

Karma yoga, its origins, fundamentals and seven life constructs

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Karma yoga is both simple and complex at the same time and as such requires a measured and reflective response. This paper in exploring the origins and fundamentals of karma yoga has sought to present interpretations in a clear and sattvic manner, synthesising key elements into seven life constructs. Karma yoga is revealed to have an eternal relevance, one that benefits from intimate knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita. By drawing on respected texts and commentaries it has striven to elucidate certain sacred teachings and give them meaning so that they become a guide for daily living.

Keywords

Altruism,
Bhagavad Gita,
Karma yoga,
Karma yogi,
Niskama Karma
yoga,
Service
conscious ness

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the concept of Karma yoga and its place in the Bhagavad Gita and how this philosophical thought can influence people's conduct and mindset. The study focuses on identifying the various dimensions of karma yoga, with special reference to Niskarma yoga and the life constructs drawn from it.

Design/methodology

The study has employed a qualitative research methodology. To achieve the study objectives, and identify the various constructs of the Niskama Karma yoga, the study used content analysis of three main texts authored by Swami Vivekananda, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Swami Chinmayananda as a source of reference and extensive literature review on various scholarly journal articles and relevant books that discussed extensively the concept of Karma Yoga, Niskarma Yoga and relevant key areas of the study.

Originality

The study identified seven distinctive, but interrelated dimensions of karma yoga termed as the heptagon of life constructs for the first time and these dimensions provide a practical template by which life can be lived.

Study Implications

The findings of this study would help an individual throughout their life journey whether it is in work environment, be it in social or personal life to enhance happiness, peace and satisfaction. The seven life constructs presented in this paper crystallise the relevance of karma yoga and by so doing present a challenge to every individual who seeks to aspire to live and fulfil them daily.

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Introduction

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
 मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ ४७ ॥
Karmanyevadhikaraste ma phalesu kadacana
Ma karmaphalaheturbhumar te sanago stoakarmani

“You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself to be the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction” (Mukundananda, 2014)

This is one of the most significant and popular verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* that offers deep insight into the spirit of the work and is invariably quoted in discussions of karma yoga. Regarding the science of work, the verse give four instructions: 1) You perform the work without expecting any results; 2) The fruits of your actions are not for pleasure; 3) Pride of doer ship should be given up while working; 4) Do not be attached to inaction.

Over the centuries the *Bhagavad Gita* has been viewed as a sublime text and people of Hindu origin tend to consider this work the most important Hindu religious text. *Bhagavad Gita* is not only a holy book that includes a concise description of Sanatan Indian philosophy, but it is also a real handbook and compass to a meaningful life (Rastogi and Pati, 2014) and has the perfect solution for any types of problems in life (Easwaran, 1997). For some it is a universal handbook for humankind and continues to be recognised as a real and profound source of wisdom in many fields including leadership and management (Sharma, 1999; Mulla and Krishnan, 2006) and psychiatry (Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

The context of the Gita is such that it has proved inspiration for a huge variety of different individuals. Even Mohandas K. Gandhi in 20th Century claimed that his works in reforming Indian society and campaigning for and achieving India’s independence was inspired by the *Bhagavad Gita*. Despite various school of thought, according to Dasgupta (1991), Indian philosophy is based on three fundamental beliefs:

1. **Theory of Karma:** All actions will have future results that can be good or bad and be the cause of joy or sorrow. If people do bad things in their lifetime, the results of this will be negative, cause sorrow and lead to rebirth in another body.
2. **Atman/soul (the existence of a permanent entity):** This is our real Unknown nature, untouched and pure.
3. **Doctrine of salvation or Mukti:** The end goal of humankind is to achieve moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

The core philosophy and teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* is based on these three beliefs and suggest that one can be freed from the cycle of birth and death by performing one’s duty selflessly or without any attachment of interest. Swami Vivekananda (1907) observed that multiple paths are also another unique feature of Indian philosophy that are accepted as ways to reach the same ultimate destination. Therefore, people have their own right to choose the best path most suited to them.

Karma Yoga has been described by Singh (1999) as “the quintessence of the philosophy of life” and is one of the paths people can choose to achieve their ultimate goal - *Moksha* or liberation from rebirth. According to Mulla & Krishnan (2006) the teaching of Karma Yoga forms the heart of the Indian philosophy.

