

Traits Of An Ancient Indian Wisdom In Modern Sustainable Business Management- A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

“Wyasotchishtam jagat sarvam” (व्यासोच्चिष्टं जगत् सर्वम्) is a Sanskrit dictum that connotes, ‘whatever we read, write and research today, has its origin in the Mahabharata’. Ancient Indian knowledge system strives to be the treasure of wisdom, parenting the modern branches of knowledge and management. This study witnesses a long list of influential modern management gurus namely Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Mr. Narayan Murthi and so on. Albeit, the need for more Gurus does not seem to cease. Mindful of this need, Indian mystique guru ‘Shri Sadguru’ is a guiding force for mankind. He influenced the world by teaching the management of our mind, body and soul through ‘inner engineering’. Despite lacking professional training from management institutes, his management advice is followed by many. He gives due credit of his rational scrutiny to Indian ancient wisdom. Similarly, the present study hypothesises that the great ancient Indian knowledge system has remained a reasonable and sensible source for propagating modern branches of knowledge. The paper aims at finding out the traits of the ancient Indian management system and its reflection in the present-day studies of management. The researcher will apply some of the key concepts of the management introduced by the father of management studies ‘Mr. Peter Drucker’ such as good leadership, constant innovation and change, decentralisation, social responsibility and its indirect references from Indian religious scriptures. The paper is divided into two parts. Firstly, Lord Krishna’s speech known as “Shrimad Bhagavad Gita” on the battlefield, is investigated as the best text resource of management of mind, body and soul. It also imparts knowledge on efficient managerial and good leadership techniques. The researcher focuses on how traditions and wisdom have evolved and transformed from one generation to the other. Secondly, Lord Gautam Buddha’s preaching of human resource management will be analysed and how it has been carried forward in modern times. The research aims at finding out the legacy of ancient Indian wisdom into current discipline called ‘business management’.

Keywords- Management, entrepreneurship, leadership, Bhagavad Gita, Gautam Buddha, Lord Krishna, ancient wisdom etc.

1. Introduction

In the era defined by the rapid reach of information through social media, a recent disturbing news emerged. “Killer Work: Strained 25-Year-Old IIT, IIM Graduate and McKinsey Employee Dies by Suicide in Mumbai”. (1) The talented youth committed suicide and succumbed to death due to intense work pressure. This has created a sense of urgency to find ways to help the youth to efficiently attain a work-life balance. Vouching for ancient Indian wisdom, the treasure of knowledge acts as a torch bearer. The management system introduced during Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilization is worthy of being called exceptional. All

ancient religious scriptures have guided mankind to manage the body, the mind and the soul at the workplace and at home. These mythological scriptures have nurtured our imagination. Sneha Tripathi and Dr. Tejal Jani in Devdatta Patnaik's *Exploration of Myths* says,

“Even before the arrival of writing skills, myths existed in society through oral tradition. It shaped the foundation of civilization: religion, culture, philosophies, literature, art, tradition and custom. Myths of a civilization stories which frames and give structure to the culture of that particular civilization. Hence, studying myths, scriptures, epics and sacred books of a particular religion will give a deep insight into its belief system and social structure.” (2)

a. Aim

This study aims to establish the ancient Indian wisdom as the empirical origin of modern management studies.

b. Objectives

- i) To study the traits of the ancient Indian management system and its reflection in present day management studies.
- ii) Understanding key concepts of management introduced by Peter Drucker and finding its relevance in Mahabharata, the legend.

c. Hypothesis

The select Indian ancient wisdom knowledge system are the pioneering literary pieces that propagated the nascent management study branches. Tales of times provide evidence that these legendary texts have remained a reasonable and sensible source for writing the code of ethics and conduct for present day scenarios.

