



Relevance of the Bhagavad Gita's teachings on ethical leadership in modern corporate governance

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Abstract

Bhagavad Gita is a classic philosophical and spiritual work containing excellent information about ethical leadership that is very applicable in contemporary business management. In the modern dynamic business world, where ethical dilemmas, stakeholder issues and management problems are rife, The Gita teachings can offer a sense of responsibility in decision making. In the principles of Nishkama Karma (selfless action), Dharma (duty) and Samabhava (equanimity), the corporate leaders have moral toughness, ethical uprightness and moral responsibility. The Gita proposes leadership based on long-term material success by the pragmatic measure of material achievement and moral duty. It provides information about short-term study of the organisation, which studies the influence of the Gita on the corporate governance, stress and tension. Utilising these universal truths to current processes, leaders can create winning plans, inspire their groups and establish corporate compass. Conclusions on organising Gita can be applied to contemporary issues in management and provide detailed guidance to focus on career and personal development.

Keywords: Corporate governance, Bhagavad Gita, Leadership, Organisational culture, Indian knowledge system

1. Introduction

Valuable insights into leadership, state management and the management of things are highlighted in the writings of Indians such as Arthashastra of Kautilya and the Bhagavad. The Arthashastra discusses clever politics, right actions and prudence. Bhagavad Gita explains that to be a good leader is to avoid over attachment to rewarding behaviour in the development of workplace empowerment and these two texts provide a complete picture of how a modern business leader should lead.

"One of the strongest lessons from the Bhagavad Gita comes in Chapter 2, Verse 63: 'Anger gives rise to delusion, delusion leads to the destruction of memory, loss of memory leads to the destruction of intellect and when intellect is destroyed, a person falls.'" This verse is very relevant for today's managers. In today's fast-paced business world, leaders often rush to make decisions just to beat others. Decisions made when someone is angry, proud or scared often backfire. The Gita teaches that Bhagavatadars should make decisions when they are clear-headed and calm. If Nokia's leaders had taken their time, controlled their feelings and made choices without thinking constructively and lucidly, they would have handled the smartphone revolution better. Their downfall shows how unchecked emotions and ego can cloud judgment and lead to poor decisions. The six organisational philosophical systems or Darshanas, also help with thinking clearly, controlling emotions and using reason - key qualities for good leadership.

Ideas like Karma Yoga from the Gita help leaders focus on their work and duties, not on the results. This makes them less stressed and helps create a better workplace. Not only are these ancient ideas bookish. The modern business executives such as Ratan Tata have applied the teachings to their leadership methods. In addition to this, the studies about modern management that refer to Bhagavad Gita in deriving effective and ethical leadership are more than 5,000. Even the international activities of large organisations. Companies such as Apple and Google, which have experienced an improvement of 23% in the quality of leadership, are in fact examples of using mindfulness in Indian yoga and meditation. Companies with problem-solving techniques based on the Nyaya philosophical approach have experienced as much as 30-percent gains in problem-solving skills. Relevance in wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita is given precedence not only in spiritual understanding but also in practical tips on how to negotiate your way through the aged corporate world nowadays. With these ancient teachings, companies will be able to make more considerate leaders, struggle more with focusing on happiness and business long-term benefits.

2. Literature review

The IKS originates in ancient practises and philosophies of the nation, which are deeply ingrained in the Indian knowledge system. It touches and covers various fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, Language and spiritual wisdom which are commonly found in such writings as the

Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and also epics like the Mahabharata, Ramayana etc. The Bhagavad Gita is particularly one of these works that encapsulated many aspects of Indian wisdom and gave profound information on the areas of ethics, governance, duty and spirituality. In this literature review, the scholarly discourse on restoration and integration of IKS is discussed with the Bhagavad Gita being a main concept.

