

Managing the Self: Lessons from the Bhagavad Gita on Personal Management and Development

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Abstract

This study delves into the key principles of the Bhagavad Gita pertaining to personal management and development, assessing their applicability in contemporary practices. Utilizing a textual analysis approach alongside an extensive review of relevant literature, the study examines the Gita's teachings on detachment, expertise in action, self-discipline, and spiritual consciousness – all crucial aspects of personal management and development. For individuals and organizations seeking effective personal management and development, To integrate these principles into daily routines, the study suggests structured reflection practices, goal-setting frameworks, and leadership training programs that emphasize ethical decision-making and mindfulness. Ultimately, the study concludes that adopting these timeless principles can cultivate a work culture grounded in respect, compassion, and holistic well-being.

Keywords: Bhagavad Gita; Development; Modern Practices; Personal Management; Teachings

INTRODUCTION

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a profound philosophical text that presents practical wisdom for managing the self, and offers guidance on how to live a fulfilling and meaningful life (Muniapan, 2020; Simpson,



2020). The *Bhagavad Gita* is an ancient Hindu scripture that has been widely regarded as one of the most profound and timeless texts on personal management and development (Amar et al., 2019; Kumar, 2017; Rukmini, 2022). The *Bhagavad Gita*, a revered Hindu scripture, is a philosophical dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. It is part of the ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata by Vyasa, and consists of 700 verses divided into 18 chapters. The Gita addresses fundamental themes of duty (dharma), self-discipline, detachment, and self-realization, making it a timeless guide for personal and professional development.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been revered for thousands of years as a source of timeless wisdom and guidance for individuals seeking to live a fulfilling and meaningful life. Gelblum's (1992) analysis of the *Bhagavad Gita* challenges the claim that the text advocates complete detachment from goals and desires. Instead, it highlights the concept of loka-saṅgraha, which signifies the consolidation, cohesion, and mutual interdependence of the world. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, rather than promoting absolute goallessness, encourages action free from selfish motives, aligning with broader social and cosmic harmony. Its teachings on personal management and development are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. The *Bhagavad Gita* presents a holistic view of personal development that includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions (Satpathy, 2010; Sivakumar & Rajini, 2022).

In recent times, there has been a growing interest in the *Bhagavad Gita* among management thinkers and practitioners (Lavanya 2021; Mukherjee, 2017). The text has been studied and applied in various domains of management, including leadership (Simpson & Pina e Cunha, 2021), strategy (Gupta & Garg, 2020) and organizational behavior (Kathuria & Awasthy, 2022). Modern management thinking, which emphasizes the importance of values,

ethics, and spirituality in the workplace, has found resonance with the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Saraswat, 2005).

Personal management is an essential aspect of modern-day life. It involves managing oneself in various dimensions, such as career, relationships, health, and well-being. Personal management is crucial for achieving success, happiness, and fulfillment in life. The *Bhagavad Gita* provides valuable insights and guidance on personal management, which can be applied to modern-day life. Sharma (1999) explores how the *Bhagavad Gita* offers valuable insights for modern management practices and identifies four major themes: the sacro-civic society model, the concept of the detached yet committed leader, the importance of self-management, and the integration of spiritual values into organizational culture. Sharma (1999) emphasizes that the *Gita's* teachings can guide leaders in balancing material pursuits with ethical considerations, fostering a harmonious and effective organizational environment.

As noted by Jaiswal & Rao (2019), the *Bhagavad Gita* is a guidebook for managing one's self, and offers valuable insights into personal management and development. The scripture emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, self-control, and self-mastery, which are essential components of personal management. In addition, the *Bhagavad Gita* presents a holistic view of personal development, which includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions.

Swami Vivekananda (1900) aptly encapsulates the essence of the *Bhagavad Gita's* teachings when he states, "We are all slaves to our senses, slaves to our own minds, conscious and subconscious." In alignment with this, the *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 6.5 teaches that

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् | आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मन
"One should elevate, not degrade, oneself with one's own mind. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul, and his enemy as well."

“One should have control over the mind and senses, and should not let them become the masters of the self.”

The scripture further underscores the significance of nurturing positive attitudes and virtues such as detachment, equanimity, and humility, which serve as essential cornerstones for personal growth and development.

