be fully effective and not 'somewhat managed' (Panda & Gupta, 2007) management tenets must rise from indigenous culture which is deep rooted both in society as well as hearts of people. The present paper is an attempt on the same basis about the well known "Karma" doctrine which is present in the psyche and belief system of the people born in this land.

While motivating people towards organizational objectives and extracting high amount of work in both qualitative and quantitative ways is becoming mandatory in present day competitive environment, it is also being realized that so called "management theories" in practice are unable to produce desired results equally across the countries. In the words of Virmani (2005) "The Indian manager today, educated either in the West or tutored on Western management literature, attempts to manage and administer the Indian industrial structure on Western principles. This, he/she finds, does not work. Compromises result often accompanied by frustration; work does not proceed as planned. Goals are however achieved. Management is somehow effective." (p.4). It is, therefore, acknowledged that Management Science is not universal in nature. Similarly human resource issues are multi dimensional in nature (Pandey & Bajaj 2019).

In order to have sustainable results it is essential to identify the core components of the cultural ethos (Krishnan, 2003) and build on them.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on qualitative research methodology. Hermeneutics methodology has been adopted to interpret the text. In comparison with quantitative methodologies, qualitative methodologies are used less often in management literature; instead they are more prevalent in studies pertaining to law, ethics etc. In view of bringing in this paradigm to enable a new perspective, we therefore find it relevant to discuss a few details about 'Hermeneutics' methodology here. This methodology of interpretation is suitable particularly to interpret wisdom literature. Once it has been acknowledged that Management Science is not universal in nature, it follows that the subject varies in tandem with the cultures, values and beliefs of different parts of the world. It is, therefore, incumbent to place emphases on the interpretation of various ancient texts and wisdom literature in the new context.

Hermeneutics is considered as 'Art of Interpretation'. Interpreting and understanding are not only (Felice Addeo) the ways of knowing, but they are also the ways people deal with reality. Though this methodology was first applied only to the studies pertaining to law, religion etc., in the course of time its scope got widened. Schliermacher widened its scope to all human documents and modes of communication. Relying on phenomenological and constructivist epistemologies, Hermeneutics evolved to become a strong and powerful social research method.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Sinha (2014) opines that Indian mindset is multi layered, based on the belief in the validity of ancient wisdom with a willingness to invite new ideas of other time periods and developed in other parts of the world. The result is a composite mindset. Karma Philosophy belongs to the ancient wisdom and widely believed by people in India. Bhagavad Gita extensively discusses about the 'Karma' principle III chapter called 'Karma Yoga'. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi observes that Gita is as much accessible to a common man as to a scholar. He also stated that he was inspired by the practicability of Gita to become a Karma Yogi (man of action) in his life. In his words Gita provides answers for any question that haunts a mind. Though there are many schools in Indian philosophy, almost all of them go around three fundamental principles (Dasgupta. 1991). Firstly, the good and bad deeds of people cause joy and sorrow eventually due to theory of Karma. Second principle is the existence of permanent entity which is called 'Atman' or soul which has a cycle of rebirths according to its past deeds. Third principle is there is a way to obtain liberation from the cycle and attain salvation. It is possible when the individual is free from all desires or emotions which lead to action. Gita also is based on these three fundamentals and describes the path to break the cycle to attain salvation. Karma Yoga is an essential part of Gita. It describes how to act in an intelligent way so that one can free oneself from the effects of the action. According to Tilak (1915/2000) Karma Yoga can be defined as "technique for performing actions in a manner that the soul is not bound by the effects of the action. Karma Yoga is applicable almost in every dimension of life.

Datta & Jones (2019) made an attempt to discern constructs that explain seven aspects of Karma Yoga namely work, duty, service, purpose, giving, now and acceptance.

