

A Study on Enriching Spirituality at Work Place Through The Karma yoga of the Bhagavad Gita

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Abstract

Spirituality, in Indian Culture, refers to the realization/experience of oneness with all beings of the world. This oneness finds expressed as spirituality at workplace through the dynamism of interconnectedness. The paper deliberates on enriching individual spirituality at workplace through the *Karmayoga* of the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is a holistic wisdom that expounds dimensions within an individual, and thereby, having potency leading towards interpersonal and organizational effectiveness. The method of the conceptual paper includes: (a) expounding *Karmayoga* of the Bhagavad Gita from its spiritual dimension, (b) identifying and presenting the take-away for enriching individual spirituality at workplace, and (c) pointing out the potency of the principle of *Karmayoga* for individual and organizational development/welfare. The Bhagavad Gita explains the principle of right approach to perform any action (*Karmayoga*). The principle of *Karmayoga* provides a paradigm shift in the domain of action, namely, the performance of an action is not based on its result - orientedness, but on the intention/process - orientedness. This understanding of *Karmayoga* unfolds and enriches a number of variables that characterize individual spirituality at workplace, The paper has identified twenty-five such dynamic variables. Thus, we are able to understand that *Karmayoga*, in the process of enhancing these factors, enriches individual spirituality at workplace. When we closely observe the potency of the factors that are impacted, we understand that the principle of *Karmayoga*, in the process of enriching individual spirituality and inter-personal

relationships in workplace, also automatically enriches organizational effectiveness. A comprehensive model, reflecting all dimensions of *Karmayoga*, and its empirical validities would place the principle of *Karmayoga* as the differentiator in the work culture domain of organizations.

Key Words: *Workplace Spirituality, The Bhagavad Gita, Karmayoga, Individual Spirituality and Inter-personal Relationships, Organizational Effectiveness.*

Introduction: Spirituality

'Spirituality', in Indian Culture, may be understood as an intra-personal journey of self-discovery/realization. It may be termed as the guiding force of one's inner consciousness and a process of self-enlightenment/realization. The process of self-realization involves experiencing the eternal/ultimate nature of one's own self (*ayam atma brahma - Mandukya Upanisad 1.2*) and its relationship with a universal/cosmic power, energy or divinity (*aham brahmasmi - Brihadaranyaka Upanisad 1.4.10*), culminating in the experiential realization of the underlying oneness with all beings (*sarvam khalvidam brahma - Chandogya Upanisad 3.14.1*). The experience/realization of the Vedantic oneness is the hallmark of spirituality and a grand central ideal of Vedanta. Dr.S. Radhakrishnan (1929) points out that the most prominent feature of spirituality in Indian Culture is the ideal of oneness of all beings in the universe.

The Oneness of all beings - Interconnectedness - Spirituality at workplace

The oneness of all beings is the basis for one's interconnectedness and this interconnectedness is the cardinal factor of spirituality at workplace. Therefore, it may be stated that the oneness of all being is the crux for spirituality at workplace. Let us now expound this view-point.

(1) Oneness and Interconnectedness

According to Indian Culture, the oneness of all beings is not only a grand spiritual dictum but is equally a dynamic ethical perspective. The oneness is the basis for all ethics and morality. Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works, Volume III, 189*) proclaims "The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not only brothers.... but that you and I are really one. This is the dictate of Indian Philosophy. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality". This perception enables an individual to realize that since the whole universe is one and the same divinity is existing in everyone, it logically follows that an individual, in the act of injuring another is, in fact, injuring oneself. This understanding provides a logical and spiritual substratum for all ethical dictum.

It forcefully enjoins one to adhere to all moral precepts because it clearly makes an individual realize that he/she affects himself/herself, more than others, by his/her own actions.

From this spiritual interconnectedness, arises ethical virtues such as sympathy, empathy, trust, truthfulness, sense of responsibility and belongingness, towards others.

(2) Interconnectedness and Spirituality at Workplace

Spirituality at workplace is often characterized by the factor of interconnectedness. This dynamic factor may be the interconnectedness with one's own self/divinity as well as the interconnectedness with others in workplace. This aspect of interconnectedness is the essence for spirituality at workplace. In fact, spirituality at workplace is often defined in terms of interconnectedness. Miltroff and Denton (1999, 83) considers spirituality as the feeling of inter-connectedness among oneself, others and universe. Marques, Dhiman and King (2007, 11) points out that spirituality at workplace is an experience of interconnectedness among those involved in the work process, starting with authenticity, reciprocity and personal good will, which are generated by the deep sense of meaning inherent in organizational work and generate greater motivation and organizational excellence. In the words of Kolodinsky, Madden, Zisk & Henkel (2010, 167), spirituality is "an intrapersonal and metaphysical relationship with a higher power or transcendent force which provides motivation, purpose, and a sense of connectedness with others". Venkat R. Krishnan (2008, 12) points out that spirituality leads to interconnectedness among individuals. In fact, it could be the ultimate competitive advantage. Thus, the dynamic factor of interconnectedness acts as the crux of spirituality at workplace.