d. Review of Literature

Ancient Indian scriptures resonate timeless wisdom and insights in today's management studies. Different cultures in all eras and epochs have unveiled priceless guidance on leadership, organisational behaviour and ethics. Apart from the quintessential guide of righteous living, Bhagavad Gita, there are various other management ethos guides that are the ancient pillars for management wisdom. For example, Tao Te Ching (Taoism), The Art of War (Sun Tzu), The Bible (Christianity), The Analects (Confucianism). These age-old spiritual texts provide timeless lessons that support modern management theories, acting as inspiration and guidance for modern management research. Through the integration of traditional wisdom with contemporary methodologies, leaders have the ability to develop a comprehensive management style that promotes ethical integrity and corporate success.

e. Significance of Ancient Indian Wisdom

The World's first university was established in Takshila in 700BC. More than 10,500 students from all over the world studied more than 60 subjects. India invented the number system as the number 0 (zero) was invented by Aryabhata. The past is inherent in every act of the present. T. S. Eliot has rightly captured 'pastness of the past and its presence' in his renowned essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent'. (3) The ancient wisdom (the past) has been evidently pervasive in literature of all times and is relevant in the era of globalisation as well. No document stands in isolation without accepting its historical lineage and inheritance from the past. Northrop Frye's archetypes talks about 'self-contained literary universe'. (4) Carl Jung talks about 'collective unconscious' when he quotes, 'There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the forms of images filled with content, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action.' (5) Ancient Indian wisdom performs as yesterday's solutions to today's problems. A saying goes, 'Ved Vyas has already discarded the newness of literature because he stated that the Mahabharata has said it all.' (6)

f. About the Selected Texts

Truthfully, navigating our ways through life in a highly progressive materialistic society may feel like walking on eggshells, with a constant threat to disrupt our mental peace. The Mahabharata, a two thousand years old Indian mythological epic stands tall with shades, colours and emotions of life beautifully woven by Ved Vyasa. Since then, each piece of information and literature has an indirect reference to the Mahabharata. These ancient scriptures of wisdom deserve its rightful acknowledgment for birthing various literary traditions. Modern branches of 'Business Management studies' are interlinked with the ancient wisdom. The Gita elucidates the philosophy of Dharma (righteousness), Karma (action), Yoga (union), Vairagya (detachment), Satsang (association), Gunas (qualities) demonstrating their significance in attaining a peaceful and fulfilling life. Leadership emerges as another crucial facet within the teachings of the Gita. These constitute the core values of management studies. Peter Drucker is celebrated all over the world as the father of management studies but the roots of his management principles can be found in Indian ancient wisdom. Throughout history and into the present, all social groups universally share the value of work, work ethics,

entrepreneurship, sales and profits, management of rule governed society and so on. The present research tries to identify the traits of Indian ancient wisdom and integrate them in present times as it demands world-class leaders and managers. The paper is divided into two parts. Firstly, Lord Krishna's speech known as "Shrimad Bhagwad Gita" on the battlefield, will be investigated as the best resource for management of mind, body and soul along with managerial and leadership techniques. The study delves into understanding how traditions and wisdom have evolved from one generation to the other. Secondly, Lord Gautam Buddha's preaching (1st century BCE) of human resource management with the help of eight noble truths are analysed. Furthermore, the paper investigates the Shrimad Bhagwad Gita as an ancient Indian wisdom and its connection to modern management studies.

2. The Bhagavad Gita and its application to Peter Drucker's selected key concepts

The Bhagavad Gita, a revered Hindu scripture, offers profound insights into life, duty, and spirituality. Its core teachings stress on the principle of Dharma, or duty, emphasising the value of carrying out one's obligations without being fixated on the results.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन। मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