Pradhan & Pradhan tried to assess the possible relationship between the dimensions of Karma namely emphasis on process than outcome, act with equanimity etc and several job attitudes like job satisfaction, job involvement and intention to quit etc. With the help of their thorough investigations authors conclude that Karma dimensions are positively related with first two job attitudes and negatively related with the third one.

Mulla & Krishnan (2009) made an attempt to explore the relationship between leader's Karma Yoga and transformational leadership. They studied 205 pairs of leader and follower – to investigate leader's karma yoga and follower's belief in Indian philosophy on the follower's perception of transformational leadership. The relationship is strengthened if the follower's belief in Indian philosophy is high.

Among few other studies based on ancient wisdom of India, the study of Koushal (2018) can be brought into picture where author tried to study the decision making pattern showed in ancient stories of India.

5. ORIGINALITY:

The study constructs two dimensions of 'Karma' model-namely 'Individual Action' and 'Collective Action'. Gita explains interdependence which exists among people, people and nature and people and

Universe. The effective Action model explains why and how people perform relentless action and the approach that must be followed in order to make the action effective. Effective Action helps individual to excel and thereby society and nation to progress. Collective Action model (Interdependence model) explains the attitude one has to adopt while performing action. The study also brings out the relevant interpretation to the word 'Yajna' to the day to day circumstances.

6. INEVITABILITY OF ACTION:

The root verb (dhatu) of Karma is 'Kri'. In the words of Swami Vivekananda dhatu 'Kri' means to act. So, as a concept Karma refers to all the action a person does physically and mentally. All the activity creates Karma. It is first referenced in 'Upanishads' as a concept related to causality.

'Karma' which is akin to the word 'Action' is extensively described in Karma Yoga chapter of Bhagavad Gita. The text describes the importance of selfless action. This means that the full focus must be on the action itself without concerning oneself with both the outcome of the action and the selfish interest to own the results of the action. Action must be performed with full attention and awareness. Gita teaches that if actions are done in this way, the type action itself becomes irrelevant. It can be the most mundane one or a very serious one and both can become lead to excellence. In other words, it is the attitude to the action, rather than action itself which is of supreme importance.

Now, the critical question may arise here, if not for expectation then why should anyone act? Can't they just refrain from action sit in peace? If results are not to be desired, what is the use of action?

The following Sloka of Karma Yoga gives suitable answer.

Sloka:

**Na Karma Namana aarambhaat Naishkarmyam Purushosnuthel
Na Cha Sannyasana aadeva Siddhim Samadhagacchatill 3.4ll**

**Na hi kaschith Ksha Namapi Jaathutish Tatyakarmakrithl
Kaaryatehyava Sa: karma Sarva: Prakritijairgu Nailll 3.5ll**

Meaning: Action is inevitable by the very nature of mind. Our true nature is designed to act. It doesn't support to sit idle. According to the 'Prakriti' ('nature' that exists beyond human limit) everyone is made to act helplessly.

There is a certain inevitability of action which is inherent in human nature. A human being can never sit idle and he will be forced to be engaged in action by his very nature.

That means one can't attain mental peace by leaving action. If 'leaving the action or retirement' is the choice of a person, then what about the thoughts of mind? Are they not the real reason for lack of peace and happiness? The real reason for this is thoughts are the inherent tendencies existing in the mind and action is only an outward expression of these tendencies. The best way to exhaust these tendencies is intense action. A person who abandons himself in vigorous action focusing intensely on the task at hand will find that his mind becomes calmer and calmer. Therefore, one must understand that Action or doing work keeps a person hail and healthy.

While stating the importance of engaged in work all the time, Lord Krishna also points out what happens if one sits without work but the mind is active in various thoughts and mental pursuits

Sloka:

**Karmendriyaani Samyamya Ya Aasthe Manasa smara N I
Indriyarthan Vimoodhatma Midhyachara: Sa Uchyathell 3.6ll**

Lord Krishna states that if a person physically refrains from the actions but mentally entertains the thoughts and desired associated with the actions, he becomes a hypocrite. It is impossible to divert mind into 'action less state' without exhausting his tendencies for action through intense performance of the action itself and reaching next level of mental purgation. This kind of hypocrisy will create a dichotomy in the mind which in turn will lead to disintegration of personality and distortion.

