SPIRITUALITY OF WORK IN *BHAGAVADGITA*

Ferdinand E. Tablan
Department of Philosophy
Bellevue College, Bellevue WA USA
Email: ftablan@bellevuecollege.edu

There is a great deal of interest among business ethicists of today on the topic of spirituality of work (SW). The connection between SW and business ethics has been acknowledged in scholarly literature, but this connection is expressed in different ways (Corner 2008). For some, SW offers solutions to ethical issues in the workplace brought about by the current unpredictable industrial environment. New technologies, globalization, downsizing and fluctuating economies have caused stress, isolation, diminished view of work and feelings of distrust and alienation among workers (Benefiel et al. 2014). Various studies indicate that recognition of SW in the workplace is positively connected to informed ethical decision making, cooperation and teamwork, company loyalty, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, meaningful work and workers' wellbeing (Ajala 2013; Saks 2011; Rego and Pina 2008; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004; Jackson 1999). Employees who develop deep spirituality are less susceptible to stress and anxiety, and exhibit more trusting relationship with their co-workers, tolerance of diversity, and altruistic behavior (Benefiel et al. 2014; Lynn et al. 2010; McGhee and Grant 2008; Marques et al. 2007). Overall, there is a growing consensus that spirituality and corporate profitability are not mutually exclusive.

This essay presents a spirituality of work from the perspective of Hindu religion. Hinduism is one of the major religions in the world comprising 15% of the world population. In its origin, *Hinduism* is somewhat a geographical term. It encompasses the various beliefs, spiritual practices, and rituals of people who originally inhabited the Indus Valley. Hinduism is not a single religion, in the sense that the term *religion* is understood in the Western context. Treating it as one tradition without considering its diverse and pluralistic character as well as the historical and textual factors that influence its development and complexities is highly problematic. This study explores a Hindu spirituality of work using

Bhagavadgita (*BG*) as its primary source – one of the most important texts in Hinduism "that virtually all Hindus know and many recite daily by heart" (Klostermaier 1994, p. 14). "Many are convinced that the Bhagavadgita is the key book for the re-spiritualization of humankind in our age." (Klostermaier 1994, p.99) Despite its identification with Vedantic tradition, it is accepted as an important source in other schools of Indian philosophy and prominent Hindu writers such as Shankara, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Vivekananda, and Prabhupada have commented extensively on it. According to Majithia (2015, p. 56), *BG* "seems clearly to be a syncretistic text that attempts to reconcile various tensions in the Indian tradition." Whether the text succeeds in doing so is doubtful. Indologists agree that *BG* consists of accretion of verses with a number of interpellations and redactions over centuries. As a result, *BG* contains inconsistent teachings. Nonetheless, these hermeneutical issues did not discourage many Hindu and Western thinkers to write extensive and at times competing commentaries on it as well as practical applications using different interpretative frameworks.[1]

It is well known that the teachings of *BG* are contained in the metaphysical dialogue between Arjuna, the warrior prince, and his charioteer and guide Krishna. Prior to the start of the decisive war as the two opposing armies of the princely cousins the Pandavas and the Kauravas face each other in the battlefield, Arjuna experiences a profound crisis as he wonders about what will be the outcome of this fratricidal war. He questions whether proceeding with this conflict is the right thing to do. Arjuna is conflicted between his duty to protect his family and his duty to regain his kingdom, between his personal and class-nuanced dharma. But as the dialogue progresses, it becomes clear that the problem of Arjuna is not only a moral conflict but an existential one as it involves *moksha* – the state of release from the bondage of rebirth (*samsara*).[2]

The law of karma states that effects are the normal binding characteristic of action.[3] Whether one performs good or evil actions, she will suffer rebirth to reap the results of such actions until all the effects of her actions are exhausted. Although the term action (karma) in Sanskrit applies to all kinds of human activities including their moral consequences as well as thoughts and ideas, we are concerned in this study with action in a specific sense, i.e. action as pertaining to professional work or paid employment, and it is in this sense that *BG* speaks highly of it (Nadkarmi 2013, p. 9). While this limits the extension of the term, it is not contrary to the comprehension of the term 'action' in the text, since the dialogue in *BG* begins with a discussion on the action of Arjuna

as a kshatriya, i.e. action in relation to his specific social function. Now, since all actions cause bondage "withdrawal from the world is a kind of insurance against being entangled in worldly desires" (Edgerton 1944, p. 158). One must eliminate action in order to avoid its binding effect. If the objective is the achievement of enlightenment by detaching oneself from the concerns of mundane existence, the right thing to do is to turn one's back on the world and live an isolated existence.

Various schools in Hinduism have different prescriptions on how to attain *moksha*. It is in *BG* where one can find an attempt to synthesize these diverse and competing accounts. While the text does not reject ascetic renunciation per se, it presents a different solution to Arjuna's dilemma. It argues that one can perform actions to fulfill his worldly responsibilities without incurring their binding effects. "It is impossible for anyone to give up action. True relinquishment consists of abandoning the desire for benefits arising from an act." (*BG* 18.11) The key is to modify one's attitude toward actions. *BG* aims to resolve the conflict between the mystical ideal of renunciation and the necessity of actively engaging in the world by presenting different yogas or paths to enlightenment. While there is no consensus as to the number of yogas presented, many commentators (Dhiman 2013; Loy 1988; Minor 1980; Radhakrishnan 1962) agree that three major paths can be discerned: *Jnana*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti* Yogas. "All other spiritual disciplines such as *Dhyanayoga* etc., are also implicit within these three." (Dhiman 2013, p. 23) The path to *moksha* includes all three, they "are not in the end different paths for different temperaments, but three elements of the one way affirmed by the *Gita*" (Minor 1980, p. 340). They are not mutually exclusive as no yoga is sufficient by itself. Because each is present in the other, a practitioner of a specific yoga would likely argue for its superiority because it incorporates all others. Thus, one can read Krishna proclaiming the preeminence of one yoga in some parts of *BG,* and then extolling the value of another in other parts. For the sake of instruction, Krishna's presentation of the three yogas is progressive. But in applying them into daily life, they are to be practiced simultaneously rather than in a step by step fashion. One must attempt at cross-fertilization of all paths in order to achieve total efficacy. This essay's interpretative treatment of *BG* will focus on the interrelationship between the three yogas.

