



Management Principles in the Religious Books: an Overview

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ABSTRACT

Catholic, Quaker, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Mormon, Amish, and other, religious traditions have each had their own influences on various business views and practices. Religion is often also a major motivational factor in business. Many people want to please and glorify God by the way they work in their business. They feel accountable both to God and to their religious community for their work performance as well as their ethical choices. Since the beginning of civilization religion has been at its very heart. A creative religion promotes a creative civilization; a fragmented religion results in a fragmented civilization. Corporates are now looking into religious and spiritual sayings to promote their business to the next level. Are business management principles influenced by these religious books? This question needs a solution and this paper aims at throwing light on certain aspects and highlights those spiritual sayings with business principles.

KEYWORDS

Religion, Business principles, Spiritual quotes

INTRODUCTION

Business ethics is the code of good conduct that a business adheres to in its daily dealings both with other businesses and with customers. Most philosophers conclude that ethical failure occurs because of lack of character. The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek word 'ethikos'. It refers to one's moral character and the way in which society expects people to behave in accordance with accepted principles. In the month of Magha (December) 5,000 years ago, on the battlefield at Kurukshetra just before the start of Mahabharata war, Krishna outlined to Arjuna a system of ethics that has withstood the test of time. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna not only how to build character but also the root cause of ethical failure and how to avoid it. Krishna outlines 26 qualities of a gentleman - to be merciful, obedient, truthful, equitable, saintly, magnanimous, mild-mannered, clean, simple, charitable and peaceful. He should have surrendered to God and not be greedy or possessive but remain steady and determined, free of the six bad qualities, not gluttonous, sober, respectful, humble, grave, compassionate, friendly, eloquent, expert and concise. Gita's solution to the ethical failure and downfall of corporations and society and family is 'controlling the senses with spiritual strength'. Ethics is linked to spirituality. For the last century or more, western businesses separated work and spirituality. Kurukshetra was also about mind control. Every one of us, whether as manager or employee, is fighting his own battle, his own Kurukshetra. The Gita can help us to learn to regulate our senses, control our minds and gain spiritual strength. The Bhagavad Gita has been predominantly studied in the contexts of philosophy, theology and literature. Many scholars believe that the Bhagavad Gita was written in as early as 3000 BC. Scholars throughout the ages have studied the Gita with great interest. Scholars like Albert Einstein, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau have quoted the Bhagavad Gita in their writings. Peter Senge, one of the most prominent management thinkers of our time, has quoted the Gita in his "Fifth Discipline" and "Presence". The same is with the great religious book - The Bible. Many people think of the Bible as a book of spiritual advice, but it is far more than this. It contains facts and wisdom about geology, weather, cultures, languages and a myriad of other subjects. It also contains many true statements about economics, and it has a wealth of good advice on how to run a business.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr Amaravathi and Anand Shankar Raja (2014) have stated clearly that many similarities exist between the ways that Taoism, Zen Buddhism, and the Self-actualization theories of Maslow and Rogers. Principles and enlightened knowledge of great saints are real inspiration for many management gurus in the Indian and Western context. Abraham Maslow was a psychologist who studied human growth, particularly. He is best known for summing up the stages of growth with this hierarchy in developmental psychology. Basically, in order for one to achieve self-actualization (which is at the top of the pyramid), the layers below it must be fulfilled first, starting with the physiological needs at the lowest tier. When the physiological needs are filled, one will start to fulfil his safety needs, and after securing both of those layers can one find love and belongingness, etc. Maslow's needs hierarchy helps to define the problem, similar to the way the four noble truths, dukkha (suffering), samudaya (truth of the cause of the suffering), nirodha (truth of the end of the suffering) and magga (truth of the path) define the problem. The researcher have even stated that in understanding the problem, one starts Buddhist practise as the solution, part of the solution is redefining the difference between Needs and Wants. An attempt is made in this paper to correlate Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory of motivation with Buddhist principles advocated by the Buddha, the Enlightened.

Hussin Jose Hejase et al., (2013) have made a detailed analysis to find out how religion affects the behaviour of people working in places that are more often exposed to unethical practices. Selected respondent employees, working in the financial business sector, namely in Syrian banks and insurance agencies are taken as the sample. People, across the centuries, have embraced ethics principles that emanate from different sources, including family upbringing, culture, society, wisdom, experience, social classes and wealth. However, in the current research ethics is assessed based on religious values. The researchers even concluded that however, it is important to note that organizations have their own set of values emanating from their corporate social responsibility, and most of the time, take into consideration the values of the surrounding community. Therefore, employees are trained and educated to follow organizational regulations which are aligned with their own moral principles and professional training.

