

# Ancient Indian Wisdom in Modern Management : A Review of its scope and prospects

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The paper is based on reviewed literature and development in mentioned field of study which provides an excellent insight into the great pool of knowledge from our ancient Indian scriptures about management and administration. It provides an opportunity to integrate the wisdom with current management practices like TQM, Sustainable development, Environment protection, CSR, etc. for achieving a higher purpose, and for creation of an ethical environment. The challenges of today's turbulent and imbalanced economic environment and society can be effectively addressed by the teaching of ancient Indian wisdom, and can help us to live in peace, co-operation, and harmony. It can give ethical direction to the modern managers, and create a league of extra ordinary leaders who can guide us towards a new horizon, but then the knowledge should be introspected from a spiritual stand-point and not with a doubt about its validity but with faith, irrespective of the religion we follow.*

**KEY WORDS:** Indian Wisdom, Ancient Scriptures, Ethics, Spirituality, Indian Management.

"When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad-Gita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. Those who meditate on the Gita will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day."-Mahatma Gandhi (Das, 2013).

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Management is needed in each and every field of human activity, be it any form of organization, business and corporate, defence, sports etc. where it is required to attain maximum output with the limited resources. It is not something that is developed recently; rather it has been practiced since the start of the concept of society. In earlier days, kings used to administer their kingdoms, since then the evolution process of modern

management theory has started with great scholars contributing to the knowledge base for having a better understanding of the term.

### **1.1 WESTERN MANAGEMENT AND REASONS FOR ITS FAILURE**

Most of the theories of management were developed in the west in the last 150 years when industrialization was taking place in the west (Mahadevan, 2008), keeping in mind their culture

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and values (Virmani, 2013), Management evolved as an art and then sate art, then science, then discipline and then profession (Bhaatarai, 2010).

The developments in the management thought lead to effective control over organizations and accelerate the rate of growth of the economy, and thereby ensure the profitability of the organization. But the recent downturns and economic turbulence has raised serious questions as to where are we going wrong? Is it just a cycle that will go away or some deep rooted problems are there that need to be searched and answered, in order to have a balanced growth.

First of all the universal applicability of a single management theory cannot be achieved due to the mismatch in the cultural values which leads to inconsistent and conflicting results (Srivastava, 2009).

Secondly, the evolution process of the western management philosophy itself is confusing like labour management to personnel management, to human resource management, and then human resource development, then business process re-engineering, to TQM and so on (Virmani, 2013).

Thirdly, the western ideologies have failed to react in turbulent situations because the ideas deals with problems at material level and that there is a wild thirst for profit (Bhaatarai, 2010).

The degrading human values and corporate frauds have raised doubts about our future of having all round development and sustainability.

## 2. NEED FOR A CHANGE: INDIAN MANAGEMENT

Indian soil saw the major influences from the west

only after liberalization of the economy in 1991, which not only opened the door for foreign MNC's but also allowed the Indian companies to move out and spread in many other nations (Nigam & Su, 2011), as the companies from west started flooding up in the nation the western management models were replicated and highly followed in India assuming that what was good for the west would also be the same for India (Srivastava, 2009).

At times question is raised in one's own mind as why all that definition that we read is given by someone from another nation, Why not an Indian? Why not an Indian theory? May be that time we didn't have the answer but today we can at least try to find why and then provide a concrete answer to it.

India is one of the oldest civilizations of the world, with a great history of its own, a land of diverse culture, a land of wealth and wisdom, and abode of the God's. A nation whose might and spirituality, values and ethics knew no boundaries, which attracted people from all over the world to visit this land of treasures. A nation which is having its base on truth and non-violence whose leaders and saints preached the essence of love for humanity, and to follow ethical paths always.

We were one of the wealthiest nations in the world at one point of time, there was no problem of hunger and unemployment under the rule of Vedic 'Rajarishis' (Saintly Kings), nor was there heavy industrialization that created wasteful needs(Gosvami, 1977), in ancient Indian culture the king was considered to be the epitome of Justice and a combination of 'Raja' (King) and 'Rishi' (Saint) (Govindarajan, 2008), we always