Yoga of Knowledge – *Jnana*

The first point made by Krishna is that actions are inevitable because they are part of our lower or embodied self (*prakriti*), the controller of the body and the senses. *Prakriti* is the self that is part of nature and of the social world, the agent of our actions. Analysis of action to determine what is right presupposes understanding of one's true nature. Comprehending the nature of self will lead to wisdom in action. Here, knowledge is a virtue – not information- gathering, but self-understanding. Shideler (1960, p. 310) describes Arjuna as one who "was caught in the error of tending to make his selfhood and his experiences of things final and ultimate." However, our higher self (*purusha*) is a pure subject without any quality, it does not act, creates no agency, and remains steady and unchanging. It is the eternal unchanging subject or witness that can never be an object. Rather, it observes the individual's actions and state of emotions. *Purusha* is the passive enjoyer of experience that should not be identified with the doer or the object of experience. It is completely independent from *prakriti* and from the physical world of space-time-causality. Unlike the empirical self, *purusha* is the conscious and unmanifest part of oneself, the one/spirit in the body that does not die, it neither kills nor is killed (*BG* 2.17-26).

Prakriti is the "locus of all activity" (*BG* 3.27). Within *prakriti* are the three *gunas* (qualities, threads, or modes) that are responsible for the evolution of and variation in things that exist in the phenomenal world by their different combinations, permutations and interactions. Whatever *guna* dominates determines the manifest characteristics or natural qualities of an entity. *Sattva* possesses lucidity, intelligibility, knowledge, light, pleasure, purity, positivity, virtue, goodness and creativity; *rajas* is for energy, passion, misery, greed, pride, exertion, neutrality and egoism; and *tamas* for entropy, apathy, lethargy, dullness, inertia, negativity, impurity, anxiety and delusion. Because of the constant activity and interaction of the *gunas*, action is inevitable. But unlike the lower self, our higher self is inactive and without *guna*. "While *prakriti* is involved in the operation of and changes in the phenomenal world, *purusha* provides the direction or orientation for them" (Kwak and Han 2013, p. 64; Cf. *BG* 13.26).

BG claims that the individual is a single entity. The higher self and the embodied one both constitute the individual person. But because the higher self is unchanging, it is the lower self that evolves and that constitutes the physical and

psychical features and activities of human nature, including intellect (*buddhi*) which produces consciousness, mind/will (*manas*) responsible for sensations, and ego-ity or I-maker (*ahamkara*). According to Stietencron (2005, p. 215), "Egoism develops out of ego. If there were no *ahamkara,* no 'I-maker' in our psychic instrument, there would be no separation of subject and object and so no objects 'out there' at all." Ignorance comes from confusing *purusha* with the ego or I-faculty, resulting in the entanglement of the former with the latter, when in reality the I-faculty is not part of *purusha* but an evolute of *prakriti*. Proper knowledge is to distinguish *purusha* from the evolutes of *prakriti* and cognitively detach the higher self from bodily actions.

Purusha is eternally free from all forms of desire. As pure consciousness, it is a pure subject. While the two selves are inseparable, most people fail to recognize the presence of their higher self. This is because we are so preoccupied with our sensual desires that are activities of the lower self. When the mind is fixated on sense objects, it loses sight of the higher self and gets completely absorbed with the empirical self and how it is affected by actions and passions. By distinguishing *prakriti* from *purusha*, one is freed from the trappings of physical objects and sensual pleasures. She realizes that her higher self is not the doer of actions, and so learns to detach herself from the external results of the latter (*BG* 3.27-28).

Jnana aspires to go higher than our ordinary way of knowing by acquiring the right frame of mind in order to transform the way we perceive ourselves and our relation with the world. The ordinary way of looking at ourselves is to identify our self with our external experiences and emotional responses. This knowledge is fixated on sense objects and breeds attachment, desire, delusion, and lust of possession. *Jnana* "aims at disconnecting the mind from various sense objects to which it is attached" (Theodor 2010, p. 8). "When a man is not attracted to external objects, he finds peace at the core of his being. When he is totally absorbed in the contemplation of the supreme being, he finds unlimited happiness" (*BG* 5.21). This is essential so that the mind can focus on *purusha*. "Just as a lamp does not flicker in a windless place, the disciplined mind of a yogi doesn't waver in the peaceful contemplation of the higher self" (*BG* 6.19). The goal is to acquire wisdom that discriminates the real from the unreal, the eternal from the temporal, the higher from the lower self.