Therefore, the study focuses on the concept of Karma yoga and its place in the *Bhagavad Gita* and how this philosophical thought can influence personal effectiveness and well-being. The study also

focuses on identifying the various dimensions (constructs) of karma yoga, with reference to Niskarma yoga and its influence on life's journey.

Methodology

To understand various types, attributes and dimensions of karma yoga the study embraced qualitative research methodology by applying an exploratory study. The study is based on three main texts and commentaries on karma yoga authored by Swami Vivekananda (1999), Swami Chinmayananda (2008) and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (2017) and various scholarly journal articles and relevant books those that discussed extensively the concept of Karma Yoga, Niskarma Yoga and relevant key areas of study. The choice of these three texts are mainly due to their intellectual authority on the subject and as these are widely recognised and respected.

To understand the concept of Karma Yoga, an inclusive approach was used, as it may cause biased and misunderstanding if the concept is only analysed and understood within the few verses or couple of chapters. The concept must be understood within the whole of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Tilok, 1926; Pal, 2001). Emphasis was placed on exploring seven life constructs drawn from karma yoga for these provide a defined code of objectives by which to live by.

Literature review

Karma Yoga: Understanding the concept

The word *Kri* in Sanskrit means *karma* which is activity or doing something or activity that includes all actions performed by a person whether they are of body, speech or mind (Mulla and Krishnan, 2006), individual mental and physical activities (Singh and Singh, 2010). The word yoga originated from the Sanskrit root *yuj* which means 'to join'. According to Mulla and Krishnan (2006) the concept is used in three ways in Mahabharata:

(i) Special skills; most effective and efficient methods/techniques to do the job or as a device. The following verse highlights this well:

Buddhiyukto jahatha ubhe sukrtaduskarte

Tasmadyogaya yujyasva yogah karmasu kausalam

By engaging the intellect (buddhi-yukto) one sets aside both righteous and unrighteous deeds. Therefore, engage yourself in this yoga for yoga is the true art of performing action (Chapter-2 verse-50)

(ii) Equability of mind for the consequences

yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanāñjaya

siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga uchyate (Ch 2 Verse 48)

Situated in yoga, perform your actions giving up all attachments, Dhanamjaya. Remain equal in success and failure for such equanimity is what is meant by yoga.

(iii) Elimination of creating any bondage through karma

buddhi-yukto jahātiha ubhe sukṛita-duṣkṛite

tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśhalam (Ch 2 Verse-50)

One who prudently practices the science of work without attachment can get rid of both good and bad reactions in this life itself. Therefore, strive for Yoga, which is the art of working skilfully (Mukundananda, 2014)

If we look at the following verse no 14 Chapter 2 *Bhagavad Gita*:

It is contact with the senses, Kaunteya, which leads to sensations of heat and cold and pleasure and pain. Being impermanent, these sensations appear and then disappear, and you must learn to endure them, Bharata

Our senses are in contact with the material objects continuously and that brings happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain in a person's mind. This experience leads to desire to further experience this feeling again and again that leads to an attachment with the object ultimately. Thus, this goes some way to explaining the desire to acquire material things and the store set by them in many societies.

Although, the term 'Yoga' and 'Karma Yoga' is used interchangeably in various instances in the *Bhagavad Gita* (tilak, 2000), Mulla and Krishnan (2006) used the karma yoga as "a technique for intelligently performing actions". Aastogi and Pati (2014) defined karma yoga as a "positive state of mind that is characterised by absorption & Service Consciousness".

Karma in Buddhism is viewed as action and consequences of action (Singh & Singh, 2010). However, the doctrine of the concept has two meanings in Buddhism: Universal and Psychological. In Buddhist philosophy only psychological karma is profound, which means for all intentional actions of body, mind and speech by individuals will have psychological consequences. For example, for the good and intelligent actions an individual will expect to receive a positive experience while bad actions will elicit a negative experience. On the other hand, Universal law of karma amounts to the theory of universal moral justice which has its origin in ancient Indian religion and philosophical thought. In Vedic philosophy karma was viewed through life's rituals.