It underscores the idea of selflessness and acting in accordance with one's inherent nature and societal roles. Additionally, the Gita teaches the path of righteousness and the pursuit of knowledge, advocating the importance of self-awareness, self-discipline, and spiritual growth. Devdatta Patnaik endorses the significance of devoting oneself to a higher power and divine will to attain inner peace through submission and meditation. Overall, the Bhagavad Gita provides a comprehensive guide to live a fulfilling and meaningful life while navigating the complexities of existence with wisdom, integrity, and spiritual consciousness. Peter Drucker's management theories are discussed on global intellectual platforms. His core concepts encompassing effective leadership, constant innovation and change, decentralisation and social responsibility have been perceived to resonate with the selected ancient Indian wisdom in the Gita.

a. Good Leadership

Leadership ethics are an important aspect of business management. Lewicki et al. (2001) found that behaviour of supervisors', with regards to work ethics, affected the ethical climate for workers either positively or negatively. These ethics were taught to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra by Lord Krishna. Arjuna, the prince and key warrior of the Hindu epic Mahabharata, was unwilling to engage in a battle to fight his own kin. More than a battle of strength, it was a war of ethics for him. According to Lord Krishna, duty (Dharma) is supreme and one has to do it selflessly. Arjun is portrayed as the perfect king by Ved Vyasa. Devdatta Patnaik says about imagining oneself as 'perfect', "Perfection is a myth. There is no evidence of a perfect world, a perfect man or a perfect family anywhere on the earth. Perfection, be it a Ram Rajya of Camelot, exists only in mythology. Yet everyone craves it. This craving inspires art, establishes empires, sparks revolutions, and motivates leaders. Such is the power of myths." (7)

It is Lord Shri Krishna who motivated him to fight for the victory of good over evil. Lord Krishna encouraged him to stand for righteousness. Krishna helped Arjuna realise that attachment of any kind has no place in warfare. Enemies on the battlefield have to be defeated regardless of any kinship. Teaching Arjuna the art of detachment and he trains him to be a practical leader. A leader never looks back when he stands against anarchy. Real, transparent, truthful and open leadership was the ultimate aim for Arjuna.

यदा, यदा, हि, धर्मस्य, ग्लानिः, भवति, भारत, अभ्युत्थानम्, अधर्मस्य, तदा, आत्मानम्, सृजामिहम्।

b. Constant Innovation and Change

Arjun was the favourite disciple of Guru Dronacharya. He taught him all the techniques and tactics of warfare. As the war for the land of Hastinapur was declared, Lord Krishna offered two choices to the two parties, Arjun and Duryodhana. They could choose to fight the battle with either 10000 warriors on one hand and solely the Lord Krishna on the other. Arjuna decided to choose the almighty Lord Krishna as he knew that Krishna was the king's maker in the battle field. Karna, the demigod of royal birth and son of the sun god Surya and princess Kunti's child, was the real face of challenge to Arjuna from the Kauravas. Bhagavad Gita underscores the importance of upholding one's duty (dharma) while adhering to the ground of ethics and morals, rather than advancing to end lives blindly. Arjuna unethically trapped Karna and killed him when he was unarmed. Arjuna under the able guidance of Lord Krishna tried new techniques and innovation and finally won the battle. In their research, Robertson & Anderson (1993) discovered that leaders foster an environment that affects their followers' moral judgments.

c. Decentralisation

Decentralisation is a process observed in organisations where the decision-making responsibilities and daily operations are distributed amongst higher, middle and lower subordinates. It fosters job satisfaction and promotes a spirit of group cohesiveness. It plays a key role in good governance. Satpathy, B. Muniapan, B. Dass, M. in the article on good governance in Bhagavad-Gita observes the following:

“As per the Bhagavad-Gita governance can be made people-oriented, efficient and effective when the governance is aimed at leading people in the right direction selflessly for the public welfare. In governance; effective is ‘doing the right things’ while being efficient is ‘doing things right’. Stated another way, ‘doing the right things’ is the ability to identify critical issues and opportunities that can change and develop. ‘Doing things right’ is important for maintaining and sustaining that growth and good governance.” (6)

d. Social Responsibility

Managers are accountable to society and community. The manager has to be philanthropic, environment friendly, ethical, economic and open minded. Lord Krishna educated the prince to keep a broader perspective and a holistic approach to every situation. He expected Arjuna to fight for justice and welfare of the society and he rightfully did so. He enlightened Arjuna of his kshatriya dharma which is to fight against evil. Bhagavad Gita is ‘the manual of life’ that Arjuna diffuses to the best of his capacities. Thus, it has been clearly observed that there is an indirect connection between the selected concepts of Peter Drucker’s management theory in Shrimad Bhagavad Gita.