This form of intellectual discipline provides new insights for action and

centered living. One becomes indifferent to the external outcomes of her actions. Worldly happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, material success and failure are all regarded with an even eye. Freed from worries, one achieves peace of mind and tranquility that enables her to work effectively.[4]

Yoga of Action – Karma

Karmayoga is the model for moral development in the Indian context that has "three interrelated constructs, duty-orientation [duty for duty's sake], indifference to rewards and equanimity" (Mulla and Krishnan 2014, p. 348). It is not enough to do our actions with the right mental attitude, we must do only those actions that are right. Proper or right action is that which is in accord with dharma, improper action is contrary to dharma. 'Dharma' stands for duty, ethics, law, righteousness, truth, or right conduct.[5] It "has its roots in the structure of the cosmos, and the socio-ethical law of humankind is but one facet of an all-embracing law encompassing all beings" (Klostermaier 1994, p. 52). Dharma is related to the pre-Vedic notion of *rta*: a universal rule that no one can alter. *Rta* works spontaneously within each thing to guide the orderly movement of nature. As the normative function of *rta* becomes more significant, it acquires a moral dimension and is gradually replaced by the term dharma in th*e Upanishads*. Eventually, the extension of the term dharma is expanded in post-Vedic texts to cover a wide range of ethical and social practices while retaining the principal Vedic position that duties and proper conducts vary by class and state in life. Because of this all embracing character of dharma, a strict demarcation line between the secular and the religious in Hinduism cannot be drawn. Dharma satisfies the dual demands of our physical and spiritual lives. It is both cosmic and ethical, universal and particular, personal and social – providing the organizing principles of social and individual lives. Some examples of universal dharma (*sadharana*) are non-injury, truthfulness, abstention from anger, purification, non-stealing, gift-giving, hospitality, compassion, and forgiveness. Personal dharma (*svadharma*) includes tasks and duties proper to a particular individual in connection with her physical, emotional, and mental characteristics. Muniapan and Satpathy (2013, p. 181) define personal dharma as the "individualized application of 'dharma' dependent on personal 'karma'."

Social dharma refers to one's familial and social duties. It is understood in terms of sets of coordinates required for each *Varna* and stage in life (*Asrama*),

"for these represent the main factors of time, place, and circumstance that determine one's own specific dharma" (Koller 2006, p. 86). In this context, Dharma is one of the four objectives (*purushartas*) that define the aims of Hindu way of life. The other three are *Artha* (worldly success); *Kama* (all forms of enjoyment); and *Moksha*. These ends encompass our biological, economic, social and spiritual needs. Hinduism does not condemn material success as long as it does not hinder us from the attainment of *Moksha*. Further, *Artha*, *Kama* and Dharma are valid objectives only up to a certain stage in life. Thus, the four ends in life are supposed to correlate with the four stages in life or *Asrama*.[6]

"Of the *asramas* the householder and the renouncer stages are clearly the most important both ideologically and in terms of concrete historical developments." (Flood 1996, p. 64) They represent two opposing tendencies in Hinduism: engagement and contemplation – active concern for the world and complete abandonment of ordinary life in favor of a more perfect state. While *BG* does not reject the concept of *Asrama*, it presents a creative solution to this dilemma by pointing out that one can perform action without incurring its binding effects, a sort of actionless action. In the beginning, Arjuna is not concerned with the pursuit of *Moksha*, he is worried about the outcome of war and the fate of his family and loved ones. One who discovers his higher self as disconnected from actions loses interest in the results of his actions. Krishna advises Arjuna to focus on the intent of his action, i.e. to perform his action for its own sake, as a sense of duty, with indifference or non-attachment to material outcomes, future consequences, or extrinsic rewards.

If *Asrama* is a model of ordering individual life, *Varna* is a system of ordering society. Both are institutions devised by ancient Hindu sages to ensure "the application of ethical, moral and spiritual values of all work done by human beings" (Agnivesh 2004, p. 89). Krishna tells Arjuna to set aside his personal relationship and look into his *varna dharma* or class duty. The *Varna* system already existed as early as the Vedic period. The earliest reference to it is in *Rig Veda* where *The Hymn of the Primeval Male* describes how the four classes originated from dismemberment of the primordial-cosmic person. "In the period of the Vedic hymns (1500 B.C. to 600 B.C.), there were classes and not castes. We do not find any reference to connubial or commensal restrictions. The occupations were by no means hereditary" (Radhakrishnan 1940, p. 372). Caste is not a Sanskrit word, it is derived from the Latin word

"castus" which means pure or chaste. *Varna* means color, not skin color as has been believed, but colors used to identify the arrangement of participants in Vedic yajna (Klostermaier 1994, p. 334). *Jati* is the actual social group where one is born. No one knows the origin of the *jati* system and how it gets related to *Varna* in practice. "The traditional view is that the jatis represent a proliferation of social groups from the varna system" (Flood 1996, p. 60). Unlike *Varna*, *jati* suggests no divine origin.

The concept of *Varna* was further developed in later texts. *The Laws of Manu*, which became the textbook of Hindu social system, states the principal duties that are assigned to each class. The system is not a mere social construct but divinely ordained. *BG* (4.13) declares that the four classes are creation of Krishna. Class differentiation is based on different qualities, talents, and skills rooted in one's nature i.e. the predominance of a certain *guna*. "The scholars, the warriors, the merchants and the workers are all destined to perform certain duties, according to their natures born out of these qualities." (*BG* 18.41) *Varna* addresses the different needs of society: cultivation of knowledge and culture, food and financial security, peace and order, manual work, etc. "In an ideal Hindu social order, each type is responsible for the performance and fulfilment of different functions, and proper functioning of each part is necessary for the stability of the whole society" (Richardson et al. 2014, p. 77). All achieve their perfection by actualizing their natural talents and abilities as they perform their respective duties or dharma.[7]

> It is preferable to perform one's own duty imperfectly than to perform someone else's duty perfectly. By performing one's own duty, which is born of one's nature, a man does not earn any future consequences. One should not shrink form doing one's duty though it is flawed, since all ventures have their shortcomings like the fire which is marred by smoke (*BG* 18: 47-48).