In ch-3, verses 12, 13 and 16, Krishna was telling Arjuna that a person who uses life's resources without working are living in sin. Therefore, this is the person's obligation to work without any self-interest or without having any desire for reward. Sublime teachings of this nature have shaped Indian beliefs to such an extent that Mulla & Krishnan (2014) posit that; "the Indian *weltanschauung*" has itself influenced the doctrine of karma yoga.

The ultimate objective of humankind according to Vedanta is to attain Moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Kapatker, 2015). Indian philosophy advocates that the paths for liberation must be suited to an individual's situation, temperament and disposition (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006). Karma yoga is one of the paths that provide the route to the ultimate liberation. According to Indian philosophy there are four types of paths to achieve moksha in life:

1. The Raja Yoga-The Path of Meditation & Contemplation (Sometimes known as the Path of Discipline)
2. Jnana yoga-The Path of Knowledge
3. Bhakti yoga-The Path of Devotion & Self-Surrender
4. Karma yoga-The Path of Action with the Right Attitudes and Intelligence

However, it must be pointed out that there is no mention anywhere in the *Bhagavad Gita* which only advocates to choose only one path and ignore others. It is important that we create a balancing act by combining these four paths to achieve our ultimate objective. Depending on the individual situation, context and timing people may give priorities to one over the others.

Karma yoga and positive outcomes

Radhakrishnan (1948/1993) anticipates a series of positive outcomes for those who are attuned to and who pursue and live by karma yoga such as: peace of mind (verses 66,70 & 71, ch-2); happiness (verses 66, ch-2), satisfaction in life (verse 17, ch-3) and end of pain/sorrow (verse 65, ch-2). A real karma yogi is always completely satisfied. Mulla & Krishnan (2006) identified four outcomes based on their content analysis of Mahatma Gandhi's commentary on the Gita: Liberation; attainment of oneness with the supreme god; peace in mind, and happiness. These are categorised as spiritual (first two) and psychological states (last two). Many studies indicate that life satisfaction is positively influenced by karma yoga (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006; Radhakrishnan, 1993). According to Menon and Krishnan (2004) karma yoga or complete dedication to individual duties in the workplace will enhance the organisational

effectiveness. Rastogi and Pati (2014) found that karma yoga brings positive outcome for the organisation such as job satisfaction, personal growth and higher organisational performance. Kumar & Kumar (2013) in their examination of the positive psychology of karma yoga highlight its therapeutic properties. According to Vivekananda (1972) Karma Yoga is the system of ethics of religion in the Indian context and that is the core message of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Karma yoga is a strategic tool that enables work to be done with the right skills, the correct level of competencies, with the right attitude towards others and the world and with commitment and dedication (Chatterjee, 2016). Such an approach to work indicates that an individual can utilise or develop a mental state of balance which is not influenced by emotional dualities such as success and failure; gain and loss, joy and sorrow or pleasure and pain. Therefore, a true karma yogi will always perform their duty according to their best abilities without seeking or desiring any personal rewards. This is because a karma yogi is always working for the wider benefit of the society in which selfish desire has no place. According to Srivastava (1990) the progress and prosperity of self and society at large comes through karma yoga. We can make the point here that the meaning of Niskama Karma is the right skills with right attitude in the right situation towards an action. That lead us to raise the following question: “*Is there any association between Niskama Karma Yoga and personal effectiveness and well-being?*”

Mulla & Krishnan (2014) make the important point that; “Karma yoga shifts individual’s focus away from their rights to their duties.”, such an observation gets to the heart of why by living by the tenets of karma yoga a person gains a true equilibrium borne out selflessness. In sincere service an individual engages in oblation, that lifts their work above the mundane and by so doing makes it a spiritual offering, one that is no longer tainted by personal vanity or petty self-interest. Personal subjugation to a higher objective involves a willingness to give of oneself in a calm and dutiful manner, free from outward show and inner desire. Arguably many of the ills of the world are caused by personal, local and national egoism, an outlook that fosters individual, communal and international disharmony and conflict. Karma yoga offers the opportunity to recalibrate in a life enhancing manner, and by so doing enables a person to be positive and purposeful. The essence of karma yoga is that an individual is duty-orientated, indifferent to rewards and imbued with equanimity. Following such a path raises questions about the prevailing way of ‘living’ and whether karma yoga is counter-cultural or is in fact something that transcends culture.