3. Eight-fold system of the Buddhism

The preaching of Lord Buddha also shares commonalities in the world of business management. Sidharth, the Prince, later renowned as Gautam Buddha, resided in South Asia in the 5th century. He decided to leave behind the cardinal pleasures and embarked on a journey to find out the ultimate truth of life by becoming a common man. He gained enlightenment post an extensive practice of meditation and finally attained Nirvana (samadhi) in Gaya, India. His noble truths and ‘eightfold paths’ are considered as the bases of many branches of knowledge which guide us to a life free of suffering, rebirth and death

The Buddhist doctrine preaches that every individual is entitled to accumulate wealth. However, it should be acquired strictly by legal means and without greed, and violence. According to him, honesty is the only and highest virtue that leads to a peaceful life. Buddha worked on finding solutions to human sufferings. He has guided mankind to navigate through stressful day to day encounters and turn the experiences into learning opportunities. His pioneering concept of Vipassana meditation worked miraculously in understanding the nature of suffering and methods to deal with it or end it. He taught the law of “impermanence”. “Anitya” (anicca in Pali) talks about temporariness and transitoriness of life. All sufferings are a passing phase and nothing is permanent. A positive thought aids in dissolving our ego and transforming us as kind, empathetic and compassionate living beings. His ideology sailed through south Asia and went on to influence the whole world via preaching and anecdotes. His eight noble paths are a perfect guide for leaders and managers. Yukl (2006) asserted that mobilising and swaying followers in the desired direction constitute effective leadership. Buddha’s preaching targeted and influenced those who were his seekers and believers. He taught the world that ethics and values are the base of a successful leadership. His ardent follower the great Dalai Lama has given essence of Buddhism,

“All religious traditions foster a sense of love and compassion and because greed and desire can obstruct it, they also advise contentment. The idea of being created by God means that individuals possess a spark of God within them. This is a powerful concept that resembles the Buddhist explanation of Buddha nature. If you ask the purpose of such different philosophical ideas, it is to foster a sense of love and compassion.” (8)

Buddhism compels us to seek the truth of suffering at first. Secondly, one has to look for its root and work on the root cause of suffering. Lastly, one has to dedicatedly meditate and guide themselves towards ending the suffering and finally walk the path of the eight noble truths. This not only ensures an end to one’s suffering but stabilises us and prepares everyone for future endeavours. All leaders and managers have to inculcate spirituality and facilitate a dialogue with the inner self. Sigmund Freud’s personality theory (1923) talks about three layers of mind namely the ‘Id, Ego and Superego.’ (9) Id is our instinct; ego is the real self and superego is morality. The eight paths of Gautam Buddha work on all layers of mind and liberate us from the loophole of questions. Following is the analysis of each fold in the point of view of business management.

a. Right Understanding

The psychology behind our thought processes starts as a sensation, proceeds to perception, learning, memory, thinking, motivation and finally takes the shape of an emotion. One has to understand and take things as they are. This is the highest form of wisdom according to Buddha. In the famous Buddhist story of Kisa Gotami, she pleaded with Gautam Buddha to bring her dead child back to life. Buddha instructed her to fetch white mustard seeds from a house untouched by death. Unable to find such a place, she realised the universality of death and the inevitability of mortality. (10) This understanding helped her detach herself from her son, who came through her but was a separate entity.