With interconnectedness in the background, Spirituality at workplace facilitates the active participation and enrichment of the variables in work place, such as person-organization fit and meaning/purpose in work (Kolodinsky R.W. et al, 2008), intuition and creativity (Krishnakumar S. and Nick C.P., 2002) honesty and trust (Mukherjee S. et al, 2016), job satisfaction, engagement, commitment and improved work performance (Duchon D and Plowman D.A., 2005), improved problem solving capability and reduced stress level (Tischler L. et al, 2002), and emotional intelligence (Kamalakhannan, S.K., & Shalini P. 2019) - all of which ultimately leads to increased organizational performance.

Thus, we observe that spirituality, in Indian Culture, refers to the realization of the oneness of all beings and this oneness is the essence of spirituality at workplace through the dynamic factor of interconnectedness.

Objective of the paper

The paper deliberates on enriching the individual spirituality in workplace through the *Karmayoga* of the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is a holistic wisdom that expounds dimensions within an individual, and thereby, having potency leading towards interpersonal and organizational effectiveness.

Method of the paper

The method of the conceptual paper includes: (a) expounding *Karmayoga* of the Bhagavad Gita from its spiritual dimension, (b) identifying and presenting the take-away for enriching individual spirituality at workplace, and (c) pointing out the potency of the principle of *Karmayoga* for individual and organizational development/welfare.

The Bhagavad Gita

Before we deliberate on the perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita, a short note on the traditional scripture is in order.

The Bhagavad Gita is a holistic practical manual that offers numerous guidelines for the various dimensions of human existence. The Bhagavad Gita occurs in the *Bhismaparva (Chapter 23-40)* of the great epic Mahabharata, authored by Sri Veda Vyasa. It consists of 18 Chapters and 700 Verses. Even though a part of Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita is self-contained. It is considered as the Fifth Veda. 'Bhagavad' refers to 'Divine/Lord' and 'Gita' refers to 'song'. Therefore, the 'Bhagavad Gita' may be called as 'the song of the Lord/Divine'.

The Bhagavad Gita contains the essence of eternal spiritual and ethical truths (*Sanathana Dharma*). It states that 'man' or 'individual self' (*jivatman*) consists of three dimensions, namely, (a) the physical dimension - physical body and its organs, (b) the psychological/mental dimension - the senses (*gunas*), the mind (*manas*) and the intellect (*buddhi*), and (c) the spiritual dimension - the soul (*atman*). The real/essential nature of man is the spiritual dimension-the pure and eternal soul (*atman*) and not the physical and the psychological dimensions (*Chapter II, Verses 18 - 24, Volume. 1, 126-140*).

Liberation lies in the union (*yoga*) of individual consciousness/energy (Self) with the Universal/Cosmic Consciousness/energy. This union is made possible through three paths, namely, (a) The path of Action (*Karma-yoga*), (b) The path of Devotion (*Bhakti-yoga*) and (c) The path of Knowledge (*Jnana-yoga*).

The popularity of the Bhagavad Gita may be: (a) due to its dealing with day-today existential issues, (b) it is a scripture for all age groups and for all temperaments, and (c) it appeals irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

The Principle of Right Approach towards Action (*Karmayoga*)

Of the many powerful cognition enshrined in the Bhagavad Gita, we identify the dynamic principle of *Karmayoga* which has immense potency to enrich spirituality at workplace.

The Bhagavad Gita explains the principle of right approach to perform any action (*Karmayoga*), thus:

“Your right is only to be engaged in action, but never to its fruits. May you not be motivated by the fruits of actions. May you also be not drawn to inaction.” (*II.47, Volume 1, 177*).

Explanation:

The Bhagavad Gita identifies two ways of performing any action, namely, (a) performing action with the desire for its result/outcome, and (b) performing action as right/duty (*Svadharm*) and without the desire for its result/outcome. When actions are performed with the desire to enjoy its results, the desire binds the soul and becomes the cause for rebirth, resulting in bondage. (*II.49, Volume 1, 192*). When actions are performed as one’s own duty without the desire to enjoy its results, such actions do not bind the soul into repeated rebirths, resulting in liberation (*II.51, Volume 1, 208 & III.19, Volume 1, 282*).

