

The Bhagavata Gitā and Modern Business Management

Pramod Kumar Dash

HoD, Department of Philosophy, Nayagarh Autonomous College, Nayagarh, Odisha, India

DOI: [10.55559/sjahss.v2i09.159](https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i09.159)

Received: 08.08.2023 | Accepted: 03.09.2023 | Published: 24.09.2023

Electronic reference (Cite this article):

Dash, P. K. (2023). The Bhagavata Gitā and Modern Business Management. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(09), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i09.159>

Copyright Notice:

© 2023 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

ABSTRACT

The *Bhagavata Gitā* is one of the source books of philosophic inspiration and a foundational text in ethics. It outlives the speculative interest of the *Brahmasutra* and the Upanisads and suggests an outline of ideal living. The *Bhagavata Gitā* is a treatise of *Yoga sādhanā* pertaining to the discipline of mind. There is a scope of transformation of mind from the state of *visāda* or disappointment to the state of *sanyāsa* or detachment in the teachings of the *Bhagavata Gitā*. The first chapter of the *Bhagavata Gitā* is known as *Visāda Yoga* and the last chapter is known as *Moksa Sanyāsa Yoga*. Every man should be like a *karma yogi* and every action should be done in the sense of *yajna*. The *Bhagavata Gitā* has focused on *Purusārthas*, the four cardinal values of human life, such as, *dhrama*, *artha*, *kāma* and *moksa*. *Artha* and *kāma* are empirical pursuits which are to be guided by *dharma* in order to attain the ultimate end of life. Business management is basically the management of *artha* and *kāma* through the pursuit of *dharma* or the principle of righteousness. A true businessman should be like a *karma yogi*. Business is profit oriented but making profit at any cost is not the ethics of business. The *Bhagavata gitā* teaches the dexterity in action and steadiness in wisdom. Business is to be managed by proper skill with a mind of equanimity. A true businessman should be stable in mind and be able to take right decision in the right context. The *Gitā* teaches applied ethics which can be viable in the context of place, time and person. This teaching of the *Gitā* has direct impact on the modern business management. *Artha* leads to *anartha* if it is not managed rationally according to the business skills and responsibilities. *Kāma* or desire should be regulated so that a businessman should not behave like a greedy person and must have patience for the unexpected consequences. The highest value in the teachings of the *Bhagavata Gitā* is *lokasngraha*. Business management should be meant for the welfare of the people transcending the selfish motives for accumulating wealth by foul means. In this paper we would discuss the influence of the teachings of the *Bhagavata Gitā* on the modern business management from different perspectives.

Keywords: *Bhagavata Gitā*, Business skill, *Karma Yoga*, *Lokasngraha*, Decision Making, Good will

I

Character of a Businessman: There are four Varnas or colour of psychic trait, such as, *Brāhmin*, *Ksetriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*, which are wrongly interpreted as four castes in social stratification. Because of this misinterpretation there are social crisis of division and discrimination and many other problems. This misconception has been removed by the treatise of the Bhagavata Gita. There are not four groups of people denominated by four castes like *Brāhmin*, *Ksetriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*. Rather, every human being is endowed with these four psychic traits. So every individual is *Brāhmin*, *Ksetriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra* according to guna and karma in different states of mind. When our mind is calm and our knowledge is steady, we behave like a *Brahmin*. When we focus on protecting *dharma* or the righteousness, we behave like a *khetriya*. When we use worldly intelligence proving our keenness and expertise in trade and commerce, we behave like a *Vaisya*. Similarly, when we are prone to offer physical service for survival and comfort of our own lives and the lives of others, we behave like a *Sudra*. It is said that by birth, everyone is a *Sudra*, one becomes *Dvija* (twice born) by virtue of one's karmic excellence; one attains Viprahood by cultivation of knowledge and one who has realized *Brahman* is verily a *Brahmana*¹. Human life has four *Purusartha* or the values of life such as, *Dharma*, *Arta*, *Kāma*, and *Moksa* and four psychic traits like *Brahmin*, *Ksetriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*. The pursuit of *Artha* or the means for existence is fulfilled by our attitude of *Vaisya*. The pursuit of *Kāma* or desire for anything is fulfilled by our attitude of *Sudra*. The pursuit of *dharma* or the protection of righteousness is fulfilled by our attitude of *ksetriya*. The pursuit of *Moksa* or complete freedom from suffering is fulfilled by our attitude of *Brahmin*. From this analysis we would like to say that every individual has four distinct personalities like *Brahmin*, *Ksetriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*. But if we focus on any one of these personalities wholeheartedly, we become identified with that specific attitude. Thus a businessman is one who has adopted the skill of *Vaisya* as profession and devoted his life with skillful business management. But at the same time, the businessman is also a complete personality having the psychic trait of *Brāhmin*, *Ksetriya*, and *Sudra*. Besides being intelligent and having expertise in commerce, a businessman should be calm and steady like a *Brāhmin*, courageous to protect the business from dishonesty like a *Ksetriya*, humble in service to the public like a *Sudra*. Lacking any one of these qualities becomes an instrument for own's failure and frustration.