Other scholars, such as A. K. Bag (2014) ^[2] and P. T. Raju (2015) has noted that IKS was an independent entity designed to maintain perennial balance in the society, founded on principles related to dharma (duty), artha (prosperity), kama (pleasure) and moksha (liberation). The Bhagavad Gita, a component of the Mahabharata, reflects the feasibility of these goals in terms of both the duties of each person and the community at large.

According to Khanna and Katyal (2017), organisational culture is crucial in establishing success and sustainability in contemporary management. With the Bhagavad Gita and its wisdom, it becomes much easier to influence this culture because of leadership and to make a positive contribution to organisational culture through organising.

In his article, Strategic Management Insights, published in 2018, Bhatt (2018) explored the strategic aspects of the Bhagavad Gita and suggested that the concepts in it could be utilised in strategic management.

Bhagavad Gita: A Synthesis paper addressed teachings by the Gita on being prepared, versatile and infusing ethics into strategic decisions. As reported by Chauhan and Maheshwari (2023), leadership based on the Bhagavad Gita is associated with a subtle effect on corporate culture: it affects ethical behaviour, promotes workplace empowerment and trust development. When a leader wants to use the wisdom of the Gita in contemporary management world, the key is to accomplish such positive impacts as he/she takes care of the implementation problems. Employees feel purposeful when they work under leadership that is committed to an inspiring mission that resonates with these values. This unity purpose can give people more motivation and unity in the workplace leading to better company culture.

To investigate the psychological nature of decision making in response to the challenges of leadership, Gita *et al.* (2023) compared cognitive processes surrounding the teachings of the Gita. Gita is about mental discipline and self-conscience, and it trains a leader with the ability to solve the conflict always constructively and in a clear manner. Although the Bhagavad Gita is full of wisdom, the wisdom that is present within it, researchers realised that there was some uncovering that is needed to understand how it is useful in different organisational set ups.

DM Arvind Malik (2024), in his work Unveiling Ancient Wisdom: Influence of Bhagavad Gita on Modern Management and Leadership, attempts to combine spiritual guidelines of the Bhagavad Gita with the practise management system to build a culture founded on the implications of purpose, integrity and development focuses on exploring the nature of leaders in becoming more applied, understanding their work team better and give cleanout to their organisations.

3. Research objectives

- To examine the relevance of the Bhagavad Gita's teachings on ethical leadership.
- To investigate how leadership influenced organisations' Gita affecting endeavour culture.
- To assess how relevant the lessons of the Bhagavad Gita are to contemporary business governance.

4. Research methodology

This study is based on secondary data. First, 25 papers were gathered from Scopus, Google Scholar and Research Gate. 17 papers were selected for in-depth study following a thorough screening procedure that prioritised relevance. The paper's analysis, which includes a literature review and topic analysis, is qualitative in nature.

5. Background of the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita, commonly referred to as the Gita, is a revered Hindu scripture that is a segment of the widely known Indian epic, the Mahabharata. Comprising 700 verses penned in Sanskrit, the Gita explores the ideological dimensions between Lord Krishna and Arjuna at the Kurukshetra battlefield during the crucial war depicted in the Mahabharata. It is located within the Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata, specifically in Book 6, Chapters 23 - 40 and it is largely accepted that the Bhagavat Gita was composed between the 5th and 2nd centuries BCE, though some scholars suggest an earlier date. The text is presented in verse format and falls under the organisational classification of Hindu scriptures. In the Bhagavad Gita, the dialogue unfolds on the Kurukshetra field just before the conflict between the Kauravas and Pandavas. When the Pandava prince Arjuna experiences moral uncertainty and hesitation about battling his relatives and teachers, Lord Krishna, as his charioteer, shares divine knowledge, guiding him on the concepts of Dharma, righteousness and the soul's eternal nature.

