

BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ AND MANAGEMENT

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Bhagavad Gītā is the sermon given by Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna on the battlefield of Mahābhārata. The question that comes to our mind is, therefore, the following: Why should one look for the theory, principles, and practice of management in Bhagavad Gītā? To answer this question, we should analyse as to what constitutes the management science and as to what is the subject matter of Bhagavad Gītā. Management science, essentially, consists of the theory and practice of conflict prevention, conflict prediction and conflict resolution. Bhagavad Gītā also, deals with the situations of conflicts, contradictions, and confusions, and provides guidelines for their resolutions, in such a way, that ultimately, the right and the truth triumph. We should note that Bhagavad Gītā was preached at a time when Arjuna is getting of confusion, and then launching himself on a rational action plan as advised by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Managing oneself

Management is often meant to refer to the problems of managing the resources-both human resources and material resources-available at the disposal of the manager, in such a way that they are put to their optimum use. In executing this task of management, the manager faces many complex situations of conflicts. There are many alternative uses of the resources possible. Many interpersonal conflicts of interests arise while dealing with the human beings working around him. The manager has to 'manage' his finances, raw materials, capital equipments, inventories, etc. He has to 'manage' his subordinates, his superiors, his competitors, his neighbours, his contacts in the banks, the Government officials, the clients, etc. The whole theory of modern management science is developed to deal with these diverse issues of management. But it should be noted that the modern management science does not give adequate attention to one of the most important dimensions of management, viz. managing oneself. It does not spell out the fundamental factors influencing the individual behaviour and set out guidelines for 'managing oneself', before launching on the task of managing the other 'entities' around him. It is here that Bhagavad Gītā deals with the most basic issues of human behaviour and advocates the most fundamental theory that the first step in realizing good management is to 'manage' oneself and that all other types of management are

secondary to the issue of self management. Or to put it differently, Bhagavad Gītā propounds the basic principles that if each individual-be a manager otherwise-‘manages’ his attitudes and behaviour, in an ‘optimum’ manner, then all other tasks of management would be easily accomplished.

Value of Conflict

It is perceived, in the Bhagavad Gītā that each individual is the venue of conflict within oneself and that he should, first resolve this conflict within oneself and that he should, first resolve this conflicting situation, on the basis of suitable norms and strategies. The very first sloka of Bhagavad Gītā theory and practice of management science.

Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ.

Māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāśvcaiva kimakurvata sañjaya.¹

This śloka presents the question posed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who is blind and who is located in the palace, to Sañjaya, who is endowed with the extraordinary ability to see through the happenings, even in the remote places. This is the apparent meaning of the śloka. The philosophical meaning of the śloka is, however, more universal and fundamental to the basic analysis of human behaviour. Here, the blind entity is every one of us, or in particular, the entity who is caught in the midst of dilemmas of conflicting forces and confusions. In general, each jīva, being afflicted by imperfections and ignorance, is like a blind person, not knowing as to what he should do and in which direction he should go, when he is caught in a conflicting situation. If we reflect genuinely, we would realize that each one of us, at every moment, is in a state of irreconcilable crisis, not knowing what course one should take. Sañjaya stands for an entity which is able to see through all events in a transparent and dispassionate manner. Broadly speaking, Sañjaya stands for our inner conscience, which always knows as to what is wrong and what is right and as to what things are happening around us. Our mind itself is the venue of the battle; it is both Dharma Kṣetra and Kuru Kṣetra. The term Dharma Kṣetra stands for the forces of conceit, vanity, selfishness, etc. Now, in the particular context of the conflict situation, there are good thought processes signified by the term Pāṇḍavas, and the evil thought processes signified by the term ‘māmakāḥ’. These are poised for a fight for establishing their superiority. It is only the inner conscience, which keeps record of the events and the processes, through which this fight is to be resolved. Thus, the blind human being, caught in the dilemma of conflicting thought processes, asks the inner

conscience as to how the conflict got resolved. In other words, the inquisitive student of management asks perceptive and dispassionate observer of the events, as to what he has experienced and observed, in regard to the general theory, the principles and the practice-of managing a conflict situation. In order to answer this question, the most experienced and renowned Guru, viz., Lord Kṛṣṇa is brought into the centre stage along with a typical manager, viz. Arjuna, who is caught into the dilemma of conflicts. Thus the entire Bhagavad Gītā becomes a treatise on human behaviour and management science.

Bhagavad Gītā Theory of Management Science

Having recognized the fact that Bhagavad Gītā can be viewed as a treatise on management science, setting out the theory of decision making in the situations of conflict, we should analyze the distinguishing features of Bhagavad Gītā Management Science (BMS), in comparison with those of the Modern Management Science (MMS). Below I present some of these distinguishing features of the BMS, and bring out as to how the BMS is superior to the MMS.

Rational Holistic Man

The MMS theory begins its premises by conceiving the manager as a rational economic man. The conception of economic man, obviously, is the basis of all modern economic sciences. This means that the economic man would take his decisions only to derive optimum economic benefits. However, the conception of economic man gives only a partial view of man's personality and as such, the science analyzing human behaviour based upon this assumption, provides only a partial view of the issues and the processes of international management and of individual behaviour. The concept of 'Economic Man' captures only the materialistic dimension of man while the other dimensions, in particular, the spiritual dimensions, have a significant role to play in influencing the individual's behaviour. It is here that the BMS scores a point over the MMS. The BMS conceives a rational Holistic Man, determines the nature of the behaviour of man in all aspects of life, -in setting the goals and also in identifying the actions, attitudes and responses, to realize the goals. It sets out a holistic approach to the tasks of managing oneself and also in managing the interpersonal relations and conflict situations. It also provides a relatively more realistic and practical framework for the theory and practice of management science.

References:

1. Gītā 1.1.