II

Skill: Business management is skill-based. Skill is functional expertise. It is often thought that skill determines the competence of a functionary. Greater the skill, greater the efficiency and greater is the output. 'Business' being a team effort, an executive should have the sense of leadership and the capacity to take members of the team along with him. Importance of ethical virtues becomes all the more demanding when one plays the role of an executive or a worker in a corporate body. The million-dollar questions with regard to ethics in business are: Why should one go with values when disvalues, very often, pay? If lies or misrepresentation of facts, bribe, kickbacks or shady deals can ensure greater business prospects for the organization, what is wrong in taking these foul and immoral practices? Should one embrace values even at the cost of the interest of business? All these questions can be answered in a very simple way that the disvalues like dishonest, insincerity, lying, cheating, etc. may prove to be expedient in the short run, but in the long run these qualities become self-defeating and unyielding.² An executive who is humane, good and exemplary, is more advantageously

placed because being so, he commands greater loyalty from his subordinates and is able to lead the team through both fair and foul days. If an executive who is greatly efficient but is immoral and corrupt, he cannot infuse sense of participation, sincerity and commitment among the workers. Hence goodness and efficiency both are necessary for the success of a business venture.

Karma Yoga in the *Bhagavata Gitā* teaches the skill of doing all actions (*Yoga Karmesu kousulam*)³. Our karma should not only be good but also equipped with efficiency. Performing any action according to the norms or instructions is duty, but one should learn the art and skill of doing action so that the very action cannot bind the agent. Due to our ignorance of the spiritual experience we entertain in our intellect unending desires. As the desires in us, so are our thoughts. As our thoughts, so are our actions. At every moment, the texture and quality of our thoughts are directly conditioned and controlled by our desires. Actions are nothing other than our thoughts projected and expressed in the world. Thus, in the chain of ignorance, constituted of desires, thoughts and actions, each one of us is caught and bound. *Karma Yoga* facilitates us to transcend the *karmic* nexus by the experience beyond ignorance. *Karma Yoga* does not mean renunciation of action or running away from life. Man is ever agitated under the influence of the triple tendencies of calm and peace (*Sattva*), Activity (*Rajas*) and Inactivity (*Tamas*) inherent in him. Even for a single moment, he cannot remain totally inactive. So long as we are under the influence of these mental tendencies (*Gunas*), we are helplessly prompted to act. Complete inaction is impossible. Even the maintenance of the body would not be possible by inaction. So act one must. The *Gitā* explicitly maintains that *Lokasangraha* (wellbeing of all) should be the motive of all actions. We are not asked here to renounce the fruits of actions as such nor to ignore them, but we are only warned to renounce our mental slavery and intellectual clinging to the expected and imaginary fruits⁴. Only when we get preoccupied with the expected fruits of our actions do we come to exhaust ourselves, and thus become inefficient in our activities. One who is established in the Self, though engaged himself in action, cannot be said to do any action. Every action has its reaction. But merely bodily action cannot yield a reaction. Reactions of actions take place in the mental and in the intellectual states. An action can leave a mark on our subtle-body only when we act with an ego-centric consciousness that we are the actors. These false impressions can be effective only when our actions are motivated by powerful and strong egocentric desires. Ego is created when the All pervading Self identifies itself wrongly with the body, mind and intellect and their respective fields of objects. The egocentric identity with the body is the actor and the sufferer, and where the ego is not; there the mere bodily actions cannot bring about any consequences. The state of egolessness indicates a condition of perfect conquest over the mind and intellect. Such an individual who has thus conquered his egocentric misconceptions about himself, though acting, is not fettered by the natural consequences of the actions performed.