Since *Varna* is based on individual nature, birth becomes a criterion, or else the notion of *guna* and natural qualities will not make sense. But it is not the only criterion. Theoretically, the *Varna* system is much more flexible and allows upward mobility as evidenced in literature. It is not meant to restrict professional development or social progress. As an outcome of natural differences among human beings resulting from the interaction of the three *gunas*, there is no reason

why it should be coercively implemented (Theodor 2010, p. 3). The classification is not only hierarchical but functional. "Each requirement was assigned to be fulfilled by a class possessing the particular gifts necessary for its fulfillment. The evident inequality of individual attainments was recognized, but the possession of gifts added to one's responsibility" (Gandhi and Desai 1946, p. 102). Muniapan and Satpahty (2013, p. 182) describe Karmayoga as dexterity in action. "When one is in a profession that suites one's talents and temperaments he is peaceful, balanced and equanimous." The *Upanishads* (Chandogya 4.4.1-5) states that the ultimate basis of social class is not birth but virtue, character and ability. Unfortunately, when birth acquires greater significance than qualification and hierarchy takes priority over function, *Varna* degenerates into casteism, racism, gender inequality and exploitation that plague India for thousands of years and cause many of its social ills.

Society is the realm in which we assume our obligations to others – this is what the system of *Varna* would like to accomplish in its original intent. "Varna is a way of grouping individuals according to their own natures and qualifications so that they might make a maximum contribution to the social order while at the same time enhance their prospects for fulfillment and liberation" (Koller 2006, 95). Today, it is obvious that we are situated in our respective communities in different ways, not only by birth or occupational groups but also by religion, economic status, political affiliations, voluntary associations, cultural heritage, etc. The social structure found in the Varna system is not only obsolete, it is also simplistic and restrictive. In India's history, *Varna* has been wrongly interpreted and practiced, which leads to the marginalization of those who have less power in traditional Hindu society (e.g. women and the poor). But this is contrary to the teachings of *BG*, which states that *Varna* is for the sake of prosperity and world order (Doniger 2014, p. 168; Koller 2006, p. 94). It ought to be about service to community rather than entitlement or privileges. Radhakrishnan describes *Varna* as a kind of ethical pyramid - more is expected to higher class, in terms of moral and spiritual demands, and less in terms of personal enjoyment. "While it recognizes that men are unequal in scale and quality, it insists that every human being shall have the right and the opportunity to contribute to human achievement, so far as his capacity goes" (Radhakrishan 1940, p. 368).

The fact is that there are external factors that have limiting effects on our career choices and occupational functions. This is what some authors called the

objective dimension of work. From this perspective, work is an integral part of the socioeconomic realm – historical and economic realities influence its organization. Because of our embodiment, we live a conditioned existence. The work that we do and the social organizations we establish are oftentimes marked with sin and imperfection. It can lead to our bondage or entanglement with worldly concerns. As an economic activity, human work can be a dehumanizing element in life, not because it is so by nature but by the way it is concretely organized. The historical degradation of *Varna* into casteism, where work is imposed arbitrarily and binds many in conditions of slavery, is one example of how work can be used against the person. It is the loss of the authentic meaning of work. It happens whenever people are used as means to an end. The human worker becomes subject to labor rather than the subject of labor.

Yoga of Love and Devotion- *Bhakti*

Bhakti is ontologically based on the nature of our higher self. Like other paths, *Bhakti* involves detachment, but here, one detaches the self from finite things so that she can attach her higher self to Krishna. Our relationships with the world and with our fellow humans are contingent, which brings with them expectations beyond the present situation. "As long as there is the delusion of self apart from the world," Loy (1988, p. 284) comments, "then resentment will naturally arise from any perception of a threat to that self and its desires." The way of selfless action is not complete without deep devotion to God, the highest Being, for in the final analysis selflessness is not simply the denial of oneself, but the offering of oneself to God. It is not detachment from material things alone or attainment of peace of mind, but union with God that is the final stage of deliverance.

Several passages in *BG* (9.13-34; 12.3-10; 18.56-71) give emphasis on *Bhakti*. If these lines are separated from the rest of the text, they give the impression that one is saved simply through the grace of Krishna. There are also passages in *BG*, however that downplay the ritualistic tradition, claiming that the reward for ritualistic/devotional sacrifices is temporary and finite rather than complete salvation. Blind performance of devotional ceremonies without understanding their meaning does not lead to *moksha*. Thus, one must bear in mind that *Bhakti* should be not separated from the other paths. One cannot practice *Bhakti* without overcoming self-centered habits (Loy 1988, p. 286). The ethic of selfless

action is essential in order to become a pure devotee, for sacrifice, austerity, or charity "can become vices if divorced from the rule of selflessness or detachment" (Gandhi and Desai 1946, p. 95). When prayers and religious rituals are performed correctly, *Bhakti* becomes a way of knowledge and selfless action (Koller 2006, p. 195). In addition, *Karma* and *Jnana* are both forms of devotional worship too, i.e. ways of glorifying God. Since the higher self is one with God, *Jnana* includes devotion to Krishna (*BG* 4.9-11). When an action is done for its own sake, i.e. as a sense of duty, without desire or aversion to outcomes, the action is also performed in an attitude of devotion (*BG* 18.46). Conversely, devotional offerings must be performed in the spirit of non-attachment, similar to Karmayoga, otherwise, they will only result in continual rebirth due to the influence of desire and ignorance. In his commentary, Radhakrishnan (1962, p. 562) claims that "Bhakti, or true devotion, according to the Gita, is to believe in God, to love Him, to be devoted to Him and to enter into Him. It is its own reward."