Understanding today’s rat race of the corporate world, also comes with accepting that every time of business has become a money minting commodity. Ancient Buddhist wisdom, if implemented, will change the outlook of the modern corporate sector, to finally realise that lives and mental wellbeing is far more important than rat race.

b. Right Thought

Right thoughts lead to right decisions and actions after a thoughtful and accurate understanding of the situation. According to Buddha, craving or greed leads to suffering. Modern businesses are outcome oriented. Profit and turnover are the ultimate goals of the market. Profit leads to craving for material gains and furthermore, it leads to suffering. Vipassana teaches us to observe our thought process, calm it and then sort the thoughts that lead to craving. With the invention of the iPhone, Steve Jobs' innovative vision elevated Apple to the highest level of technological growth and changed people's lives. His drive resulted in the development of superior operating systems. His idea of the Macintosh as a portable, easy-to-use computer transformed computing. Jobs was known for motivating his team with his enthusiasm as he marketed the Macintosh as a "incredibly great" device that would "make a difference."⁽¹¹⁾ 'The people who would have been poets in the sixties and they're looking at computers as their medium of expression rather than language.' (Jobs, 1984: 18). With right understanding of the subject, inclination to process it further and right thoughts, lead to a bright and right future. (14)

c. Right Speech

Herbert Schriefers, and Gabriella Vigliocco talk about speech production psychology, "Speech production refers to the cognitive processes engaged in going from mind to mouth (Bock, 1995), that is, the processes transforming a non-linguistic conceptual structure representing a communicative intention into a linguistically well-formed utterance". (12)

Buddhist philosophy claims an ideal speech is that which is 'abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech and from idle chatter'. (14) One has to mindfully speak the right thing at the right time to reap its full benefits. This is a crucial quality for leaders and managers to possess who wish to motivate their subordinates in order to retain good productivity. Negotiation, another facet of speech, is an important aspect of modern businesses. Choosing your words wisely can resolve disputes, making you a solution-oriented person. And the right speech will lead to the right kind of results. These Buddhist principles are intrinsically relevant to corporate employees of today's business world.

d. Right Action

According to the moral and ethical theory of utilitarianism, the ideal course of conduct is the one that maximises utility, which is typically understood to mean maximising happiness and minimising suffering. Epicureanism stands opposite to right action theory. They believed in pleasure of body and pleasure of mind. Epicurus, the Greek philosopher, believed in living life with full pleasure to its full extent. 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die', is another thought that is associated with the Epicureans. These notions stand corrected against the Buddhist philosophy of right action that does not allow any greed and craving. (15). The Buddha (c. 563–483 BCE) describes some of his previous incarnations during his long journey to enlightenment in the form of Jataka Tales, a vast collection of morality tales from Buddhism. (19) Here is one of tales of right action that speaks in a nutshell. To their father's dismay, the two sons of a businessman became devoted followers of Gautam Buddha. One day, the father confronted Buddha and spat on him because he was upset by his sons' devotion. Buddha answered with a calm grin that made the man uncomfortable. After realising his error, the businessman asked Buddha for forgiveness. Buddha observed the man's remorse and readiness to repent rather than the transgression. The businessman was profoundly moved by this empathetic reaction, which made him proudly accept his sons' devotedness to him and recognize the magnificence of the Buddha. This tells us how one should pause, understand and make sure they respond to a situation and not react.

e. Right Livelihood

A livelihood encompasses living conditions including income, social status, gender roles, education facilities, property rights, infrastructural developments and so on. Sustainable livelihood is the biggest challenge for developing countries as it faces the challenges of poverty, illiteracy, bribery and many more societal demons. Buddhist philosophy expects good living conditions where illicit activities are banned. Drinking, smoking, killing animals, cheating, keeping weapons and other such immoral acts affect the livelihood of the members of a society.