III

Decision making: A business executive is to be very serious about decision making ability while discharging the administrative responsibilities. A single wrong decision may have detrimental consequences for the person as well as the organization. All decisions should be backed by reason. When decisions are backed by bias or is motivated by personal sentiment, it becomes subjective and destructive. Managing the affairs of the people is more challenging

than handling the machines or materials.⁵ The executive should remain above personal considerations and should behave impartially.

The *Bhagavata Gītā* has given much emphasis on the ability of decision making. The perfection of human life is attained through our moral consciousness in each and every context of life. If any context of life is devoid of ethical discipline, our whole life becomes chaotic. A single wrong decision can spoil the beauty of our whole life. A single passionate desire can put us into the dogmatic slumber of illusory attachment. It is true that every moment of life is the moment of transformation. This transformation is possible by constant awareness of the principle of righteousness. Man struggles against diverse situations confronting his own confusions and outside interferences. Man is not living in the paradise of happiness and perfection. He has to struggle hard to fight against the natural and social evils to attain perfection in life. The ultimate goal of human life is freedom from suffering or attainment of the highest perfection. This inner urge to attain perfection inspires every one of us to guard against evil in our thought, speech and action. So every situation of life is a war-like situation. The attitude of protesting against injustice (*adharmā*) is the hallmark of human personality irrespective of caste, creed, colour and religion. In the *Bhagavat Gītā*, war is construed as *Dharma Yuddha* or the protest against injustice. The civil war between the clans of *Pandava* and *Kaurava* is only symbolic. The war symbolizes the facts and facets of human life with the complexity of contexts and conformity of ethical paradigms. The war symbolizes the dialectical relevance of ethical paradigms and transcendental synthesis of apparent phenomenal contradictions. The war symbolizes the warrior who is not a man of weapons with war-skills but the warrior who is perfect in the skill of action, knowledge and devotion. Here the warrior is a skilled *karma yogi*, true aspirant of wisdom and a devotee lover of the Truth. Every man is a warrior in the war of his life. The very small span of life is a field of performing right action, attaining right knowledge and serving the society with true devotion.

IV

Good will: Production, distribution, consumption, accrual of profit constitutes the business cycle in which the management, executives, workers, consumers play their respective role. Good will regulate the nature of the product, quantum of production and mode of distribution and determination of reasonable price. Constant vigilance on quality-control, sensitive to the opinion and grievances of the consumers, and collection of the grass root information are to be maintained in order to keep the good will of the corporate sector intact. There is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)⁶ which refers to non-fiscal activities of the corporate in relation to the society. It is directed to promote the interest of the society. CSR aims to integrate profit and sustainable progress of the society the consumers are the target individuals who remain at the other extreme of the business activity.