This study aims to explore the verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* that are relevant to personal management and development, and to draw lessons from them that can be applied in modern-day life. By doing so, this study hopes to offer insights and guidance on how individuals can manage themselves better and live a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have discussed some aspects of modern life and its relationship with teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Mishra & Mahapatra (2019) investigate the concept of servant leadership in the Indian context, tracing its origins from Swami Vivekananda and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Their paper reviews existing literature on servant leadership and examines its practice by notable Indian corporate leaders such as Narayana Murthy, Azim Premji, Ratan Tata, and Dhirubhai Ambani. By bridging historical roots with contemporary examples, the study highlights the unique application of servant leadership within India's leadership paradigm.

Jaiswal & Rao (2019) examine the relevance of ancient wisdom in modern leadership. Focusing on the *Bhagavad Gita*, they extract valuable insights on leadership principles such as duty, selflessness, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. By drawing parallels between Gita's teachings and contemporary leadership practices, their paper highlights the enduring applicability of these lessons.

Tripathy et al. (2020) investigate effective corporate leadership by integrating principles from the *Bhagavad Gita* and Aristotle's persuasion techniques. Focusing on ethos, pathos, and logos, their study aims to guide contemporary leadership practices in becoming ethical, empathetic, and logical, thus attracting followers. By drawing parallels between ancient wisdom and modern leadership, their paper emphasizes the relevance of timeless leadership principles in the corporate world.

Harshavardhana & Srinivas (2021) examine the *Bhagavad Gita*'s teachings and its relevance to leadership. Their paper emphasizes the significance of cultivating virtues, selflessness, integrity, and fearlessness in leadership roles. By advocating active listening and balanced decision-making, the paper underscores how the *Bhagavad Gita*'s principles can lead to contentment and inner peace in leadership endeavors.

Maharana's (2021) research delves into the *Bhagavad Gita*'s teachings and their applicability to entrepreneurship. The paper extracts insights crucial for modern entrepreneurs, connecting ancient wisdom to contemporary business skills. By presenting this knowledge in an accessible manner, the study aims to bridge the gap between traditional philosophy and the demands of the modern entrepreneurial landscape.

Sethi & Walsh (2022) explain enduring leadership wisdom from the *Bhagavad Gita*, offering insights relevant to modern business leaders. Exploring 18 facets of leadership such as vision, motivation, and decision-making, their review draws valuable lessons from the ancient text. By uncovering the *Gita*'s timeless principles, the paper underscores their applicability to contemporary leadership in business contexts.

Rani's (2023) paper examines the resonance between management principles and teachings from the *Bhagavad Gita*. It

underscores how the *Bhagavad Gita*'s practical messages align with core management practices, emphasizing the relevance of its principles in contemporary management approaches. While some literature explores the philosophical and spiritual aspects of the *Bhagavad Gita*, limited attention has been given to extracting actionable lessons for personal management and development. This research aims to bridge this gap by systematically analyzing the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and providing practical recommendations that individuals and organizations can implement to enhance their personal management practices.

Objectives of Study

To explore the key principles and teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* related to personal management and development.

To analyze the relevance of these principles for modern personal management practices.

To provide recommendations for individuals and organizations to apply the principles of the *Bhagavad Gita* for effective personal management and development.

METHOD

This study employs a textual analysis approach alongside an extensive review of relevant literature to examine the *Bhagavad Gita*'s teachings in the context of personal management and development. The methodology involves the following key components:

Source of Text and Translations

The primary reference for this study is the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* in the Kannada edition published by Gita Press, Gorakhpur. This edition has been utilized for its linguistic clarity and faithful representation of the original Sanskrit text. To ensure accuracy and

contextual understanding, multiple authoritative English translations were consulted, including those by Swami Prabhupada (Bhagavad-gita As It Is), Eknath Easwaran (The Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation), and S. Radhakrishnan (The Bhagavad Gita: With an Introductory Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation, and Notes). Where necessary, independent translations were undertaken, with careful consideration of linguistic accuracy and philosophical intent.