‘For concentration is better than mere practice, and meditation is better than concentration; but higher than meditation is surrender in love of the fruits of one’s actions, for on surrender follows peace’ *Bhagavad Gita*. Chapter 12 Verse 12

Dimensions of Karma Yoga

According to Sharma (1999), the popularity of the *Bhagavad Gita* has been increasing throughout the world among management and social sciences scholars to address organisational challenges in recent years especially in exploring and applying the concept of karma yoga/Niskama karma yoga. As indicated above the complexity of understanding the concept and having a real consensus about the true meaning of karma yoga there is always possibility having misunderstanding and misconception. Therefore, operationalisation of the dimension/construct differ widely across studies (Rastogi and Pati, 2014). Narayanan and Krishnan (2003) in their study on “relationship between Guna, Karma yoga & Transformational leadership” found two dimensions of karma yoga: (1) Doing one’s duty; (2) No attachment with the actual outcome.

Based on content analysis and commentaries of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a study conducted by Mulla & Krishnan (2006) to measure core beliefs in Indian Philosophy and Karma Yoga, identified two dimensions of Karma Yoga: sense of obligation towards others (duty orientation) and an absence for desire for

rewards. Their findings indicate that a belief in Indian philosophy increased duty orientation, and life satisfaction is enhanced when there is an absence of desire for rewards. The findings of their study further indicate that “higher the individual dutifulness, higher they are on karma yoga”. However, the same authors in 2009 have found three dimensions of karma yoga adding one extra construct which is Equanimity as third construct. Singh and Singh (2010) proposed four dimensions of salesperson’s karma orientation:

1. Work as selfless action
2. Work as a duty towards others
3. Detachment from work-related rewards
4. Equanimity or calmness under environmental influences.

Rastogi and Pati (2014) by reviewing various previous constructs of karma yoga identified two important constructs: (i) Absorption & (ii) Service consciousness.

The above discussion and review of various literature indicate that the concept of operationalisation of karma yoga lacks consensus. While we see an attempt to justify the operationalisation of the concept by Mulla and Krishnan in 2006 but most of the others failed to justify their constructs more robustly and critically.

Table-1: Dimensions of Karma Yoga

Author (s)	Year	Dimensions
Narayanan and Krishnan	2003	Two dimensions (1) Doing one’s duty; (2) No attachment with the actual outcome.
Mulla & Krishnan	2006	Two dimensions: sense of obligation towards others (duty orientation) and an absence of desire for rewards
Mulla & Krishnan	2009	Three dimensions Sense of obligation towards others (duty orientation) An absence for desire for rewards Equanimity
Singh and Singh	2010	Four dimensions: Work as selfless action Work as a duty towards others Detachment from work-related rewards Equanimity or calmness under environmental influences.
Pradhan S	2013	Five dimensions: Emphasis on process than outcome Obligation towards others To act with equanimity Seek perfection/excellence in action Regarding work as an offering to higher self
Rastogi and Pati	2014	Two dimensions: (i) Absorption & (ii) Service consciousness

Sources: Authors of this study

Niskama Karma-Meaning and Philosophical Understanding

The doctrine of Niskama karma yoga is very contemporary in nature and has global relevance and is very practical and can be applied in virtually any context irrespective of psychological, spiritual, religious or societal beliefs.

Niskama karma is a composite concept and is based on two distinctive words namely *niskama* and *karma*. Furthermore, *niskama* also is a composite concept that is made up on *nih* and *kama*. The meaning of *nih* means a sense of denial or negation, hence *niskama* means -denial of *kama*. *Kama* is used in the *Bhagavad Gita* to mean of sensuous desires but not the satisfaction of sensuous desires (Pal, 2001). Various literature suggests that both concepts of *karma* and *kama* are used variously with different meanings and in many cases are confused, loosely defined and ambiguous (Pal, 2001). However, in the *Bhagavad Gita* these concepts are used without any ambiguity in which *Karma* is used as a sense of action while *kama* is used to mean of sensuous desires. When we look at the meaning of desires, conceptually this is linked to the notion of attachment. Various scholars of the *Bhagavad Gita* have interpreted or translated the concept of 'Niskama Karma' in terms of non-attachment action or desireless action. The *Bhagavad Gita* identifies two distinctive types of actions: desireful and desireless. Now, based on the understanding of *niskama karma*, a logical question is arising: "Is there any human action that is desireless? Is this desire linked to the outcome of the action? This means that an individual will do the tasks without any outcome related desire. Or maybe there is an element of desire in action but no elements of desire for the outcome. These should be understood clearly and explain the position of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