According to the *Bhagavata Gītā*, almost all inter-human conflicts are to be traced to their intra-human roots or what we call human nature. We all have a peace instinct, *ahimsā* in us, despite our occasional aggressive temper and action. What we, as humankind, can achieve in the realm of peace depends on what we are. Mankind is yet to evolve a compliance organization which is normative, not coercive, and still effective in its peace-ensuring task. Our inner peace is lost due to our inner conflicts and confusions. The *Bhagavat Gītā* begins with *Viśāda Yoga*⁷ representing the inner conflicts and confusions of man as a basic psychological disorder. Inner conflicts and confusions are natural to man but very unfortunate when such disorders take place in the field of battle. Here the field of battle symbolizes the

field of readiness where man should be action-oriented with full of wisdom and dedication. War-field is a field of detachment from the empirical attachments where one should not have any passion for personal relationship and any reactions of inner conflicts. But in the *Bhagavat Gitā* it is shown that man is psychologically trapped even in the time of war and the place of war-field. This is the irony of human intellectuality and rationality. Man is always found in the crossroad of confusions and becomes indecisive of what to do and what not to do. Man suffers from this psychological battle throughout his life. The *Bhagavat Gitā*, from the opening chapter of *Visāda Yoga*, introduces the nature and limit of human mind. A confused mind is not qualified for any war. War ethics suggests that if both the opposite parties standing on the opposite sides are not ready for fighting, there cannot be any fighting at all. As *Arjuna* was confused and reluctant to fight against his relatives, he needed psychological counseling to have readiness for war with strong conviction and wisdom. The *Bhagavat Gitā* has given importance for the mental preparedness of the war than the real war. Understanding and feeling are the roots of all activities. *Karma* should be performed by the support of *jnana and bhakti*. So, war is not a mechanical reaction, rather a well-planned action backed by wisdom and dedication.

V

Profit and Loss: Business aims at profit. But sometimes business yields less profit or no profit at all. This depends upon so many factors involved in business management and corresponding circumstances. In this juncture one businessman who has not a stable mind gets distracted from the continuity of business. On the otherhand many businessmen learn a grow in the adverse situations bearing loss in business because they know that business is a running venture in which profit and loss are natural outcome of some business strategy. A businessman should behave like a *Karma Yogi* and relinquish the consequences of profit and loss. He should do business in the sense of *Yajna* and be ready for any consequences thereof.

The Bhagavata Gitā is called a *Yogasāstra*. *Yoga* means union and in business management *yoga* can be equated with the concept 'profit' or addition to the invested capital. Man loves to live a luxurious life and is essentially prone to be inert. If left to themselves, majority of men would demand in life only food to eat with the least amount of exertion and plenty of idle hours. Man undergoes three stages of growth and transformation from desire to desirelessness: a) desire-prompted activity, b) selfless dedicated activity and c) quite meditation. The first stage of man's growth is his being awakened activity, and this is easily done when the individual's desires are whipped up. Thus in the first stage of his evolution, desire-prompted activity takes man out of his mental and intellectual inertia to vigorous activity. In the second stage of his growth, he becomes tired of the desire-motivated activities, and feels energetic when to act in a spirit of dedication and service. The third stage of development is accomplished through meditation. The Vedic literature also highlights a systematic development of the technique of Self-perfection. The 'Mantra' portion of the Vedas expresses an all-absorbing sense of wonderment of the deluded at the sight of Nature's vastness in strength and beauty. The '*Brāhmana*' portion prescribes ways and means by which ritualistic activities can be undertaken for the satisfaction of one's material desires. The '*Āranyakas*' prescribes varieties of worship-methods called the *Upāsānās*, which are to be practiced by pure minds uncontaminated by any desire. Desireless activities are called *Yajnas* which refine mind and intellect of the seeker of wisdom. The Upanisads, the last part of the Vedas, imparts the wisdom of the Truth and Infinity which is attainable only by a pure

intellect having no desire for the worldly allurements. Thus, in the first stage of transformation man is advised to whip out of his sleepy inertia (*tāmas*) motivated by the individual's egocentric desires. In the next stage, inertia (*tāmas*) is invigorated into the 'agitations of dynamic activities (*rajas*). This state is again to be transcended through the process of 'non-egocentric Divine activities undertaken in a spirit of goodwill and love for all' and the individual reaches a certain amount of tranquility and peace, purity and joy (*sattva*). Being groomed with desire management man gets transformed from the state of 'renunciation of action' to 'renunciation in action'.