It is also to be noted about one of the most valuable contribution of Gita from which the present day corporate also get benefit is about the working nature of the person. Psychological well being refers to the achievement of one's full psychological (Kumar & Kumar, 2013) potential.

Sloka:

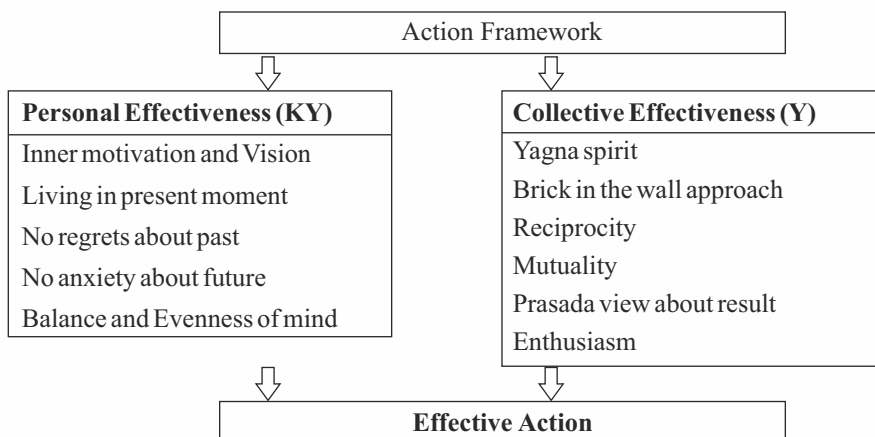
**YasthvindriyaNiManasaaNiyamyarabhate Arjuna
Karmendriyai: Karma YogamAsktha: Sa ViSishyathe II3.7II**

**Niyatham Kuru KarmatvamKarmajyaayoHyaKarmaNa:
Sarira Yatra api cha the Na PrasiddhyedaKarmaNa: II3.8II**

Krishna, therefore, asks Arjuna to get involved in intense work by disciplining the mind. The mind creates diversions by getting involved in the objects of the senses

The one who wants to excel must act by stabilizing other thoughts. Employing all abilities in proper direction is very essential. It has to be practiced continuously. Nature has endowed every human being with unending enthusiasm and energies to get engaged with work. Human being is by nature progressive with progressing thought process. 'Next what', 'how to make it better' are the questions spring up in a human brain in daily course of action. If not human race would not have come so far from the primitive stage to the present day life. Therefore, there is no dearth of capacities or energies to work. What has to be taken care of is how to keep it away from deviations. This is the biggest puzzle for the HR world around the world. The paradox of social organization is that human variability must be reduced to ensure predictable role performance, yet spontaneous and innovative activity must go on (Katz, 1964). Gita provides a wonderful solution for this. One must realize two things. First, to realize that there is tremendous potential within every human being. The very nature of a person is working relentlessly. Secondly, disciplining the senses has to be done. It can be done by employing them to the higher purpose and keeping the mind on the Higher achievable goal with the complete awareness of that is the only way to excel. This is the way to make the action into effective action.

7. EFFECTIVE ACTION:



In order to fetch the predictability of role performance, action must be effective in nature. Effective action can be defined as that action which is completely purpose oriented and efficiently investing time, energies, capabilities and skills by a person without giving any opportunity for dissipation into 'purpose defeating' deeds. It again has to be achieved at two levels.