THE GITA

This ancient text has never been studied in the management context. If we look closely, the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita contains many leadership lessons that are similar to contemporary leadership theories and practices. Consider some of these lessons embedded within the Gita. The Gita is as fresh in insight and as relevant today as it was 5,000 years ago. If only every manager, administrator, politician, employee, worker and others pick a copy of the Gita and spend a few minutes daily reflecting on its message, one can experience the positive transformation. Who doesn't wish to be disciplined, to achieve home-work balance and bring peace and harmony in a secular environment? Most of the western management concepts of vision, leadership, motivation, decision making and planning, are all discussed in the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita preaches that once the basic thought process of man is improved, it will automatically enhance the quality of his actions, and consequently, their results.

Bhagavad Gita contains many leadership lessons that are similar to contemporary leadership theories and practices. Many contemporary leadership topics such as emotional intelligence, situational leadership, character and integrity were already discussed in the Bhagavad Gita thousands of years ago. These topics were discussed in a philosophical context, as management science as we know today did not exist then. It is also intriguing to find other management concepts embedded in the Gita. Thousands of years before Frederick W. Taylor defined work and worker, and Peter F. Drucker defined knowledge and knowledge worker, the topics of work and knowledge were already in the Bhagavad Gita. Consider some of these lessons embedded within the Gita:

"Leaders should embrace rather than avoid formidable challenges because they bring out the leaders' greatest strengths

Leaders should be resilient in their actions and should not be weakened by pain and pleasure.

Selfish desires and animosity obscure the purpose of leadership.

Leaders achieve lasting power and glory by exercising compassion and selfless service.

Effective leaders do not lead by fear or anger.

Character is core to effective leadership.

Leaders need to be aware of the self and the surroundings."

The ancient spiritual wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita seems at first like an odd choice for guiding today's numbers-driven managers. Also known as Song of the Divine One, the work relates a conversation between the supreme deity Krishna and Arjuna, a warrior prince struggling with a moral crisis before a crucial battle. One key message is that enlightened leaders should master any impulses or emotions that cloud sound judgment. Good leaders are selfless, take initiative, and focus on their duty rather than obsessing over outcomes or financial gain. The central theme of Krishna's lecture, *nishakama karma* - the need to engage in action, but with detachment, without expecting any reward from it - is also widely known, and, indeed, has been much debated. Some have argued that the "fatalism" Indians are sometimes accused of stems from internalising the concept of *nishakama karma*. Again, in The Argumentative Indian, Amartya Sen has made the case that Arjuna's initial reaction could well be as valid a moral position as that of Krishna's.

BHAGAVAD GITA AND MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

The modern (Western) management concepts of vision, leadership, motivation, excellence in work, achieving goals, giving work meaning, decision making and planning, are all discussed in the Bhagavad Gita. There is one major difference. While Western management thought too often deals

with problems at material, external and peripheral levels, the Bhagavad Gita tackles the issues from the grass roots level of human thinking. Once the basic thinking of man is improved, it will automatically enhance the quality of his actions and their results. Various dimensions of management in the eyes of Bhagavad Gita

- ❖ Utilisation of Available Resources
- ❖ Attitudes towards Work
- ❖ Work commitment
- ❖ Motivation - Self and Self-Transcendence
- ❖ Work Culture
- ❖ Work Results
- ❖ Managers Mental Health

Utilisation of Available Resources

The first lesson of management science is to choose wisely and utilise scarce resources optimally. During the curtain raiser before the Mahabharata War, Duryodhana chose Sri Krishna's large army for his help while Arjuna selected Sri Krishna's wisdom for his support. This episode gives us a clue as to the nature of the effective manager - the former chose numbers, the latter, wisdom.

Attitudes towards Work

Three stone-cutters were engaged in erecting a temple. An HRD Consultant asked them what they were doing. The response of the three workers to this innocent-looking question is illuminating. I am a poor man. I have to maintain my family. I am making a living here, said the first stone-cutter with a dejected face. Well, I work because I want to show that I am the best stone-cutter in the country, said the second one with a sense of pride. Oh, I want to build the most beautiful temple in the country, said the third one with a visionary gleam. Their jobs were identical but their perspectives were different. What the Gita tells us is to develop the visionary perspective in the work we do. It tells us to develop a sense of larger vision in our work for the common good.

Work Commitment

A popular verse of the Gita advises 'detachment from the fruits or results of actions performed in the course of one's duty. If we are always calculating the date of promotion or the rate of commission before putting in our efforts, then such work is not detached. 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 ones accepted duty, the Gita does not absolve anybody of 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 mind, from dissipation of attention through speculation on future gains or losses.