f. Right Effort

An old collection of Indian fables known as the Panchatantra, is a made-up story in which characters, such as plants, animals, and other living things, are taken from nature. It concludes with the moral of the story. One such Panchatantra story of *The Mice and Elephants* is an apt anecdote to define right efforts. There once was a happy mouse society living under a tree, until an unintentional stampede by elephants unfortunately claimed many lives. The elephant leader, perceiving the rat king's bold approach, consented to redirect the herd in order to save the mice. The elephant king later recalled the rat king's generosity when poachers captured the elephants. The rat king used a messenger elephant to organise his nest and split the nets, freeing the imprisoned elephants. The reciprocation of right efforts always leads to positive outcomes.

Right effort, the first in this triad, levels the field for right mindfulness by implementing the four ways to invest our energies as recommended by the Buddha: (1) neutralising active, unwholesome mind states, (2)

discouraging inactive, unwholesome mind states, (3) nurturing active, wholesome mind states, and (4) encouraging inactive, wholesome mind states. The term “wholesome,” central to understanding right effort, connotes well-being and holistic integrity, in harmony with the tenor of “right” and “true.” (16)

g. Right mindfulness

According to the Buddha, the right way to mindfulness is the presence of mind. All acts performed with the right mind and sense of presence, leads to serenity, deep connections, insight and wisdom. Mindfulness does not include paying attention to the memories, daydreams, thoughts about the future, problem solving, visualising and so on. Vipassana, meditation of a mindful kind, demands us to pay attention to the sensation within the body during meditation. A mindful person can concentrate and learn the art of being present in the moment. The buddha wants his followers to be mindful of their body, feelings, mental states, and mental content. Leaders should aim to learn the art of staying focused and mindful to ensure they are guiding their subordinates learn, evolve and not remain stagnant.

h. Right Concentration

The last step of the Buddha's eightfold path and the most difficult. The human brain is capable of thinking the unthinkable. This ability blesses us with a boon of thinking billion thoughts in fractions of seconds. This comes at a risk of drifting away in negative thoughts and spiralling down in negative thoughts. The mind can be a good slave but a dangerous master. Thus, watering the good thoughts and right concentration leads to right meditation. It is a stage of tranquillity, to bring the mind to stillness. Lord Buddha suggests that the mind should be secluded from sensual preoccupation and should be able to control infatuation and desires (Moh-maya, Moh is attachment and Maya is illusion). This is the right way to cut off ourselves from restlessness and anxiety. Mental hindrances and impure intentions are barriers to the path of happiness. The pursuit of happiness should be pure and legit.

These eight noble truths are treasures of ancient wisdom that help you achieve happiness. In order to help organisations discover and train managers in the eight paths for effective leadership, the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism can be further evaluated and used as a model. This will help organisations build a positive and fulfilling work-life balance.

As India progressed as a developing nation, such concepts are depleting. However, in today's age, women still get unequal pay. According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index no country has yet achieved full gender parity, although the top nine countries (Iceland, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, Nicaragua, Namibia and Lithuania) have closed at least 80% of their gap. Global data provided by LinkedIn shows persistent skewing in women's representation in the workforce and leadership across industries. In LinkedIn's sample, which covers 163 countries, women account for 41.9% of the workforce in 2023, yet the share of women in senior leadership positions.

4. Survey Findings

The researchers learned from a comprehensive survey conducted among students (17) and educators (18) that shed light on the profound impact of integrating ancient Indian wisdom from scriptures into modern management studies. The survey revealed overwhelmingly positive responses, indicating a significant shift in perspectives and outcomes.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey findings(20) affirm that integrating ancient Indian wisdom into management education not only enriches academic learning but also cultivates a generation of mindful leaders capable of harmonising personal growth with societal wellbeing.

As exemplified by luminaries such as Swami Vivekananda, Gaur Gopal Das, and others, the synthesis of knowledge, wisdom, and action paves the way for a transformative journey towards holistic success and meaningful contribution to society.

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