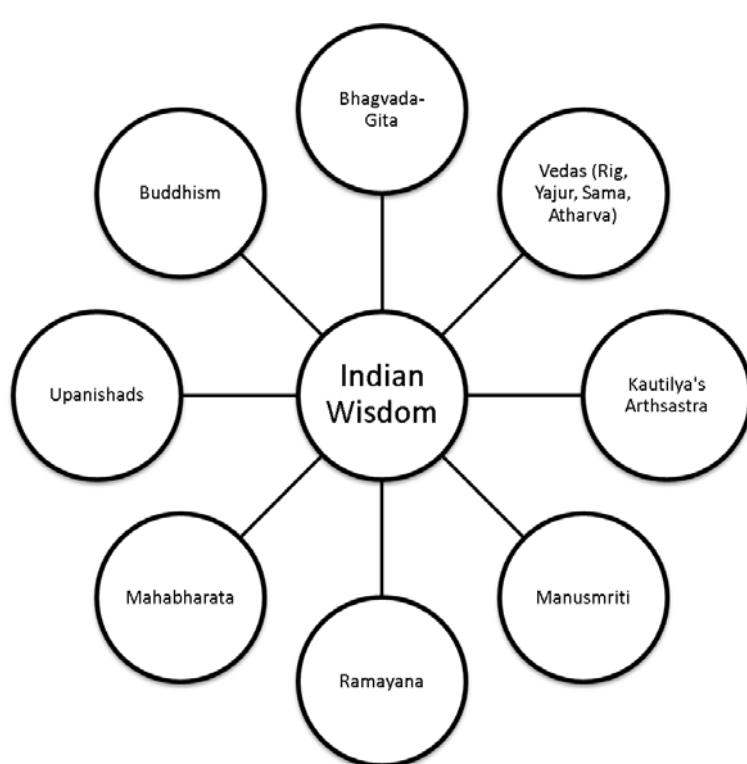
cite the example of Rama Rajya (Ramayana/Ramacharitramanas), when we talk about effective governance(Desai, 2009), but then degrading social values and disharmony among the people broke the integrity of this great land, and the final blow was given by the foreign invaders.

Once known as golden bird has now lost all its feathers, but we stood again, within a period of 50 odd years after getting Independence from British rule, we were gaining the same might and power but we had compromised on one important aspect in this process of development, the essence-the core values, the spirituality, ethics, that were our main treasure, which were our real wealth. Today

we are one of the fastest growing economies, but also one of the most corrupt nations, we are the hub of MNC's but our farmers and committing suicide, we are skilled but ethically bankrupt.

This is not the nation that we have dreamt of- this is not what we were supposed to be. We have to rise once again, just as the sun rises from the east, but not entirely depending on what we gave got from west- but we will have to go back to past-to develop our future as rightly pointed out that, "Those interested in furthering their understanding of good leadership are advised to look back to the past for answers to the future" (Rarick & Nickerson, 2009).

## 2.1 SOURCES OF ANCIENT INDIAN WISDOM



Source:(Bhattacharjee, 2011), (Gosvami, 1977), (Suresh & Janaki, 2012), (Mahadevan, 2008), (Munipam, 2007).

## 2.2 ESSENCE OF INDIAN WISDOM

The essence of Indian management is about society, people and every aspect to develop with Purity, Ethics and Morale, Karma-Yoga( Work action), Knowledge, evenness of mind, objectivity of work, faith and that each and every person need to work efficiently with detachment from its result in order to keep moving the wheels of universe (Tripathi, 2009).

Our ancient wisdom always give prime importance to certain values and qualities like- Humility, pride less, non-violence, tolerance, simplicity, service to teacher, cleanliness, steadfastness, self control, renunciation, absence of ego, non-attachment etc.(Murali, 2009), which are the base of our existence; in addition to this, the five principles of Gautama Buddha-Non violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-intoxication are the need of time to change the entire system for a brighter future (Govindarajan, 2008). Ancient Indian scriptures are full of psychological knowledge and sound philosophical background; the yoga sutras mentioned in the ancient literatures' are valuable assets in achieving a balanced state of mind and a healthy development (Satija, 2013). During the Vedic era there was a strict code of conduct laid down by the Vedas where the duties of the kings, the heads and subjects were stipulated and any deviation was considered sin (Virmani B., 2000).

Ancient Indian education aimed at helping the individuals to grow in the power and force of certain universal qualities for building a higher type of manhood from the teachings of Upanishad and the 'Purusartha' of life to develop a character and multidimensional personality with respect for all

norms of life (Bhatta, 2009). The four characteristics of 'Purusartha' mentioned in our Vedic literatures are Dharma (Righteousness/ Religion), Artha (Economic Development), Kama (Sense gratification), and Moksha (Liberation)- (Sharma, 2005), a society is not considered civilized if it doesn't pursue the goals of 'Purusartha', in a regulated fashion (Gosvami, 1977). The Vedas direct men to follow the natural regulations and it uphold the divine arrangement, and that everyone will receive his necessities and there will be no scarcity provided that humanity lies in its natural condition (Gosvami, 1977).