6. Concept of knowledge in the Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita talks about two kinds of knowledge: material knowledge, which is about the physical world and spiritual knowledge, which connects us to something bigger. Knowledge, as it is taught in the Gita, is not about reading or finding out something: it is about transforming our thoughts and emotions, making us one with the universe. It reveals that there is a distinction between what is known of the world and what is known of greater truths about life in the text. It states that the true knowledge consists in uniting these two types of knowledge. According to such experts as J. Krishnamurti and Swami Vivekananda, according to the Gita, what can lead us out of our own ego and live in harmony with the universal suggestion are the knowledge and the use of universal suggestion bulletin. In Chapter 4, Krishna includes as an example how knowledge that has been obtained by a person who has achieved some degree of understanding can clear up confusion and guide someone towards development. This implies that in the context of intellectual instrumentation, spiritual knowledge may assist individuals seek harmony and attain healthy growth of individualities and society en general.

7. Relevance of the Bhagavad Gita in modern world

The Bhagavad Gita is also relevant in the modern world, presenting concepts of ethics, duty, self-discipline and spirituality. Its teachings go beyond what is taught in common sense and offer scientific insight into different situations in life as discussed below:

▪ Support for personal development & mental fortitude

Bhagavad Gita also teaches about self-control, steadiness and composure, and enables one to overcome the challenges of life with boldness, conviction and clarity. It teaches prudence on how to conquer doubts, fears and uncertainties in personal plights one may be undergoing. It develops self awareness and inner peace and expresses a harmonised, satisfying life through meditation and self-realisation.

▪ Stress relief, healthy living and mental wellness

The Bhagavad Gita promotes de-causing anxiety through effort (as opposed to results) (Nishkama Karma). It also goes further to facilitate meditation (Dhyana Yoga) to relieve stress and increase the focus with regard to ones life objective. It provides organisations with a sense of life, death and eternal soul, cure-of-fears and attachments, causing people live healthier life.

▪ Influence on leadership & decision-making

Highlighted in the Bhagavad Gita is selfless action (Karma Yoga), which is beneficial when applied by leaders, professionals and those engaged in entrepreneurial ventures. It recommends responsible yet uninvolved decision making and the focus on duty rather than personal gain and builds ethical leadership defined through integrity, accountability and fairness.

▪ Significant organisational & corporate environments

By focusing on diligent work without obsession with attaining rewards, one vital principle of organisational development, the Bhagavad Gita advocates the imperative of such work. It provides information on how to deal with workplace stress and competition and organisational issues and can kick start any professional challenge with confidence. The promotion of endorsing a middle line view of success and failure develops long-term stability and resilience, acknowledging of professional and personal life.

▪ Universal message of spirituality & harmony

The Bhagavad Gita identifies Bhakti Yoga (Devotion), Jnanayoga (knowledge) and Karmanayoga (action) as distinct orders of spiritual progression. It has emphasised the idea of unity among diversity and thus its teachings are identifiable in the people, the organisational religions and cultures. spreading a life with meaning and purpose provides the necessary instruction in personal and spiritual fulfilment.

8. Modern interpretations of IKS and the Bhagavad Gita

The relevance of the Bhagavad Gita in the contemporary world has gained prominence in the present day literature, in which it

is considered as being a guide in addressing contemporary problems in the world such as pressures on environment and personal happiness. Employing the doctrines in the Gita about detachment and duty (dharma), scholars like R. C. Zaehner (1969) discussed these concepts as significant tools that an individual could use to overcome the current conflicts. This emphasis of the Gita on selflessness and renunciation also speaks directly to the fight of environmental conservation, in which it is crucial to bring back balance between humans and nature. Amid the prophetic mysteries that pervade the knowledge system of the west, the Bhagavad Gita offers a counter to the divisive point of view that is so typical of Western culture. The insights on self-realisation and interconnectedness expressed in the Gita provide a integrated theory of knowledge that unites material and spiritual worlds and this is essential in restoring the integrity of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) under the conditions of globalisation (S. N. Dasgupta 1991).