If we assume there is no desire in action that means, there is no action. People become inactive (renunciation of action) which ultimately means *akarma* (non-action). The concept is not promoted in the *Bhagavad Gita* as its profound message. Action is the dharma of people and hence, Lord Krishna taught Arjuna the teaching and principles of karma yoga throughout his discourse. His teaching of Karma yoga means *niskarma yoga* that is without having any desire for the consequences. Arjuna was told by Lord Krishna that no one can give up the action due to their psycho-physical make up. For him, renunciation is not enough, there is no choice but to act. Therefore, the concept of action conceptually involves with the notion of element of desire for a specific action.

Although, there is no elements of desire for the outcome of our action, but it is important that individuals should act with the alignment of their own understanding of truth and such positive awareness or use of tools in such a way that no negative consequences arise from our own actions. The practice of Niskama karma yoga helps in the cleansing of self and purifies the *chitta* (mind/thoughts/emotions).

In the quest to negate self and be mindful of others (and where possible help them) the word 'altruism' is germane to discussions. Altruism is an antonym of egoism and essentially means a 'selfless concern for the well-being of others' This word is believed to have been coined by Auguste Comte (1798-1857 CE) a French philosopher and the Father of Sociology. To be of an altruistic disposition sits well with the fundamentals of karma yoga, although there is a legitimate debate to be had about whether an individual can be entirely altruistic, for in acting in such a way some personal benefits may well accrue, even though they may not have been sought.

According to Pal (2001) Niskama karma is not a deontological concept rather it is well understood and explained from a teleological point of view as it is based on end outcome (consequences). Deontological theory is based on moral duty. The word deontology in Greek means *deon* (duty). In most contemporary philosophy of ethics or morality it is not those normative theories that guide us to decide what to choose from multiple choices. Deontological philosophy is really based on what people do, the ways things are done, and the techniques or tools they apply. This is not depending on the consequences rather consequence is the outcome of what they do in life. Therefore, deontologists are the very antithesis to consequentialists. We also must understand that there are so many theories on moral ethics and one such is Emmanuel Kant's (1724-1804 CE) understanding of duty. It will be wrong if we equate Niskama Karma with the Kantian's philosophy of duty as many people do. The concept of duty or ethical duty itself is ambiguous. Therefore, the concept of Niskama Karma should be understood from the teleological

perspective, based on the core tenets of the whole of the *Bhagavad Gita* not based on certain selected verses.

Heptagon of life constructs garnered from Karma yoga

Diagram: Heptagon of life constructs of Karma Yoga



Source: Authors of this study

There are several key constructs & core messages that can be drawn from karma yoga that can inform a behaviour that is attuned to the world and cosmos, rather than obsessed with self. It is possible to discern Seven aspects that warrant reflection and action: work, duty, service, purpose, giving, now & acceptance.

1 Work (in line with the socio-ethical code)

To be idle is to be devoid of meaning, hence why being unemployed or under-employed can be so debilitating, some even talk of it being 'soul destroying'. Work enables an individual to have not only focus, but the ability to contribute in a manner that can enhance life. Whilst toil is not without challenges and occasionally drudgery the spirit in which work is approached can make all the difference. Karma yoga not only sets store by the value of work but encourages a mindset that encourages the embracing of the task at hand to such an extent that it is to be done with pride and nobility. The American civil rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1964 CE) Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968 CE) is one such individual who articulated such an approach with clarity:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"

Work should be done with a willing spirit, regardless of the nature of the task. Karma yoga does not place a higher value on certain types of work and thus has an egalitarian approach that sees value in the nature of work assuming of course that it is informed by values that mean that it is not harmful to others. Thus, it behoves each of us to occupy our time wisely, preferably for the betterment of humankind and the world. Even in trying situations there is scope to use time in a constructive manner, a point illustrated by the fact that when during the British Raj the lawyer and independence campaigner

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948 CE) was incarcerated in Yeravda prison, Pune (formerly Poona) in 1932-1933 CE he used his time to spin his own cotton yarn by using a simple *charkha* (a portable spinning wheel).