8. PERSONALEFFECTIVENESS:

In order to get the desired result, action must be effective in nature. In the Gita, achieving personal effectiveness has been given as an important quality to be developed (Yogaha Karmasukousalam). Effective action can be defined as that action which is completely purpose oriented, efficiently investing time, energies, capabilities and skills by a person without giving any opportunity for dissipation into 'purpose defeating' deeds. Gita teaches that the effectiveness can be achieved by developing two qualities

- a. Having a compelling and inspiring Vision or Goal
- b. Learning to focus on the task at hand in achieving the Vision or Goal
- c. Learning to be even minded when faced with ups and downs in the journey towards the Vision or Goal

a. Having a compelling and inspiring Vision or Goal:

Sloka:

**Mai sarvaNiKarmaNisannyasyaadhyaatmaChetasaa
NiraaSiNirmamobhutvaaYudhyasvaVigatajvarall 3. 30 II**

Krishna tells that all actions have to renounced in HIM. In the materialistic sense, it has to be understood that the 'goal' or 'big purpose' must occupy the prime place and all other activities must be set accordingly only to realize that. Mind and all other energies must be directed only towards that. By cultivating this steadfastness of purpose, all our mental and physical energies get channelized and draw the individual towards Vision. Just as a compass always points towards NORTH irrespective of where it is kept, similarly at every moment of our lives, the thoughts and actions have to be only towards the Vision.

b. Learning to focus on the task at hand in achieving the Vision or Goal

Sloka:

**Karmanyevadhikaraste Ma PhaleshuKadachana,
Ma KarmahalaheturbhurmaTeSangostvakarmani**

Krishna advises to realize where we have control and where we do not have control. He says that if we analyze to depth, for everyone in the world be an emperor or a beggar all we have control is on what we can do the present moment. Realizing this point deeply is the secret of all efficiencies. Our pre-occupation with things we do not control is the very reason for our lack of efficiencies and maladies like stress and depression. If we can cultivate through practice to focus only and only on what is to be done in the present moment, it leads to an infinite column of energy which can be used for the task at hand.

This sloka is often misinterpreted. It never says that we should not care of results. For every endeavor, we should fully evaluate the chances of success and failure, we should make elaborate plans for how to achieve success and having done that, fully focus on the task at hand.

c. Learning to be even minded with ups and downs in the journey

By focusing on developing a compelling vision and the needed mental quality of focusing on the present task at hand, a column of energy is generated and the same can be used to drive ourselves. However, we lose the energy because of various 'bad habits' of the mind. These habits of the mind are our preoccupation with the failure possibilities of future, guilt feelings of the past. By assiduous practice, these have to be blocked.

NiraaSiNirmamobhutvaaYudhyasvaVigatajvarall 3. 30 II

When a task is completed, a result comes. Our mind has to be trained such that when the result comes, we should have the equanimity to watch it, immediately learn the lesson the result is teaching us and course correct our course of action. This equanimity is an important quality to be cultivated (Samatwam yoga uchyathe)

Once the three points elaborated above are achieved, the individual starts functioning at a very high level of efficiency. However, to convert this efficiency into effectiveness, another important aspect has to be incorporated-Collective Effectiveness

9. COLLECTIVE EFFECTIVENESS: (YAJNA)

Sloka:

SahaYagnaPrajaaSrishtvaaPurovaachaPrajaapati: AnePrasavishyardhvamEashavoosthvishtaKaamaduk II3.10II

Here, Lord Krishna brings the concept of Yagna. He states that when the Creator created the mankind, simultaneously he also created Yagna and announced that Yagna is the instrument that can satisfy all human desires. Yagna is a collective endeavor carried on by more than a single person for greater benefits and thereby achieving even personal or individual benefits. It is realizing that in collective welfare, there is individual welfare. Yagna, according to Krishna, also has the power to satisfy all the needs. Encyclopedia of Britannica describes 'Yagna' as 'the vedic sacrifice' or an outer form of ritual worship. Its main purpose is to bring harmony between 'devas' or elements of nature and mankind. But, Yagnas have ethical base (V. Jayaram) and have other purposes also. They provide an opportunity to human beings to transcend their selfishness and help others. As per the main frame of the present article it is the second purpose which makes sense. The term 'Yagna Spirit' hereafter used in this paper must be implied as the ability conferred by the individuals - the ability to act in selfless manner. It is the ability to give importance for broader objectives in place of selfish objectives. Keeping aside the spiritual meanings that are usually drawn from Gita Slokas, the interpretation which appropriately fits and give better results is made.