Selection Criteria for Verses

A systematic selection process was employed to identify verses relevant to personal management and leadership principles. The inclusion of verses was guided by:

Thematic relevance – Verses reflecting self-discipline, work ethics, resilience, decision-making, and leadership were prioritized.

Practical applicability – Selected verses had to offer actionable insights that align with contemporary management and personal development theories.

Exclusion criteria – Verses with purely theological or esoteric interpretations were excluded unless they had direct relevance to management principles.

Textual Analysis and Literature Review

A qualitative textual analysis was conducted to interpret the philosophical and managerial insights of the selected verses. This involved:

Contextual analysis – Examining each verse within the broader discourse of the Bhagavad Gita.

Comparative analysis – Aligning the teachings with modern management literature, leadership studies, and personal development frameworks.

Literature review – Consulting academic papers, books, and commentaries to validate interpretations and establish the Gita's relevance in contemporary management discourse.

RESULTS

Chapters and Verses of the Bhagavad Gita on Personal Management and Development

Table 1

presents chapters and verses from the Bhagavad Gita that have principles and teachings relevant to personal management and development.

Chapter	Verse	Sanskrit Version	English Translation
2	48	योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi	Established in yoga, perform action
2	50	कर्मसु कौशलम् yogaḥ karmasu kauśhalam	Yoga is excellence at work
3	5	न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् na hi kaśchit kṣhaṇam api jātu tiṣṭhatyakarma-kṛit	Everyone is inevitably compelled to act, regardless of their desires
3	19	तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samāchara	Therefore, without attachment, always perform the work that needs to be done
5	10	ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः brahmaṇyādhāya karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ	One who gives up attachment and performs actions for the sake of the Supreme Lord is not affected by sinful reactions
6	5	उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् uddhared ātmanātmānam nātmānam avasādayet	One should uplift oneself by one's own efforts and not degrade oneself
6	16	नात्यश्नतस्तु योगोऽस्ति न चैकान्तमनश्नतः nātyaśhnatastu yogo 'sti na chaikāntam anaśhnataḥ	Yoga is not possible for one who eats too much or too little
6	17	युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु yuktāhāra-vihārasya yukta- cheṣṭasya karmasu	One who is regulated in eating, sleeping, recreation, and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing yoga

Chapter	Verse	Sanskrit Version	English Translation
8	7	तस्मात्सर्वेषु कालेषु मामनुस्मर युध्य च tasmāt sarveṣhu kāleṣhu	Therefore, at all times
		mām anusmara yudhya cha	remember Me and fight
9	27	यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् yat karoṣhi yad aśhnāsi yaj juhoṣhi dadāsi yat	Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer, whatever you give away
		यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् yataḥ pravṛttir bhūtānām	By performing one's own duty, everyone can
18	46	yena sarvaṁ idaṁ tatam	achieve perfection

Source: Bhagavad Gita The Song of God, Commentary by Swami Mukundananda, available at <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/index>

Expertise in Action

In Verse 2:50, Lord Krishna advises Arjuna to rise above emotional turbulence and act with excellence in his work (Yoga is excellence at work). In personal management, this principle emphasizes continuous improvement and striving for high standards in every aspect of life. Drawing a parallel with modern management, this aligns with the idea of expertise development in a chosen field, as outlined by Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* (2008), where he argues that 10,000 hours of deliberate practice are needed to attain mastery.

Perform Action with a Yogic Mindset

Verse 2:48 highlights the importance of performing actions with an undistracted mind and without attachment to the outcomes. In personal management, this can be interpreted as cultivating focus and emotional resilience while pursuing goals. This teaching resonates with Newport's (2016) concept of deep work, where individuals achieve peak productivity by focusing on challenging tasks with

minimal distractions, similar to the discipline demanded in yogic practice.

Inevitability of Action

Verse 3:5 This verse emphasizes the inevitability of action, as no one can stay idle even for a moment due to the inherent nature of life and the world. It encourages performing actions with awareness and a yogic mindset, instead of resisting them.

Duty and Detachment

Verse 3:19 emphasizes performing one's duty without attachment to the results. This principle aligns closely with Karma Yoga in modern work ethics, where the focus is on process rather than being fixated on the outcomes. For leaders and managers, this can translate to focusing on excellence in execution, independent of immediate results. Collins (2001) discusses how great companies focus on their core purpose (duty) and let results follow naturally, reflecting the detachment from immediate rewards.