God in *BG* is both immanent and transcendent. He pervades all and permeates all (*BG* 7.6-10). As an avatar, Krishna is the reincarnation of the God Vishnu, he is the embodiment of the ultimate reality in human form. Krishna is a God who intervenes and becomes part of human history to restore dharma. While His higher nature is eternally inactive, His lower nature is the source of all actions in the world. *BG* (6.11) emphasizes how Krishna loves and cares for each individual, for everything in the phenomenal world is a manifestation of His lower nature. The everyday realm of material concerns is not an illusion or insignificant. Krishna is the support of all beings, all things exist in him. He is ever at work, lest the world should come to an end, but nothing that He does affects or disturbs Him (*BG* 3.24; 4.6-8).

Love of Krishna does not only entail performing specific actions or doing particular ritual or sacrifices. Krishna says in *BG* (12.4), "They reach me too by disciplining their senses, adopting an amiable attitude toward others, and by engaging themselves in the service of others." One cannot love Krishna without cultivating universal love to all His creatures. All comes from God. Seeing God everywhere, one is free of any negative feeling toward anything. Krishna tells Arjuna to abandon all dharma and seek refuge in Him alone. "Bow devotedly to me and take shelter in me. By my grace you will achieve the eternal and peaceful abode of the supreme self" (*BG* 18.62). This should not be interpreted as license, for in this part of the dialogue Arjuna is already committed to his dharmic

actions. Through *Bhakti*, one transcends any form of internal conflict in the performance of dharma as one attains peaceful oneness with the Absolute.

Concluding Reflection

Every worker has a spiritual soul or a higher self (*purusha*) that is closely related to God. She should be regarded as an end in itself rather than an object to be used for the betterment of another. As she takes priority over all other material things, the person is the moral basis of any economic or social organization. Because persons are endowed with intelligence and free will, they ought to be treated with respect and dignity. Such dignity covers the world of work in its totality. This is clearly articulated in *BG* when Krishna says that all types of professions are created by Him. "Since the concept of human dignity is not based on human merit, or distinctive features of some people and not others, there is no justifiable reason to differentiate in the degree of respectful treatment due each person." (Hick 2003, p. 31) This reproves all forms of discrimination, including religious. It also entails respect for religious freedom in the workplace. However, the notion of rights as arising from the inherent dignity of the individual person apart from the community is lacking in traditional Hinduism. "In Hinduism the rights of the individual person are always the rights of individuals in a community and consequently cannot be discussed without reference to one's community duties and responsibilities (dharma)" (Coward 2005, p. 39). Nonetheless, there is a shift of emphasis among contemporary Hindu ethicists toward a universal aspect of dharma that includes duties and responsibilities to all beings.[8]

Since work or karma is a spiritual activity, it is a moral activity as well. Hence, career choice is a moral choice. It involves self-analysis and self-criticism through discernment and deep reflection. In relation to this, Chattopadhyay (2012, p. 117) points out the significance of *Jnanayoga* because, "Only when one has self knowledge can he undertake to manage himself." We must not only choose a profession befitting our character and personality or, in the words of *BG*, the most dominating *guna* in our personality. Part of the notion of profession as dharma in *BG* in the commentary of Easwaran (2011, p. 125), is to see to it that one's "occupation is not at the expense of others. Making

money from products or activities that are harmful, such as cigarettes or weapons, sets a low ceiling on spiritual growth." No matter how much profits they generate, we must not engage in economic activities that degrade people including ourselves, and do not address authentic human needs. We do not just work for ourselves to pursue our personal ambition or satisfy our individual needs and desire. Because work has a social character and a vehicle for social interconnectedness, "work entails a social responsibility to work in harmony with others - and with the environment - so that the rights of all are balanced" (Ford 1995, p. 31). In all economic activities, we ought to consider the wellbeing of our communities. We need to foster a spirit of cooperation and solidarity with all workers so that everyone will benefit from God's creation.

One problem in conceptualizing SW according to Gotsis and Kortezi (2008, p. 583) is the tendency to treat it as if it were a panacea to all organizational problems. What must be considered is that SW does not directly translate into specific or even morally good ways of organizing work. A case in point is the historical practice of *Varna* where "work subordinates man and man is made for work." (Peccoud 2004, p. 36) There is always a gap between faith and action, between theory and practice, or between belief and lived experience. Theoretical discussion should not be confused with descriptive account of actual practices and historical reality. However, actual practices are oftentimes unintelligible unless related to normative teachings that not only guide people's actions, they can also motivate change. Because work is a dimension of our embodiment as taught by *BG*, it is conditioned by material realities. A Hindu SW involves ethical analysis of concrete situations as human workers are affected by technological, economic, and organizational aspects of their employment, including concerns for alienation, injustices and exploitation. It recognizes that spirituality is a lived experience connected to our historical existence in our society and in the workplace.

Given the many challenges arising from the world of work today, including forced labor, bonded labor, child labor and other forms of exploitation, transforming the human world requires the transformation of the world of work so that the dignity of the person as a spiritual subject is respected. Every worker has an inner life or higher self that needs to be nourished. The person is the author and beneficiary of work, work is for the person, not the person for work. When the latter happens, work is overvalued and distorted. In *BG*, the claim that work does not emanate from our higher self (*purusha*) does not mean it is

not part of who we are, for our whole self is present every time we work.[9] But we are not totally absorbed by our work since our higher self is free of any agency, it transcends all our actions. While work has an intrinsic value, valuing work above persons would be contrary to the teachings of *BG*. Thus, our social roles and professional obligations have to be coordinated with the nature of our transcendent soul/self. We have spiritual aspirations that must be considered in the workplace in order to promote our overall health and psychological well-being. Problems related to work are not only material or economic but spiritual or moral too – human fulfillment, dignity, creativity, work-life balance, etc. Recognition of the spiritual/higher self is essential to develop a holistic paradigm of work. This entails rejecting the notion that work is a material commodity. At present "the material paradigm still constitutes the main framework of reference and driving force in defining public policy" (Peccoud 2004, p. 24). Religious and spiritual variables have been largely excluded from organizational research (Neubert and Halbesleben 2015). According to Zsolnai (2015), the dominant management model today is still based on a materialistic-individualist conception of the person – a being who seeks to maximize her sensual pleasure and self-interest.