VI

Strong determination (*Samkalpa*): Business is a determination. It sprouts from a desire, grows through the attitude of desirelessness and finally it becomes a determination. So every businessman must be groomed with three fundamental attributes such as *kāma*, *niskāma* and *samkalpa*.

Kāma, *nishkāma* and *samkalpa*, as the dialectical triad, explain the transcendence of *kāma* and *nishkāma* leading to the synthesis of the highest psychic transformation of *samkalpa*. Without attachment we cannot have any psychic pursuit for doing any action. Without detachment we cannot attain freedom from the bondage of our own actions. Our attachment for doing an action and detachment from the bondage of action, both are inevitably required for perfection. Indulgence in action and renunciation of action lead us to imperfection. The goal of life is to transcend both indulgence and renunciation and attain the highest state of *Naishkarmya Siddhi*⁸. This is possible by *Samkalpa* or the noblest desire originated from our *samskāra* or the disposition of spiritual discipline. *Samkalpa* is a yogic tool to help us focus and bring the power of our deeper core desires to bear in our lives. A *samkalpa* is a heartfelt intention reflecting our highest ideals. *Kāmanā* is the desire that leads to action but *samkalpa* is the desire that is created by our *samskāra*. 'As we desire, so we do' and 'as we do, so we desire' are two dialectical aspects of our psychic pursuit. The former is *kāmanā* and the latter is *samkalpa*. The perfection of the state of *samkalpa* is attainable by the practice of *Nishkāmakarma*. *Kāma* or desire is the psychic pursuit of attaining any goal. This psychic pursuit is also known as *kāmanā* in the text of the *Bhagavat Gitā*. In all most all Indian scriptures *kāma* or *kāmanā* has been considered as the root cause of suffering and at the same time it is strongly admired that *kāma* is one of the *Purusāthas* or the values of human life. The focal concern of this piece of writing is to clarify the paradoxical status of desire in our practical life. Secondly, we shall discuss how can we negotiate the gap between what should be desired and what is not desirable at all. Thirdly, we shall observe the fact that whether desires create actions and reactions or our habituated actions create desires in us. And lastly, we shall conclude how *kāma* or desire can be converted to *nishkāma* or the state of desirelessness and after being habituated of the skill of *nishkāmakarma* how can we become able to have *samkalpa* or the desire for the perfection.

Samkalpa is also meant as positive strong determination for doing an action. Different persons have different types of desires according to their *samskāra*. As our knowledge varies from person to person, so is our action and devotion. Some are addicted with passionate desires and some are endowed with purified desires. *Niskāma* is attained gradually by the practice of having good desires. From annihilation of desires we cannot culture the state of *nishkāma*. Our desire for the well-being of others graduates the sense of *nishkāma* in our *samskāra* and results in creating new desires (*samkalpa*) for the best of the society or

collective well-being. In the seventh chapter of *Chhāndogya* Upanisad it is declared that *sankalpa* is greater than mind. In the *Suklayajurveda*, the 34th *adhyaya* of the *Vajasaneyi Samhitā*, the concept '*sankalpa*' is interpreted as right intention or having an auspicious resolve. The highest prayer to the divinity is to be blessed with a peaceful mind having always good intentions for all.