All work should be offered up to the Divine and thus be done to the very best of our ability. It is important to understand that any work we do in everyday life should follow the socio ethical codes and should not be against normal accepted socio-ethical code of conduct (dharma). *Bhagavad Gita* Ch 3 Verse 3 does indicate that there are two paths leading to enlightenment and each is suited for a person of a particular temperament: (a) the path of knowledge, meditation and intellectual inquiry, for those who wish to explore the inner life of the spirit, and (b) the path of work for those inclined toward action.

2 Duty orientation

Central to karma yoga is the relationship that an individual has with others and the wider world. In Hinduism duty is encapsulated in *dharma* and thus it helps to reflect on the form that duty should take. Each person has a duty towards him or herself and as such should treat their body as a temple that is held in reverence and treated with respect. In Chapter 6 Verse 5 of the *Bhagavad Gita* there is clear evidence of the challenge and dichotomy at the heart of self:

“One should uplift oneself by oneself; and one should not debase oneself because surely the Self is one's own friend and one's own enemy.”

The point about being; “one's own enemy” is a salient reminder that our own actions or inaction can be our undoing, as in the way that indolence and sloth are the enemy of work. A key element of personal duty is the duty to others that includes family, fellow human beings and society. As humans there are duties (and compassion) owed towards the planet and *daya* - all living creatures and this is a reminder of the importance of stewardship, something that is relevant to every age. In work there are professional duties, just as there are moral duties ordered by the Divine Law. Being mindful of what has gone before individuals have a duty to their ancestors just as they have a duty to show compassion to other people including those of different faiths. With the sublime in mind it is also imperative to do one's duty towards deities and that deemed the Divine with respect and humility. *Bhakti* - devotion to God is a duty of all. All duty must be entered into with enthusiasm and a pure heart, for ultimately it is only of real and lasting worth if done with honest motives. In karma yoga duty is an obligation one premised on notions of self-sacrifice.

Lord Krishna vehemently argued against the decision of Arjuna not to fight against his relatives. His advice to Arjuna was that Arjun should fulfil his responsibilities by doing his moral and ethical duties without getting himself preoccupied with the rewards. According to Chinmayananda (2016), cessation of all duties is the signature of death. Any action can be a glorious sacrifice if it is done in the right way, most effective and efficient manner, with a sense of motive, love and appropriate level of emotion. Karmic yogi do their moral duties for the benefit of wider society without having any selfish desire.

3 Service consciousness

The relationship with others is intimately bound up with a sense of service. Far from being demeaning, service is something that is life enhancing. Each of us should strive to serve others and in so doing find joy in doing so. If we do not currently serve, we should seek opportunities to do so and do so to the very best of one's ability. The ultimate service being *puja* - ‘adoration’ that is a witness to devotion. It pays to reflect on the way that we serve, who we serve and how we might serve more effectively. By aligning personal will with the Divine will one is better able to serve in a meaningful manner. As in work it is vital to stay focused on the central task and not allow ourselves to be distracted or deflected from our service.

4 Purpose

Just as work provides a focus so it is essential that life has meaning. In Hinduism the purpose of life has four objectives based on achieving *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*. Collectively these four objectives are called *Purusārtha*. *Dharma* is part of the cosmic law that governs the universe and part of this law is that people should strive to live in a virtuous way. Another dimension of *dharma* is that each person is born indebted to others whether these be to the gods, the family or the world at large. Thus, a primary purpose of life is to live righteously and endeavour to payback that debt through work, good works and personal sanctity. *Artha* involves the quest for personal prosperity, for by successfully making a living an individual acquires the “means of life” which provides the security and resources by which a person is better placed to help others. Whilst wealth and prosperity are deemed laudable objectives, it is vital that they are achieved by ethical means that keeps the purpose within the bounds of *dharma*. Through *kama* a person finds emotional fulfilment and thus reduces stress and feels more positive about life and their personal and professional dealings. Ultimately the purpose of life is to achieve *moksha* – enlightenment and liberation.