SW is not only about company retreats or meditation and prayers in the workplace, it also concerns material realities of economic life. The priority given to the spiritual aspect of the human person in *BG* does not entail total disregard of the material aspect of work. SW is not simply an individualized pursuit of meaning, it is a lived experience connected to our embodied existence in the community of which we are a part. When work is devalued or distorted, society is damaged, and families and communities suffer.[10] Thus a Hindu SW would be "very critical of the present global neo-liberal economic paradigm of deregulation, privatization, flexibility, consumerism and free market economy in which profit, capital and wealth stand over people" (Peccoud 2004, p. 28).

The task that lies ahead is for business leaders to develop a model of work organization that will respect and promote SW, so that spirituality becomes a dimension of corporate culture and an integral part of organizational functioning. Part of treating employees with respect is giving them a chance to participate actively in production and decision making in their workplaces through some kind of co-management and profit-sharing. "They should be given the possibility to be responsible and accountable for what they do" (Naughton and Laczniak 1993, p.

990). Intrinsic/non-material motivations such as self-actualization and fulfillment, sense of security or peace of mind, service to community, spiritual contentment, and interpersonal relationship should also be the focus of management, without totally abandoning the extrinsic/material rewards of work. When workers are intrinsically motivated to do their jobs, they experience a kind of flow, an experience of oneness with the activity. Workers also deserve a workplace where the firm's goals, visions, and policies are clearly defined and transparent, respectful and trusting relationships are present, and where they are provided with support, tools, and opportunities to excel in their profession and grow as a person in all dimensions, including their social and family life.

Related Bibliography

Agnivesh, S. 2004. "Decent Work: Perspective of the Arya Samaj, A Hindu Reformist Movement." In Philosophical and Spiritual Perspectives on Decent Work, ed. Peccoud, D. 89-95. Geneva: International Labor Office.

Ajala, EM. 2013. "The Impact of Workplace Spirituality and Employees' Wellbeing at The Industrial Sector: The Nigerian Experience." The African Symposium. 13(2) https://www.ncsu.edu/aern/TAS13.2/TAS13.2_Ajala.pdf

Ashmos, D. and Duchon, D. 2000. "Spirituality at Work A Conceptualization and Measure." Journal of Management Inquiry. 9(20): 134-145.

Benefiel, M.; Fry, L.; Geigle, D. 2014. "Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace: History, Theory, and Research." Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. 6(3): 175-187.

Benefiel, M. 2003. "Irreconcilable Foes? The Discourse of Spirituality and the Discourse of Organizational Science." Organization. 10(2): 383-391.

Biberman, J. and Whitty, M. 2007. At Work Spirituality Matters. Scantron: Scantron University Press.

Bouckaert, L. 2015. "Spirituality: The Missing Link in Business." In The Spiritual Dimension of Business Ethics and Sustainability, ed. Zsolnia, L. Basel: Springer International Publishing.

Brooke, C. and Parker, S. 2009. "Researching Spirituality and Meaning in the Workplace." The

Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods. 7 (1):1-10.

Bussanich, J. 2014. "Ethics in Ancient India." In Ancient Ethics, eds. Hardy, J. and Rudebusch, G. 33-56. Goettingen: V&R Unipress.

Chattopadhyay, C. 2012. "Indian Philosophy and Business Ethics: A Review." Advances in Management and Applied Economics. 2(3): 111-123.

Chaturvedi, V. 2010. "Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V.D. Savarkar, The Bhagavad Gita, and Histories of Warfare." Modern Intellectual History. 7(2): 417-435.

Corner, P. 2008. "Workplace Spirituality and Business Ethics: Insights from an Eastern Spiritual Tradition." Journal of Business Ethics. 85:377-389.

Coward, H. 2005. Human Rights and the World's Major Religions. vol. 4. Ed. Haas, P. Westport: Praeger Pub.

Creel, A. 1975. "The Reexamination of 'Dharma' in Hindu Ethics." Philosophy East and West. 25 (20):161-173.

Darbha. S. 2013. "Holistic Work-Life Balance." Global Journal of Management Applications. 3(4):215-217.

Das, R. 2004. Paths to God. New York: Harmony books.

Davis, R. 2015. The Bhagavad Gita A Biography. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Day, N. 2007. "Religion in the Workplace: Correlates and Consequences of Individual Behavior." In At Work Spirituality Matters, eds. Biberman, J. and Whitty, M. 115-145. Scantron: Scantron University Press.

Dhiman, S. 2013. "Ethical and Spiritual Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita: A Survey." Interbeing. 6(1): 19-39.

Doniger, W. 2014. On Hinduism. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____and Smith, B. 1992. The Laws of Manu. New York: Penguin Classics.

_____. 1981. The Rig Veda. New York: Penguin Books.

Easwaran, E. 2011. Essence of the Bharavad Gita. Tomales: Nilgiri Press.

Edgerton, F. 1944. The Bhagavad Gita. New York: Harper & Row.

Egenes, T. and Katz, V. 2015. The Upanishads A New Translation. New York: Penguin Books.