Karma Yoga

Verse 5:10 teaches the principle of Karma Yoga, where one performs actions as an offering to the Supreme Lord, thus remaining detached from the results. It emphasizes that actions performed in this manner purify the mind and help in attaining spiritual freedom, as they are not bound by the karmic consequences of desires. This concept is fundamental to the Gita's teachings on duty and selfless action.

Self-Empowerment

In Verse 6:5, the Bhagavad Gita stresses self-effort as key to personal development. One must uplift oneself through consistent effort and discipline. This aligns with the principle that self-mastery and inner discipline are prerequisites for achieving higher goals and

self-realization. It also highlights that personal growth comes from within, and external circumstances cannot degrade one's spiritual progress unless one allows them to.

Balance and Moderation

Verse 6:16 and 6:17 These verses advocate for a balanced approach to life, with moderation in eating, sleeping, and work. They emphasize that extreme behaviors, whether in excess or deficiency, hinder one's progress on the spiritual path. Moderation helps maintain focus, energy, and a peaceful mind, all of which are necessary for engaging in spiritual practices like yoga and meditation.

Devotion and Action

Verse 8:7 Verse 8:7 encourages constant remembrance of the Supreme Lord while performing actions. This verse highlights the dual importance of devotion (bhakti) and action (karma). One should not only perform duties but do so with devotion, remembering the divine purpose behind all actions. This mindset keeps the individual aligned with their higher purpose, reducing attachment to personal gains or losses.

Action with Right Intentions

Verse 9:27 In this verse, the Gita teaches that all actions, whether related to work, food, or sacrifices, should be done with the right intentions. One should approach every action with a sense of selflessness, offering it to the divine. This prevents the entanglement of actions with material desires, purifying the individual's intentions and helping them stay focused on spiritual goals.

Perfection through Duty

Verse 18:46 states that perfection is achieved by performing one's duty. This is particularly relevant to the concept of Svadharma, or the personal duty or responsibility according to one's role in life. Fulfilling

one's duties, without attachment to the fruits, leads to spiritual fulfillment. The verse emphasizes that one should focus on performing their work to the best of their ability, as this aligns with their ultimate purpose.

Key Principles and Teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* Related to Personal Management and Development

The *Bhagavad Gita* offers guidance on a range of topics related to personal management and development, including self-awareness, self-control, ethical behavior, and achieving a sense of purpose in life. Here are some of the key principles and teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* related to personal management and development:

The Importance of Self-Awareness

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes the need for individuals to be aware of their true nature, which is eternal and unchanging. This awareness can be developed through meditation and other spiritual practices, which help individuals detach themselves from their ego and material desires.

The Principle of Detachment

The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that individuals should not be attached to the results of their actions, but rather should focus on performing their duties with dedication and devotion. By letting go of attachment to the outcome, individuals can develop a sense of inner peace and fulfillment.

The Concept of Karma

The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that every action has consequences, and individuals must take responsibility for their actions. This includes performing their duties to the best of their ability and accepting the results, whether positive or negative.

The Importance of Self-Control

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes the need for individuals to develop self-control over their thoughts and emotions. This can be achieved through spiritual practices such as meditation and mindfulness, which help individuals become more aware of their inner state and develop greater control over their impulses.

The Principle of Dharma

The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that individuals should perform their duties in accordance with their dharma, or their inherent nature and purpose in life. By following one's dharma, individuals can achieve a sense of fulfillment and contribute to the greater good.

The Importance of Service

The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that individuals should engage in selfless service, or *seva*, to others. This can be done in a variety of ways, including volunteering, donating to charity, and helping those in need. By serving others, individuals can develop compassion and empathy, and contribute to the well-being of society as a whole.

Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita* offers a rich source of guidance for personal management and development. By incorporating its teachings into their lives, individuals can develop greater self-awareness, self-control, and a sense of purpose, and contribute to the well-being of themselves and others.