The Bhagavad Gita advocates the performance of action as one’s own duty (*Svadharm*) without the desire to enjoy its results (*Phalatyaga*), terming it as *karmayoga* - the right approach to perform an action. Performance of action as one’s own duty (*Svadharm*) is to be based on one’s own innate tendencies and abilities (*Svabhava*) (*XVIII.47, Volume 3, 315*). It is always better to perform one’s own duty, even imperfectly, than other’s duty, well performed. (*III.35, Volume 1, 313*). Therefore, one should raise oneself up by one’s own efforts and should not let oneself down. One is both a friend and an enemy of oneself (*VI.5, Volume 2, 116*).

The Bhagavad Gita also points out that none can remain idle without performing any action, even for a moment, as all are helplessly driven to action by nature-born qualities (*III.5, Volume 1, 260*). In fact, even the bare maintenance of the body will not be possible without performing action (*III.8, Volume 1, 263*).

With this understanding of *karmayoga*, let us proceed to expound its takeaways for individual spirituality in workplace.

Takeaways for Individual Spirituality at Workplace

The cardinal takeaway that we may identify from the principle of *karmayoga* is the paradigm shift regarding action. **The performance of an action is not based on its result - orientedness but on the intention/process - orientedness.** This perception unfolds and enriches a number of variables for individual spirituality at workplace, as under:

- (1) The intention-oriented action develops a mind-set of 'work for work sake/duty for duty's sake' attitude. Here, the doer of action derives satisfaction in the very act of performing the action itself. This enhances the individual's feeling of doing meaningful work and job satisfaction, both of which are important components of spirituality at workplace.
- (2) The 'duty-oriented' attitude induces one to perform actions with a strong sense of responsibility and optimum ability. This activates individual's efficiency/skilfulness in the performance of actions, leading to the emergence of creativity and originality that augment spirituality at workplace.
- (3) The 'duty-oriented' attitude evokes a strong sense of dedicated engagement and individual commitment towards work, both of which enriches spirituality at workplace.
- (4) The 'duty-roundedness' promotes a steady focus on the responsibilities and duties for individuals rather than on the rights and privileges. The individual is made aware that rights and privileges will follow one who perform duties and responsibilities with utmost dedication. This promotes job engagement and job satisfaction, mitigating absenteeism and job frustration, thereby, enriching spirituality at workplace.
- (5) The 'duty-orientedness' creates an attitude that duty done well may be regarded as its own reward. Such an attitude will enable the individual to develop a sense of equipoise/equanimity in accepting both success and failure. This emotional stability facilitates stress management in individuals, improved inter-personal relationships, and thereby enriches spirituality at workplace.
- (6) The intention-oriented action facilitates clarity regarding one's focus and priorities, thereby fostering effective time-management skills, adding value to spirituality at workplace.

(7) The 'duty-oriented' attitude has limited scope for selfishness and mindless competition in the performance of actions, thereby introducing the virtues of honesty and trust in workplace, leading to positive and strong inter-personal relationships and spirituality at workplace.

(8) When actions are performed with the desire for favourable outcome (result-oriented paradigm), it creates a sense of fear, worries, stress and wary of failure, as outcomes are not under the control of the doer. These negative emotions limits individual's effective performance and inter-personal relationships in workplace. Such negative experience of emotions does not arise in the 'intention/process oriented' paradigm as performance of individuals is not linked with the outcome of their actions. It enriches spirituality at workplace.

(9) The 'result-oriented' attitude is often accompanied by the notion of 'Ego-I' in the performance of every action. (i.e.): It is 'I' who is performing this action - in this manner - in the given situation and 'I' look forward to this outcome. This 'Ego-I' attitude creates friction within an individual as well as in the inter-personal relationships at workplace. In the 'intention/process-oriented' paradigm, duty-bond work is appropriated more importance, and therefore, the notion of 'Ego-I' in individuals are limited. This fosters inter-personal relationships and enhancing spirituality at workplace.

(10) The 'result-orientedness' situation places the doer always in the realm of anticipation and uncertainty. This is due to the fact that while 'performance of action' belongs to the 'present', the 'result-orientedness' belongs to the 'future'. This position of perennial anticipation amidst uncertainty curtails individual's competency actualization in the long-run. This situation does not arise in the 'intention/process-oriented' paradigm because the 'performance of action' belongs to the 'present' and the 'intention/process-orientedness' also belongs to the 'present'. Breaking psychological shackles, the doer of action is free to actualize the inherent potentialities. It fosters individual innovativeness, thereby enriching spirituality at workplace.