Yajna here means only "any self-sacrificing work, undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication, for the blessing of all."

"Such an action cannot be self-degrading and, therefore, it is self-liberating"

..... Swamy Chinmayananda (Holy Geeta)

task keeps the person away from petty tensions or fears created by mind. These fears normally are generated from the personality limiting factors. The real spirit of the person gets caged in the negative feelings like uncertainty about success, fear of failure etc when the task is performed without 'Yagna Spirit'.

**YajnarhathKarmaNonyatraLokoyam karma Bandhana:
Tadardham karma KounteyaMukthasamga: samaacharall 3.9 II**

Every action performed by people other than for the Yagna purpose leads to attachments and binds them with after effects. They can't get liberated.

Instead, person must learn to think that every achievement is a result of collective endeavour. No one's role is negligible, neither it is possible to imagine that someone's role was less or petty. One must adopt 'brick in the wall' approach. Everyone has a meaningful role in a bigger task accomplishment. A brick is no doubt an essential unit of a wall. However, it is just one unit in the wall. If a person thinks that his role was really meaningless, that thought harms his sense of self worth. It leads to various complexes like acting with low spirits, showing withdrawn attitude, criticizing or envying others etc. Every individual must be helped to feel self worth at the same time it must not lead to egoistic nature.

Understanding and adopting 'Yagna' principle helps to bring change in the outlook of a person. He/she can observe world from high altitude. Selfishness, timidity transcend into selflessness, courage, innovative nature and experimenting nature.

Therefore, the words of Lord Krishna can be interpreted as Co operative endeavor is the supreme method to achieve any higher task. Multiple people coming together and working for one another in a harmonious environment is only the meaning of 'Yajna Spirit'

When immersed in such activity with strong commitment towards one another, it gives rise to bonding between elements. It can be identified as increased sense of mutuality. The result of the collective effort must be accepted with humility with the similar nature of accepting 'Prasada' (the food which is distributed among devotees after offering it to God. Devotees accept it as blessing of God without accommodating any 'self' feelings. It is believed that eliminating 'self' feelings like 'because of me' or 'if I wouldn't have been there' etc cleanses the inner self while preserving the same level of enthusiasm. Gita exhorts that it is the divine ordinance that this is the only effective way to achieve something and making it sustainable.

1. Conclusion & Discussion:

As mentioned in the previous pages sustainability of good outcomes of various modus operandi depends to a great extent on the fact that whether the core components are extracted from 'own belief system' or not. When it comes to India, the Karma (work) principle is deep rooted in the belief system, Consciously or unconsciously people believe that there is a higher energy in the

While taking up the word Yajna Swamy Chinmayananda emphasizes that Yajna here means only any self-sacrificing work, undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication, for the blessing of all. "He further states that Such an action cannot be self-degrading and, therefore, it is self-liberating. The stanzas of Karma Yoga will become more and more clear, and universally appropriate in their meaning, only when we understand Yajna as any social, communal, national, or personal activity into which the individual is ready to pour himself forth entirely in a spirit of service and dedication." (Holy Geeta)

Universe which has intelligence and all the deeds humans perform are part of the 'macro plan' architected by the Supreme power or in simple terms God. Bhagavad Gita, which is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna - the powerful warrior brings out the essential relationship between work and human kind. It can be described as the 'science of right work' or Science of Effective Work'. It can be attained at two levels - at personal level and at collective level. It leads to effective management. As Deshpande (2020) says effective management results into achievement of planned objectives.

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