Intermingling of cultures has been the history of India, this led to the constant adoption, synthesis and regeneration of administrative and management practices, despite varying degree of influence- it has still managed to retain its essential Indianess. There are numerous theories which tell us that Indian Management will benefit greatly by going back to the glorious days of Indian history. The virtues of ancient king Lord Rama and the wisdom of Lord Krishna expressed in Gita will make Indian management vibrant, active and effective (Virmani B., 2000).

In the words of Mark Twain, American author, "India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only" (Das, 2013).

## 2.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIAN MANAGEMENT IN PRESENT SCENARIO

Indian wisdom can be applied very efficiently in

any of the managerial areas as well as it is the ultimate answer to many of the burning management problems faced by the managers and corporate houses worldwide. The contribution of the Western management is great and cannot be ignored at all when framing any policy or taking decision but an integration is required with the Indian wisdom for achieving effective results. We have learned a lot from the western philosophies about management, and now it's time we give back the world a solution that is required to raise the standard of management for a holistic development in which, not just we develop but the entire society and environment develops and lives in coordination with each other. The wisdom inherent in the Vedic Scriptures can be extended and applied to modern Indian management problems and especially to fine tune and adjust western thoughts to an Indian setting (Rajeev, 2007). Management system based on Upanishad stresses on harmonizing the individual goals with the goals of others for bringing harmony in system; such a system would be highly decentralized and depended on every person following Dharma for the attainment of Purusarthas (Saigal, 2000).

In this present era of social degradation, unbalanced economic growth, dearth of inspiring leadership and environment degradation it has become important to revisit and integrate the various Indian philosophies for developing a holistic approach to address modern management issues (Bansal, 2009).

## **2.4 BHAGAVAD-GITA AND ITS ESSENCE IN MANAGEMENT**

The teachings of Bhagavad-Gita emphasises on the importance of work with detachment from its

results and effective Leadership and management of self. The mere concept of management is not to manage others or resources but to manage oneself, management should begin from within. If a person is able to manage him or her than he can set great examples for others to follow, as it is said in Bhagavad-Gita- Whatever the great ones do, the commoners follow.

Bhagavad-Gita is the summary of all Vedic philosophies and its teachings can be effectively applied to address any problem related to individual or organization and is a strong source of illumination (Tripathi, 2009). It has got all the management tactics to achieve the mental equilibrium and to overcome any crisis situation (Bhaatarai, 2010). The philosophy of Bhagavad-Gita should not be viewed from spiritual perspectives only but as a guide in developing managerial effectiveness by following the three principles-mind management, management of duty and the principles of self management (Munipam, 2007). The 'Gita' offers advice on humanistic and inclusive leadership and tells managers to seek higher level of consciousness when seeking to influence others, some very important qualities that a modern manager should follow- Maintain proper role, being proactive with wisdom, Self-Sacrifice (Rarick & Nickerson, 2009). In a series of epics, preaches, religious books and quotes one name is known by people that is Bhagavad-Gita, its magical and magnetic words and verses suggest to human the power of confidence and devices transformation of painful life to blissful life (Desai, 2009).

A leader must master the art of self management as described in Bhagavad-Gita and abide by the

moral values and ethics that our ancient scriptures teach us-Truth, austerity, sense, control, tranquillity of mind, righteousness, charity, mercy and renunciation for leading the organization on the right track (Kanan, 2009). Modern concepts like Altruism can be linked to the teachings of Bhagavad-Gita, which means doing something for others without a motive of self interest or self-gains where one doesn't have a stake in the outcome of an act and where individuals act solely for the benefit of others: the qualities of altruistic person are- helpfulness, consideration, generosity, concern, unselfishness', sympathy, selflessness, humanitarian, and benevolent which relates to the concept of 'Dana' mentioned in Bhagavad-Gita (K.Lakshmi, 2013).

The philosophy of Bhagavad-Gita has remained and will remain as a guide for developing managerial effectiveness, not only in this 21st century but also for many centuries more to come (Munipam, 2007). The management lessons from 'Mahabharata' extensively deals with governance of kingdom and can be aptly applied in governance of business houses (Janaki, 2012).

"When I read the Bhagavad-Gita and reflect about how God created this universe everything else seems so superfluous." -Albert Einstein (Das, 2013).