Motivation-Self and Self-Transcendence

It has been presumed for many years that satisfying lower order needs of workers - adequate food, clothing and shelter, etc. are key factors in motivation. However, it is a common experience that the dissatisfaction of the clerk and of the Director is identical - only their scales and composition vary. This situation is explained by the theory of self-transcendence propounded in the Gita. Self-transcendence involves renouncing egoism, putting others before oneself, emphasising team work, dignity, co-operation, harmony and trust and, indeed potentially sacrificing lower needs for higher goals, the opposite of Maslow. Work must be done with detachment. It is the ego that spoils work and the ego is the centrepiece of most theories of motivation. We need not merely a theory of motivation but a theory of inspiration."

Work Culture

An effective work culture is about vigorous and arduous ef-

forts in pursuit of given or chosen tasks. Sri Krishna elaborates on two types of work culture 'daivi sampat or divine work culture and 'asuri sampat or demonic work culture. Daivi work culture - involves fearlessness, purity, self-control, sacrifice, straightforwardness, self-denial, calmness, absence of fault-finding, absence of greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of envy and pride.

THE BIBLE

Bible is like an operator's manual for anyone engaged in any kind of task or responsibility, to manage or govern anything small or big, and with the kind of background, environment. The Torah teaches us not only how to build a successful business, but also what to do once it is successful. The Bible teaches us to be socially responsible and not forget about those that don't have food to eat. We have a social responsibility to our communities. We are obligated to donate a portion of our profits to the needy. Encourage employees, partners and customers to also be charitable through incentive, matching and other programs. Donate a portion of your profits to charity. Run promotions that contribute a portion of every sale to charity. Match your employee charitable giving to encourage them to be charitable. Encourage employees to do community service, use business as a vehicle for community improvement were all these simple concept relates to the business management ethics. "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Proverbs 11:24). View work as a means, not an end. When we help others, we feel fulfilled and accomplished. When we leverage the business to improve the community around, we wake up every day and appreciate what you have accomplished for the community. As King Solomon said, "Our work is meaningless unless it is to do good" (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13). Let's use our success to be socially responsible and we will live much more meaningful lives.

MANAGEMENT ETHICS AND THE BIBLE

- ❖ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it – Genesis 2:15 NIV
- ❖ Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed – Exodus 23:12 NIV
- ❖ He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers – Exodus 35:35 NIV
- ❖ Do not defraud or rob your neighbour. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight – Leviticus 19:13 NIV
- ❖ Do not have two differing weights in your bag—one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house—one large, one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you – Deuteronomy 25:13-15 NIV
- ❖ If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? – Job 31:13-14 NIV
- ❖ They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands." Nehemiah 6:9 NIV
- ❖ Good will comes to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice – Psalm 112:5 NIV

- ❖ Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich – Proverbs 10:4 NIV
- ❖ The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favour with him – Proverbs 11:1 NIV
- ❖ A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied – Proverbs 13:4 NIV
- ❖ Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow – Proverbs 13:11 NIV
- ❖ Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice – Proverbs 16:8 NIV
- ❖ The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty – Proverbs 21:5 NIV
- ❖ The craving of a sluggard will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work – Proverbs 21:25 NIV
- ❖ One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty – Proverbs 22:16
- ❖ Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labour – Jeremiah 22:13 NIV
- ❖ "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty – Malachi 3:5 NIV
- ❖ Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much – Luke 16:10 NIV
- ❖ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him – Ephesians 6:9 NIV
- ❖ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters . . . – Colossians 3:23 NIV
- ❖ Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven – Colossians 4:1 NIV
- ❖ For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages" – 1 Timothy 5:18 NIV
- ❖ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty – James 5:4 NIV

CONCLUSION

Solomon said there is nothing new under the sun and he was right. Methods may change, but thousands of years ago people were still people dealing with same business issues. Most of the western management concepts of vision, leadership, motivation, decision making and planning, are all discussed in The Bible and The Bhagavad Gita. The Gita preaches that once the basic thought process of man is improved, it will automatically enhance the quality of his actions, and consequently, their results. Many contemporary topics such as emotional intelligence, situational leadership, character and integrity were already discussed in the Bhagavad Gita as well as the Bible thousands of years ago. These topics were discussed in a philosophical context, as management science as we know today did not exist then. It is also intriguing to find other management concepts embedded in both these religious books. The big corporate firms are now in search of spirituality and spiritual dealings to deal with complex business problems in this highly competitive world.

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