(11) The 'result-oriented' paradigm places utmost importance/focus on the 'ends/outcome' of an action, unmindful of the important role played the 'means/process' through which the 'end' is to be achieved. The ethical position of the paradigm is that "The 'ends' justifies the 'means.'" It must be noted that while the 'end' is value-free, it the 'means' that is value-loaded. Therefore, performance of action, on the basis of 'result-orientedness', will not automatically vouchsafe/guarantee the ethical validity of the action. This ethical problem does not arise in the 'intention/process-oriented' paradigm because the focus is on the 'process/means' and not on the 'ends. The 'ends' are just the consequences. The ethical position of the paradigm is that: "The 'means justifies the 'ends.'" Therefore,

performance of action, on the basis of 'intention/process-orientedness', automatically vouchsafe/guarantee the ethical validity of the action. This enhances the values of honesty, trust and empathy in individuals, reflected in the inter-personal relationships and enriching spirituality at workplace.

(12) Closely connected with the above is the understanding that the paradigm shift from 'result-orientedness' to 'intention/process-orientedness' is also a shift in the ethical paradigm. The 'result-orientedness' stems from the utilitarian ethical system of consequentialism, while the 'intention/process-orientedness' belongs to the deontological ethical system. The deontological ethical system possess potency to enrich spirituality at workplace.

(13) The dictum 'One should raise oneself up by one's own efforts and should not let oneself down. One is both a friend and enemy of oneself', has high positive impact on spirituality in workplace. It advocates renunciation-in-action and not renunciation-of-action. It propels the doer's mind-set: (a) to put in optimum effort (b) to take full responsibility for the performance of action (c) to calmly accept the situation and not to blame others for the predicament (d) to desist from meaningless comparisons, mindless competitions, jealousy, anger, greediness and hatredness with others in workplace. All the above factors directly enrich spirituality at workplace.

(14) The shift of paradigm from 'result-orientedness' to 'intention/process-orientedness' is not only a shift in mind-set, but is also an important and powerful instrument/technique for the purification of the doer's mind. Purification may be understood as the process of strengthening the mind with higher value-system. This directly benefits individuals and their inter-personal relationships, thereby enriching spirituality at workplace.

Conclusion

The above exposition enables us to understand that spirituality, in Indian Culture, refers to the realization/experience of oneness with all beings of the world. This oneness finds expressed as spirituality at workplace through the dynamism of interconnectedness.

We find the principle of *Karmayoga* having immense potentiality in enriching individual spirituality at workplace. The principle of *Karmayoga* provides a paradigm shift in the domain of action, namely, the performance of an action is not based on its result - orientedness, but on the intention/process - orientedness. This understanding of *Karmayoga* unfolds and enriches a number of variables that characterize individual spirituality in workplace, such as meaningful work and job satisfaction,

optimum ability and efficiency, creativity and originality, dedicated engagement and commitment, mitigating absenteeism and job frustration, emotional stability and stress management, priorities and time-management, honesty and trust, reducing the sense of fear and wary of failures, controlling the notion of 'ego-I', enabling to be in the 'present', importance to 'means' over 'ends', deontological ethical position, mitigating jealousy and hatredness, and purification of the mind. Thus, we are able to understand that *Karmayoga*, in the process of enhancing these factors, enriches individual spirituality at workplace.

From Individual to Organizational Effectiveness

The principle of *Karmayoga* positively impacts individual and societal development/welfare. The Bhagavad Gita states that *Karmayoga* facilitates: (a) purification of the inner life/self - *Atmasuddhaye* (V.11, Volume 2, 37), and (b) stability/welfare of human society - *Lokasamgraham* (III.20 & 25, Volume1, 284 & 293), and welfare of all beings - *Sarvabhutahite ratah* (V.25, Volume 2, 98 & XII.4, Volume 3, 9). While purification of the inner life/self reflects individual development, the welfare of human society/all beings of the world, reflects societal development/ welfare.

When we closely observe the potency of the factors that are impacted, we understand that the principle of *Karmayoga*, in the process of enriching individual spirituality and inter-personal relationships in workplace, also automatically enriches organizational effectiveness. In the opinion of Srirangarajan G.S. et al (2011, 113) "... the practice of *Karma Yoga* would turn out to be a win-win situation for both the employee and the business organization: job satisfaction, personal growth and fulfillment for the employee; and higher productivity and quality performance for the organization". According to Menon and Krishnan (2004), *Karmayoga* or complete dedication to individual duties in the workplace will enhance the organizational effectiveness. Shrivastava (1990) asserts that the progress and prosperity of self and society at large comes through *Karmayoga*.

Thus, we observe that the principle of *Karmayoga* has the potency to enrich individual as well as organizational effectiveness.

Future Studies

A comprehensive model, reflecting all dimensions of *Karmayoga*, and its empirical validities would place the principle of *Karmayoga* as the differentiator in the work culture domain of organizations.

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