## **2.5 ESSENCE OF ETHICS AND DHARMA FROM 'VEDAS' IN CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

Corporate Governance is "a conscious, deliberate and sustained effort on the part of the corporate entity to strike a judicious balance between its own interest and the interest of the various constituents

in the environment in which it is operating (Bhatia, 2000). Value based corporate governance is buzz in today's corporate scenario; good governance is considered a combination of two aspects, namely higher values and effective functioning, two views can be adopted by corporate for good governance: Business and Spiritual view- the spiritual view is backed by dictums of the ancient Indian texts (Radhaswamy & Basotia, 2003).

Application of Vedic management leads to perfection and continuous improvement by Karma yoga which will lead to increase productivity and attainment of holistic development (Subramaniyan, 2009). Vedic literatures can be denoted in terms of the three 'ism' via-Dharma-Socialism, Artha and Kama-Capitalism, Moksha-Spiritualism (Love, Compassion and devotion) (Sharma, 2005).

'Dharma' as mentioned in Indian 'Shastras' (Scriptures) can be applied for improving Corporate Governance as firms in India and abroad have shown that investors notice of well managed companies, respond positively and reward such companies with higher share value (Bashin, 2010). The teachings of ancient Indian wisdom like- Dharma (Righteousness), LokSangrha (Public good), Kausalam (Efficiency), Vividhta (Innovation), and Jigyasa (Learning) are to be applied for an effective corporate governance (Bashin M., 2010). Our ancient scriptures have always been concerned about unethical and profit driven human activities and its impact on society and the environment, based on the Vedas, CSR can be looked at from three dimensions constituting the individual, social and cosmic perspectives which included Individual dimensions, fair means of acquisition of wealth,

social distribution of wealth, Conservation of resources, environment, habitation, animal life, plant life welfare etc. (Kannan, 2008). The fruits of CG can be realized only when ethics, customer and society-centric systems like TQM and CSR are adapted as policy and practiced in total in an organization (Suresh & Janaki, 2012). Dharma is the most pervasive concept of Vedic spirituality, as a social concept it refers to the moral code, law, natural and positive and also prominently to the various duties of individuals (Saigal, 2000).

The corporate houses are equivalent to kingdoms, thus the principles applied in organizing the kingdoms can be applied in corporate governance (Govindarajan, 2008). Kautilya's system of economic administration (*Arthashastra*) is one of the world's oldest treatises on the economic administration of a state under which a king need to run a state in a diversified economic activity, efficiently, actively, prudently, and profitably in ethical ways (Saigal, 2000).

In the long run ethics and values tend to survive as it is rightly said in Bhagavad-Gita—"Yatho Dharma, Tatho Jayas", meaning success goes hand in hand with the righteousness (Janaki, 2012).

## **2.6 WESTERN MANAGEMENT AND INDIAN MANAGEMENT**

The western management philosophy is not static and still is in the evolutionary phase, whereas the Indian wisdom is Static in nature as we won't find any changes in the philosophies of the literatures, it doesn't come up in versions unlike western theories which change with time. It is said that today's management practices assumes human

beings as a economic units, people are used and things are loved unlike our ancient wisdom speaks to love human beings and use things. In modern management our ends justifies our means where it should be that both our ends and means need to be justified. An individual or an organization cannot take the wrong path to achieve its goals, but it is often seen that organizations exploit its employees, customers and the environment for earning profits- which can never be justified.

The traditional management practices of India include a personal bond or emotional relationship between the employees and the bosses or Superiors (Chong, 2011). Indian management puts the emphasis on the personality of top leader and the expectation of the employees towards parenthood, which gives a family feeling and a sense of security and belongingness (Prof. B. R. Virmani & Mahurkar, 2013). Western management is believed to be Production and profit oriented, whereas Indian thought says about material gain with belief in achieving human and social welfare with mutual co-operation, harmony, spiritualism and karma yoga (Barman, 2013). Loyalty, parenthood, respect, affection and bonding which is taught by Indian wisdom is almost absent in the western management system. (Nigam & Su, 2011). It has been found that there is a huge conceptual gap between the two management philosophies, vedantic management unlike the western philosophies advocates goals of employees as the stepping stone for achieving the goals of organization and that if primary work is performed well then goals will follow (Subramaniyan, 2009).

## 2.7 CONFUSION OF THE INDIAN MANAGERS

Today we stand nowhere as to search a particular path for moving ahead, we are influenced by the west, but then we see west falling down, we then show interest in Japanese management system which creates more confusion, we don't need to search for an alternative rather the answer to all our questions are with us only, that is to introspect into our own wisdom.