According to Vivekananda (1986) there is no work without purpose.

5 Giving (without any sense of doer ship)

Dāna is a Sanskrit word for giving and charitable endeavours are a significant part of a person’s *dharma*. The *Bhagavad Gita* is clear in articulating that charity should be done without expectation and thus it behoves a person to act in an altruistic manner. Through charitable works we purify ourselves and thus behave virtuously and begin to pay back some of the debt that we are born with. Charitable giving with a pure heart is an act of love and devotion.

“Acts of sacrifice, charity and austerity should not be abandoned, but should be performed because sacrifice, charity and austerity are the purifiers of the wise.” *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 10 Verse 5

Giving can take many forms, *inter alia*, time, knowledge, land, money and other material things, and of course spirit. To not engage in charitable works is to be spiritually impoverished.

6 Focus on present (now is the best time)

We all should focus and concentrate on the present time or activities, not the fruits of the action. Each of us should appreciate and cherish the eternal present and know that we must not squander the time we have now and the qualities that we have been blessed with. It is imperative to live a purposeful now, one that requires positive action and commitment.

“Considering your dharma, you should not vacillate. For a warrior, nothing is higher than a war against evil. The warrior confronted with such a war should be pleased, Arjuna, for it comes as an open gate to heaven. But if you do not participate in this battle against evil, you will incur sin, violating your dharma and your honour.” *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 2 Verses 31-35

7. Acceptance

Human relationships are bedevilled by jealousy and resentment, much of this stemming from the fact that people rarely accept their lot in life and covet the lives and possessions of others. Central to achieving a deep inner contentment is the ability to accept situations with equanimity. Far from merely being resigned to things, we must face adversity and good fortune with the same spirit, one where we have courage to accept the fruits of our action or inaction. Moreover, the *Gita* challenges us to know ourselves and appreciate the impermanence of much of that which humans traditionally hold dear. We must accept the frailty of the human body whilst working assiduously to hone our spirit.

“The impermanent has no reality; reality lies in the eternal. Those who have seen the boundary between these two have attained the end of all knowledge. Realize that which pervades the universe is indestructible; no power can affect this unchanging, imperishable reality. The body is mortal, but he who

dwells in the body is immortal and immeasurable. Therefore, Arjuna, fight in this battle." *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 2 Verses 16-18

Discussions

Karma yoga should cause a person to ask questions of themselves and their priorities. Timing plays a part as invariably people have a tendency to procrastinate when it comes to matters of import. The seven life constructs afford a way forward, one that requires action sooner rather than later which underscore the core message of an influential work such as Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*. Equally the importance of reflection brings to mind a short story by Leo Tolstoy entitled: *The Three Questions* in which the following three questions play a central role:

1. What is the right time to begin anything?
2. Who are the right people to listen to?
3. What is the most important thing to be doing at any given time?

In karma yoga a person discovers the value of the here and now, especially when it is anchored in selfless service. In order to embark on such a blissful path, it is imperative to develop a clarity of understanding of *Satyam* (Absolute Honesty) and aspire to *Brahmacharya* (Absolute Purity). By focussing on the seven life constructs presented in this paper and drawn from karma yoga an individual is better placed to strive to achieve such ideals.

Conclusion

Karma yoga for all its spiritual origins is far from esoteric in nature. The life constructs that are drawn from it provide a practical template by which life can be lived. For any meaningful enlightenment to take place it is important that a person be familiar with key sublime text such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and endeavour to understand core teachings that can be both life enhancing and life transforming. The seven life constructs presented in this paper crystallise the relevance of karma yoga and by so doing present a challenge to every individual who seeks to aspire to live and fulfil them daily.

Limitations of the study and scope for future research

Inevitably any study of this nature is tempered somewhat by a degree of subjectivity, especially when it comes to the interpretation of Sublime texts. Furthermore, there is also the issue of translation, a key factor that has played a role down the ages when it comes to significant bodies of literature.

Karma yoga and the seven life constructs garnered from it has potential implications for those in leadership and management roles and thus there is scope to explore the way in which karma yoga can have a positive impact on both mindset and behaviour.

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