Ewest, T. 2015. "Sociological, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives on the Reemergence of Religion and Spirituality within Organizational Life." Journal of Religion and Business Ethics. 3(1) http://via.library.depaul.edu /jrbe/vol3/iss2/1

Fernando, M. and Jackson, B. 2006. "The Influence of Religion-based Workplace Spirituality on Business Leaders' Decision-making: An Inter-faith Study." Journal of Management & Organization. 12(1): 23-39.

Flood, G. 1996. An Introduction to Hinduism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ford, J. 1995. "Comparative Christian Perspectives on the Meaning of Work." In Work Values: Education Organization and Religious Concerns, eds. Natale, S. and Rothschild, B. 27-38. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V.

Gandhi, M. and Mahadev, D. 1946. The Gospel of Selfless Action or the Gita According to Gandhi. Ahmedabad: Vivek Jitendrabhai. http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/gita-according-to- gandhi.pdf

Ghumman, S. et al. 2013. "Religious Discrimination in the Workplace: A Review and Examination of Current and Future Trends." Journal of Business Psychology. 28: 439-454.

Hicks, D. 2003. Religion in the Workplace. New York: Cambridge University Press.

International Labor Office. 2012. Convergences: Decent Work and Social Justice in Religious Traditions. Geneva: International Labor Organization.

Jurkiewicz, C.L. and Giacalone, R.A. 2004. "A Values Framework for Measuring the Impact of Workplace Spirituality on Organizational Performance." Journal of Business Ethics. 49(2): 129-142.

Kennedy, R. 2003. "Spirituality and the Christian Manager." In Business, Religion and Spirituality: A New Synthesis, ed. Williams, O. 81-93. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Klostermaier, K. 1994. A Survey of Hinduism. New York: State University of New York.

Koller, J. 2005. The Indian Way. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

Krahnke, K. and Hoffman, L. 2002. "The Rise of Religion and Spirituality in the Workplace: Employees' Rights and Employers' Accommodations." The Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management. 3(3):277-285.

Kung, H. 1986. "A Christian Response." Christianity and World Religion. New York: Doubleday & Company.

Kutcher, E; Bragger, J; Rodriguez-Srednicki, O; Masco J. 2010. "The Role of Religiosity in Stress, Job Attitudes, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior." Journal of Business Ethics. 95(2):319-337.

Kwak, D. and Han, H. 2013. "The Issue of Determinism and Freedom as an Existential Question: A Case in the Bhagavad Gita." Philosophy East and West. 63(1):55-72.

Loy, D. 1988. Nonduality A Study in Comparative Philosophy. Amherst: Humanity.

Lynn, M.; Naughton, M.; Vander Veen, S. 2010. Connecting Religion and Work: Patterns and Influences of Work-faith Integration. http://www.uk.sagepub.com/aboutus/openaccess.htm

_____. 2009 "Faith at Work Scale (FWS): Justification, Development, and Validation of a Measure of Judaeo-Christian Religion in the Workplace." Journal of Business Ethics. 85(2):227-243.

Majithia, R. 2015. "The Bhagavad Gita's Ethical Syncretism." Comparative Philosophy. 6 (1): 56-79.

Malhotra, A.1999. Transcreation of the Bhagavad Gita. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Marques, J.; Dhiman, S.; King, R. 2007. Spirituality in the Workplace. Fawnskin: Personhood Press.

McGhee, P. and Grant, P. 2008. "Spirituality and Ethical Behavior in the Workplace: Wishful Thinking or Authentic Reality." Journal of Business Ethics and Organizational Studies. 13(2): 61-69.

Messarra, L.C. 2014. "Religious Diversity at Work: The Perceptual Effects of Religious Discrimination on Employee Engagement and Commitment." Contemporary Management Research. 10(1):59-80.

Miller, D. and Ewest, T. 2013. "Rethinking the Impact of Religion on Business Values: Understanding its Reemergence and Measuring its Manifestations." In Dimensions of Teaching Business Ethics in Asia, eds. Rothlin, S. and Haghirian, R. 29-38. Berlin: Springer Verlag.

Minor, R. 1980. "The 'Gita's' Way as the Only Way." Philosophy East and West. 30(3): 339- 354.

Mulla, Z. and Venkat, K. 2014. "Karma-yoga: The Indian Model of Moral Development."
Journal of Business Ethics. 123(2): 339-351.

Muniapan, B. and Biswajit, S. 2013. "The 'Dharma' and 'Karma' of CSR from the Bhagavad- Gita." Journal of Human Values. 19(2):173-187.

Nadkarni, M.V. 2013. "Hindu Economic Philosophy." www.mvnadkarni.com

Neubert, M. and Halbesleben, K. 2015. "Called to Commitment: An Examination of Relationships Between Spiritual Calling, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment." Journal of Business Ethics. 132 (4): 859–872.

Ngunjiri, F.W. and Miller, D. 2014. "Research on Workplace Spirituality, Religion and Ethics: Diverse Perspectives." Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings 2014.

Parboteeah, P.; Paik, Y.; Cullen, J. 2009. "Religious Groups and Work Values." International Journal of Cross Cultural Management. 9(1):51-67.

Peccoud, D. 2004. Philosophical and Spiritual Perspectives on Decent Work. Geneva: International Labor Office.

Radhakrishnan, S.1962. Indian Philosophy. Vol. 1 New York: Macmillian Press.

_____. 1940. 2014. Eastern Religions and Western Thought. London: Oxford University Press.

Raju, P.T. 1954. "The Concept of the Spiritual in Indian Thought." Philosophy East and West. 4(3): 95-213.

Rego, A. and Miguel Pina, C. 2008. "Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Commitment: An Empirical Study." Journal of Organizational Change Management 21(1): 53-75.