DISCUSSION

The study of the *Bhagavad Gita's* teachings has revealed several key principles directly applicable to personal management and self-development. The following insights emerge from the selected verses:

The Importance of Yoga and Self-Discipline in Action

The Gita emphasizes the need for being established in yoga, which entails performing actions with skill and without attachment to outcomes. This reflects the essence of Karma Yoga, where action is not driven by personal desire but by a sense of duty and focus. The inevitability of action, as stated in Verse 3:5, underscores that resisting action is futile; instead, one should cultivate a conscious, disciplined approach to every task.

Self-Upliftment through Effort

The Gita stresses personal responsibility for growth, highlighting that one should uplift oneself through consistent self-effort. This principle aligns with contemporary management practices that emphasize continuous self-improvement and the proactive role of individuals in their personal development.

Balancing Life's Aspects for Holistic Well-Being

The Gita teaches the importance of balance in life – moderation in eating, sleeping, and work. This ensures mental clarity and physical health, which are essential for effective action. This principle is crucial for personal management, as it encourages individuals to avoid extremes and maintain harmony in their lifestyle.

Duty and Perfection through Action

The *Bhagavad Gita* reiterates the importance of performing one's duty (Svadharma) without attachment to results. By doing so, individuals can achieve perfection and reach a state of spiritual fulfillment. The teaching encourages focusing on the process rather than the outcome, fostering a sense of purpose and clarity in action.

Devotion and Right Intentions in All Endeavors

The Gita highlights the importance of performing actions with the right intentions, guided by devotion to the Supreme Lord. This sense of surrender and alignment with a higher purpose is not just a spiritual practice but also a principle for ethical leadership and effective management, where actions are driven by integrity and a commitment to the greater good.

Recommendations

In today's fast-paced world, where stress, depression, and challenges to mental well-being are prevalent, the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* offer a timely solution. Modern life often overwhelms individuals, leading to a loss of mental clarity and emotional balance. The principles of the Gita can help individuals regain their mental resilience and intelligence by incorporating practices like yoga and meditation. These practices not only enhance focus and clarity but also foster emotional stability, helping individuals navigate the complexities of modern life.

Self-regulation is another important aspect, which can be nurtured by focusing on balanced practices related to eating, sleeping, and recreation. Individuals can also develop a deeper spiritual connection through the regular study of sacred texts, chanting, and prayer, fostering both personal and professional well-being.

Organizations can draw from the *Bhagavad Gita* to shape their management practices by emphasizing values such as duty, self-improvement, and spirituality. This may involve offering opportunities for personal growth, encouraging employees to adopt practices like yoga and meditation, and promoting a culture of self-regulation and spiritual development. Organizations can also emphasize ethical practices and social responsibility, with the understanding that all actions have consequences and striving to align

with the principles of dharma (righteousness) outlined in the Gita. Ultimately, the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* offer valuable guidance for individuals and organizations seeking to cultivate purpose, fulfillment, and spiritual growth in both their personal and professional lives.

CONCLUSION

The *Bhagavad Gita* presents timeless principles that are highly relevant for personal management and development, particularly in the context of the modern challenges individuals face, such as stress, uncertainty, and cognitive overload. Through its teachings, the Gita offers valuable insights into managing one's duties with mindfulness, developing self-discipline, and maintaining a balanced and focused approach to both personal and professional life.

By embracing principles like performing actions without attachment, cultivating yoga for mental and physical well-being, and fostering a deeper spiritual connection, individuals can enhance their capacity for resilience and clarity. These teachings provide a framework for overcoming mental challenges and improving decision-making in today's high-pressure environment.

For organizations, the Gita offers a pathway to integrating value-based leadership, ethical decision-making, and a culture of continuous self-improvement. By promoting well-being and aligning actions with higher ethical principles, organizations can foster both personal growth and collective success.

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Conceptualization: K.P.H. & V.N.; Data curation: K.P.H. & V.N.; Formal analysis: K.P.H. & V.N.; Funding acquisition: K.P.H. & V.N.; Investigation: K.P.H. & V.N.; Methodology: K.P.H. & V.N.; Project administration: K.P.H. & V.N.; Resources: K.P.H. & V.N.; Software: K.P.H. & V.N.; Supervision: K.P.H. & V.N.; Validation: K.P.H. & V.N.; Visualization: K.P.H. & V.N.; Writing – original

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Informed Consent Statement

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Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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