VII

Conclusion: Business management should be entrusted with the teachings of the Bhagavata Gita. In the *Bhagavat Gitā* moral consciousness is given the purest status of the manifestation of self-consciousness. Moral obligation is the noblest obligation and the protection of morality is the highest duty. Those who protect dharma are protected by *dharma* (*Dharma Raksati Raksitah*)⁹. *Dharma* or moral order is the root of our existence. If the moral order is not protected then our very existence is at stake. Etymologically, the word '*dharma*' means to uphold or sustain. In this sense, it is used interchangeably with *Rta*. It is said that the forces of Nature rule according to *dharma*. *Dharma* always comes out victorious (*Yato dharma tato jayah*). It means that whosoever follows the way of the cosmic order (*dharma*) is bound to be crowned with victory. The moral order is irrevocable. Hence, ultimate well-being of the individual and society consists in living in obedience to it. Human beings constitute an integral part of the natural order. Human existence is distinctive on account of their unique possessions of rationality, normative awareness and free-will. They have the innate ability to have a sense of ends and means, ought and ought-not, the pleasurable (*preya*) and the preferable (*sreya*)¹⁰. No virtuous action goes unrewarded and no vicious action goes unpunished. *Dharma* is the principle of righteousness which is functional in moral domain. At the same time it is true that *dharma* points to moral determinism. When actions of the individuals are in consonance with *dharma* or moral order, one becomes a participant in the cosmic process. On the other hand if people by and large, under the influences of prakrti or lower instinctive propensities commit evils, there is decadence of *dharma*. So restoration of *dharma* is the duty of each and every human being irrespective of caste, creed, colour and religion. War is a natural consequence of the decadence of morality. War is not violent if it is meant for the restoration of *dharma*. Every human being is a warrior of the battle of life. War is end-specific. It is not a means for acquiring more wealth or power. War is inevitable as it is suggestive of moral restoration. Moral law is universal. Moral law is categorical imperative. Impartial adherence to moral order and unconditional respect for moral obligation glorify the personality of a human being. As universal principle moral laws are same for all. Whosoever commits *adharma* should be punished. In the *Bhagavat Gitā*, *Arjuna* felt reluctant to fight against his relatives as they were his kin and kith. This was the dogmatic attachment of *Arjuna* for his blood relations. *Lord Krishna* advised *Arjuna* to fight against *adharma* only irrespective of the fact that who are the clients of *adharma*. This is war ethics.

Business is profit-oriented but making profit should be based on the principle of *Yoga*. Evenness of mind and the tranquility of mental composure in facing all pairs of opposites is called yoga. One should renounce attachment to become more efficient in performing inspired activities. We should do our duty in the society being established in equipoise and equanimity and at the same time we should reinforce this poise through renunciation of our attachment for the immediate fruits of our actions. One who has evenness of temper accomplished by his perfect withdrawal from the realm of sentiments and emotions, and who is established in his resolute intellect, get himself transcended the pairs of opposites.

One should apply oneself to the devotion of action-yoga. A man of *sthitaprajna* is endowed with both the skills of wisdom and action such as, 'evenness of mind' and 'dexterity in action'. When the art of working without desire is pursued, the *karma yogi* becomes detached from all the existing *vāsanas* within himself, both the good and the bad. The *vāsana*-pressure in an individual causes restlessness within. So, *sthitaprajna* is the highest spiritual *sādhanā* through pure *antah-karana*, which is an unavoidable prerequisite for consistent, discriminative self-application in meditation. When our intellect crosses beyond the mire of wisdom, then we shall attain to indifference and equanimity of mind.

References:

Mohanty, A. K. 1998, *Dharma*, Elite Publication, Bhubaneswar, p. 45

Mohanty, A. K. 1995, *Philosophy of Value*, P. G. Department of Philosophy, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, p.193

*“buddhiyukta jahātiha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte;
tasmādyogāya yujyasva yogah karmasu kauśalam”*

The BhagavavatGita, II -50

Ibid., II -47

Mohanty, A. K. 1995, *Philosophy of Value*, P. G. Department of Philosophy, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, p.191

UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organization. (n.d.). <http://www.unido.org/>

The First Chapter of the Bhagavata Gita is known as “*Arjuna Visada Yoga*” which introduces the conflicting state of human mind in an adverse situation.

The BhagavavatGita, XVIII -49

Mahabharat and Manusmriti Verse 8.15

Kathoupanisad, 1.2.2