Richardson, C.; Sinha, L.; Yaapar, S. 2014. "Work Ethics from the Islamic and Hindu Traditions: In Quest for Common Ground." Journal of Management, Spirituality, & Religion. 11(1): 65-90.

Saks, A. 2011. "Workplace Spirituality and Employee Engagement." Journal of Management, Spirituality, & Religion. 8(4): 317-340.

Sanchez-Runde, C.; Nardon, L.; Steers, R. 2013. "The Cultural Roots of Ethical Conflicts in Global Business." Journal of Business Ethics. 116:689-701

Sharma, A. 1987. New Essays in the Bhagavadgita: Philosophical, Methodological and Cultural Approaches. New Delhi: Books & Books.

Sharpe, E. 1985. The Universal Gita. Chicago: Open court publishing.

Sheth, N. 2002. "Hindu Avatara and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison." Philosophy East and West. 52(1): 98-125.

Shideler, E. 1960. "The Meaning of Man in the Bhagavad Gita." Journal of Bible and Religion.

28(3): 308-316.

Suri, G. S. and Abbott, P. 2009. "Cultural Enclaves: The Interplay Between Indian Cultural Values and Western Ways of Working in an Indian IT Organisation." Proceedings of SIG GlobDev's Second Annual Workshop, Phoenix, Arizona December 14th 2009.

Theodor, I. 2010. Exploring the Bhagavad Gita. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

Zsolnai, L. 2015. "Materialistic Versus Non-materialistic Value-orientation in Management." In Business and the Greater Good: Rethinking Business Ethics in an Age of Crisis, eds. Ims, K.; Jacob, L.; Peders, T. Camberley: Edward Elgar Publishing.

---

[1] For further readings, see Sharpe (1985) and Sharma (1987).

[2] There are two kinds of *moksha* in Hindu philosophy – one that can be attained in this life, i.e. achieving *moksha* while alive (*Jivan Mukti*), and one that comes after the death of the body (*Videha Mukti*). In the first kind, *moksha* is not beyond, but rather simultaneous with our earthly existence.

[3] The Gita's acceptance of the doctrine of karma is axiomatic (Gandhi and Desai 1946, p. 34). Karma is both a moral and a natural law having its basis on the law of cause and effect. "The belief in the law of cause and effect makes us realize that we are placed in a particular situation because of unfulfilled past obligations on our part and we develop a sense of connectedness with all beings." (Mulla and Krishnan 2014, p. 344) A common misconception is that the doctrine of karma suggests that individual actions are passive and pre-ordained. This is incorrect. *BG* firmly rejects fatalism at it portrays Arjuna as a free being who can choose which path to take and change the course of his existence. "Similar to the belief in a just world, belief in karma reaffirms one's faith in a just world and makes every person responsible for his or her own well-being and suffering." (Mulla and Krishnan 2014, p. 342)

[4] One may raise the objection against the *Gita* that it is rational to consider the outcomes of one's action, not to do so may lead to recklessness. However, excessive focus on external results – positive or negative, success or failure, winning or losing – can lead to anxiety or indecision. The external results of action lie in the future and in as much as no one can tell what exactly is the future, we can never be totally sure of all the outcomes of most of our actions, "we have no idea what outcome would be best for ourselves and for everybody else." (Das 2004, p. 65) The advice of Krishna is for Arjuna to constantly live the present moment by being in communion with his higher self, and not be bothered by what lies in the future. This should not be interpreted as carelessness or irresponsibility, not caring about the result comes after one has already figured out what is the right thing to do based on her duty.

5 "'Dharma' in the context of Indian philosophy may be broadly taken as equivalent to 'ethical behavior' and Adharma to 'unethical behavior'. The equivalence is by no means perfect. As a matter of fact dharma, as used and understood in the Indian tradition, is a term of very wide connotation including within it the sense of a whole host of duties as well as virtue which ought to be performed by man" (Chattopadhyay 2012, pp. 117-118).

6 As referring to social or worldly responsibilities, Dharma is one temporal end just like *Artha* and *Kama*. In another sense, dharma refers to the totality of temporal values (including *Artha* and *Kama*) in contrast to *moksha*. See Creel (1975, p. 16)

7 Krishna proclaims (*BG* 9.32) that salvation is available to all classes and sexes.   All class distinctions cease in *moksha*.

8 "Hinduism is not credal. Adherence to dharma is therefore not an acceptance of certain beliefs, but the practice or performance of certain duties which are defined in accordance with dharmic social stratification" (Flood 1996, p. 12). Here lies both the strength and weakness of Hindu dharma. As a non-dogmatic concept, it is open to change and flexibility, it can be re-examined, criticized and reformulated to deal with actualities of change and meet the needs and challenges of modern times. However, its lack of specific content and its justification become a problem as traditional social structures turn out to be obsolete. A new and more consistent theoretical framework is needed to provide grounding for dharma.

9 Some writers in Indian philosophy call the relationship between *prakriti* and *purusha* as non-dual or *advaita*. In *BG*, *prakriti* and *purusha* are not "two ontologically separate substances but as two types of reality of the soul involved in the lived experience of every human being" (Kwak and Han, p. 64). But contrary to *Upanishads* or early Buddhism, this embodied or lower self is not meant to be annihilated in *BG*. What *BG* denies is the ultimacy or absoluteness of this finite self, for it is only a limited fraction of who we are. Failure to recognize the higher self is the cause of our suffering, alienation, isolation, and dissatisfaction.

10 Indeed, the importance of family and its preservation is emphasized in the first chapter of *BG* (1:37-43). In is not surprising thus, that many Hindus sometimes "leave career development to go back to their family home and take care of their parents" (Suri and Abbott 2009, p. 8; See also Darbha, 2013).