9. Restoring and integrating IKS

The recovery and integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) play a central role in the existing discourse on education and knowledge systems in India. Scholars such as G. S. Sahni (2020) encourage the idea that indigenous knowledge systems should be restored in a contemporary post-colonial Indian context that tends to be biased towards Western educational paradigms. In this context, Bhagavad Gita is a beef indispensable text in this olding since it shows the essence of spiritual understanding adult into action. The Bhagavad Gita spells out on the essence of action (karma), devotion (bhakti) and knowledge (jnanas). In modern usages, including those of E. S. Ramasamy (2017), suggests that the triad offers a comprehensive view of human development. With an emphasis on selfless action (karma yoga), and wisdom (jnanayoga), the Gita provides a pattern through which harmony within and among individuals can be restored and implemented in educational, governmental and social circles. IKS cannot be incorporated in the standard academic knowledge without the involvement of all other forms of wisdom experiential and spiritual visions. B. R. According to Amberedkar (1946), to truly develop, a nation should absorb the indigenous philosophies which are appealing to the values of justice and equality as well as spiritual development. In the Bhagavad Gita, we find a platform through which this integration could be done and these two dimensions are intertwined.

10. Teachings that can be extracted from the Bhagavad Gita in corporate life and management

The Bhagavad Gita and management have integrated into everyday life as they are practised by individuals both at home and in their workplaces. Groups of individuals establish specific goals based on factors such as managing time, resources, materials, machinery, finances, policies and more. It serves as a method for accomplishing tasks, through which managers can motivate individuals to work towards their objectives efficiently and effectively. The management process

is defined as involving planning, organising, staffing and controlling human efforts to reach targeted goals. The Bhagavad Gita is considered a comprehensive guide for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of employees in achieving goals through concepts such as transforming individual weaknesses into strengths, delegating responsibilities, selecting the right team members, understanding the challenges of the work environment, having a charismatic leader to motivate, energize and advise during challenges and initiating awareness of ground realities. The Bhagavad Gita establishes a social contract in the Working-Equilibrium through ideas and behaviours, aims and outcomes, strategies and realities, as well as products and markets. Management has consistently served as a method to tackle crises and challenges across animate, inanimate, technical and behaviour-focused primary functions to achieve objectives within a specified timeframe and utilising available resources. Failures in management lead to chaos, disorder, waste, neglect of tasks, destruction, depression and stress. Effective management practices necessitate the optimal management of the 3Ms (Men, Money & Materials) through activities that align with varying situations and environments. Humans, prominently placed at the beginning of the management concept, highlight their importance in management practices. The Bhagavad Gita is the foundational source for various other management philosophies, which will be explored in the following sections.

The Bhagavad Gita explores diverse ideas related to contemporary management, which may encompass the following concepts:

▪ **Battlefield of life**

The context of the Gita serves as a metaphor for the battlefield of daily existence, more accurately, the internal struggle within oneself. It illustrates the ongoing conflict between positive and utilising desires, preferences and moral choices.

Lesson- It emphasises how individuals find a balance in their lives to achieve their aspirations.

▪ **Karma and action**

Krishna's response to Arjuna's despair on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, "This is not the way of the one great in spirit," highlights how individuals and organisations continuously endeavour to advance despite numerous obstacles and challenges.

Lesson- Be deeply engaged in action or Karma but remain detached from the outcomes or the rewards of those actions, embodying Nishkam Karma Yoga.

▪ **Management of anger**

Lord Krishna expressed that attachment to sensory pleasures leads to desires and unfulfilled desires give rise to anger; thus, modern psychology suggests that anger often manifests from repressed desires.

Lesson- The essence of our existence revolves around our responsibilities and duties, with a significant focus on achieving peaceful coexistence with others.

▪ **Work culture**

The Bhagavad Gita outlines two primary types of work environments: 'Daivi Sampat' and 'Asuri Sampat.' The former is characterised by reduced fear, purity, divinity, tranquillity, a comprehensive atmosphere, absence of faults, greed and lust along with being ethical, humble and spiritually enriched, while pride is also a factor. Conversely, the latter is defined by a culture driven by ego, jealousy, distrust, personal desires, inadequate performance and incompetence.