Indian system can absorb principles alien to it, the philosophies can be adapted by India but these principles should be modified to suit Indian conditions, if such a blending is not done then the dualism in Indian Management could flare up into conflicts, and the compromises in policies and principles may fail to work(Virmani, 2013). Need of hour is not to directly graft the western model, but to blend these models with Indian environment to reduce dualism and increase managerial effectiveness (Prof.B.R.Virmani & Mahurkar, 2013). The modern managers follow directions from the HQ made in another country and try to implement in Indian perspective, irrespective of its socio-cultural differences (Chong, 2011).

The western management philosophies are required for managing an organization and to compete with the developed nations but then we need to have an identity of our own where we give space for spirituality and the great ethical pool of knowledge from our ancient wisdom for achieving higher goals.

## 2.8 INDIAN WISDOM: SPIRITUAL NOT RELIGIOUS

Indian wisdom or literature is not Hindu or religion

specific-rather a behavioural science that draws its knowledge from Indian culture (Barman, 2013).

Spirituality is an important component of Indian wisdom which aims at harmonizing the various aspects for an overall development of personality (Bhatta, 2009). Indian ethos and management literature are essentially spiritual and the acceptability is difficult for the scholars who have developed a secular image of their own from the influence of western management (Dutta, 2001). There is a need of human dimensions in managerial decision making as human values cannot be defined, it has to be instinctively felt and cognitively gasped, the source of human values is in the wisdom literature of ancient civilizations and that the basis of all ethical, social and human values are sought in the truths revealed by super conscious beings and sacred religious literatures irrespective of any religion (Gustavsson, Tripathi, & Rao, 2005). Spiritual Intelligence can be smoothly applied to reduce many of the personal problems of the managers including Stress, which is much talked about now days (Chandak, 2009).There is a contradiction in the Spiritual world and material world, human values and disvalues, therefore the managers need to adopt human values of loyalty, gratitude, humility, patience, dignity, honesty, forgiveness etc. which are route to attain spirituality (Dutta, 2001). In the modern management the importance of Spirituality has been identified and attempts are been made to adopt it to increase the efficiency of the employees and encourage ethical practices, if workplace spirituality is accepted as best practice, then its adoption will be at least economically beneficial to the organizations practicing it (Desai, 2009). The importance of Spirituality or oneness, which is the

final goal of all existence, according to Upanishads, is being increasingly realized by organizations (Krishnan, 2008).

Spirituality can be achieved by any faith, as many faiths so many paths. The teachings of Holy Quran, Guru Granth Sahib, and Bhagavad-Gita all provide a spiritual perspective into management thought, for achieving peace, sensibility for managing of people and sustainability with the environment, and preaches that with spirituality one can be ethical (Mehta, 2011). The best way to differentiate spirituality from religion is that spirituality is stems from heart, whereas religion is the thinking of mind, spirituality is in Universal Love, sacrifice and harmony of thought, words and deeds. Religion can be misinterpreted but spirituality cannot because great value like love upholds Spirituality (Radhaswamy & Basotia, 2003).

The Indian wisdom should not be considered as religion specific rather human specific with universal applicability as the teachings of all religions preach the same philosophy. The above discussions on various sources of Indian Wisdom and their applicability can be usefully applied to seek answers to any problem faced at individual or organizational level.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Indian wisdom is not just confined to a few sources but there are numerous such great works that can be followed, which are interrelated, Great leaders and saints Swami Vivekananda cannot be ignored if one needs to get an insight into the Indian Wisdom, his works namely 'Work and its Secret', 'Karma Yoga', speaks about the

importance of work and the purification of mind and soul that can be achieved by selfless work and devotion; Gurus like, Aurobindo Ghosh, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore can be studied for exemplary values and ethical behavior (Bijlert, 2004).

In this modern time, when developed economies are going down, when human ethics and values are degrading, when we are becoming more and more materialistic; do we have an answer to all that we are facing? The research to be undertaken would be an attempt to bring our ancient Indian Wisdom to the modern management practices not in a religious perspective but a higher level of it which we know as spirituality, be it corporate, government or personal. The western management theories have been a boon to us and now when we see that some of the theories are not able to solve our problems-it's time we revisit our heritage with an inquisitive mind and not with the view to downgrade or insult the great works of the western management gurus and philosophers.

In the words of Will Durant, American historian, "India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages: she was the mother of our philosophy; mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics; mother, through the Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity; mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all" (Das, 2013).

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## **QUOTE**

*Any man's life will be filled with constant and unexpected encouragement  
if he makes up his mind to do his level best each day.*

***Booker T. Washington***