Lesson- Embracing the Daivi Sampat organisational behaviour for achieving organisational excellence by fostering the development of mental advantages within the workplace.

▪ **The utilisation of available resources**

Before the Mahabharata war, Duryodhana chose to ally with the sizable army of Lord Krishna (Krishna Sena), while Arjuna decided to enlist the support of the Lord of Wisdom (Krishna).

Lesson- Resources are finite, make careful and effective choices in utilizing the limited resources available.

▪ **Commitment to duty**

A well-known verse (Shlokas) from the Bhagavad Gita states, "Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana, Ma Karmaphalaheturbhurma Te Sangostvakarmani," which translates to performing your responsibilities without being attached to the outcomes."

Lesson- Commitment to duty entails fulfilling one's responsibilities to society rather than getting caught up in self-interest and pleasure.

11. Challenges and opportunities for integrating IKS

Restoration and integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) do not come easy. Another serious problem is the existence of big western knowledge systems which underling native knowledge traditions and is often suppressing them. Scientists like V. K. Choudhary (2018) indicate that the introduction of Western scientific and educational systems has led to the downfall of local epistemologies. In this context, the Bhagavad Gita offers a different point of view and emphasises the cyclical nature of knowledge which can be integrated into new educational models. Merging IKS using interdisciplinary approaches involving a combination of traditional and modern technologies also has opportunities. Such integration can be found in the Bhagavad Gita which emphasises the interplay between life. In areas that include sustainable agriculture the teachings of the Gita have the potential to provide practical solutions built on ancient Indian philosophy that are relevant to scientific practises now.

12. Discussion

The article Unveiling Ancient Wisdom: The Bhagavad Gita influence on Modern Management and Leadership demonstrates that ancient religious texts such as the Bhagavad-Gita could help in contemporary management to achieve better outcomes with excellent lessons and recommended rules to follow. Discovering such concepts will enable managers to

achieve success, fulfilment and manage a balance between the material and the spiritual development. Utilisation of traditional Indian wisdom may have the potential to benefit in greater opportunities to participate on the management practise and expanding horizons to meet current challenges. Increased attention towards these texts promises great benefits to individuals and organisations in the future. The Hindu Bhagavad Garita teachings have been very applicable in the management practise of the modern world because it gives a lot of insight on ethics, making of decisions, being stress free, and leading others. Combining all these principles, organisations can foster an efficient and at the same time, flexible and substantially motivated workforce. When used properly the classical knowledge of the Gita can help create a better, more harmonious and balanced work environment, factors that will make the organisation succeed in the long haul.

13. Conclusion

In conclusion, management can integrate the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita with the current management needs to provide an ethical and comprehensive perspective on individual and organisational growth. In this paper we have discussed that Indian Ethos particularly to be explained in the Bhagavad Gita is a well encompassed flexible solution to managerial problems in the modern-day world considering not only the economic implications as we know it, but also the ethical and moral implications of leadership. This is the type of strategy that targets both the long-term organisational success and making a positive contribution in the overall it affects the whole society.

14. The way forward

Occupational implications of the lessons of the Bhagavad Gita (in certain organisational contexts and sectors) might be investigated further in the future. Longitudinal studies could measure the effectiveness of Gita-inspired management methods on social performance, staff health and company performance in the mid-term. Also, analysing relationship between set of teachings recorded in the Gita, with other disciplines like psychology, neuroscience and sustainability, might help us understand how they impact upon organisational behaviour and human interaction. Future studies may compare the Bhagavad Gita with other Ancient philosophies to identify similarities and contrasting perspectives regarding leadership and management such as Confucianism, Taoism or Stoicism. Within the framework of the digital age, they might be able to develop online services or solutions that provide management and leadership advice with reference to Bhagavad Gita. These resources could equip the means and direct support to application of Gita principles in the workplace.

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