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MYSTERY AND MEANING OF LAW OF KARMA:

A Study on Motivation Factor in Productivity

1. Introduction

It is the primary concern of management to get work done by people and achieve peak performance and maximum productivity in their organisation. This being the goal, it is the Manager's job to motivate his subordinates towards achievement of that target. There is nothing like an universal motivator. Each individual is unique with distinctly different needs. The work situation or environment, adds another dimension to the already complex problem of motivation. Besides, the cultural aspect is yet another important point to be considered when motivation is discussed. How is a manager going to contend with all these factors while attempting to channelize, the energies of his subordinates towards organizational goals? Because human beings are involved, motivation is difficult. This problem is sharpened because their subconscious needs are hidden and motives are invisible sometimes. One very plausible method that can be tried in influencing the activities of the Indian is to appeal to his innate Indian ethics, to cater to his philosophical aptitudes. It is precisely here that the Law of Karma emerges as predominantly important.

2. The Law of Karma

The Law of Karma and doctrine of transmigration is referred to in the Upanishads. But we meet a clear reference to it in the 'Bṛhadāraṇyaka' of Yājñavalkya. It says, "Verily, one becomes good by good works and evil by evil."¹ The kind of form that the soul takes after death of the physical body would depend on its previous 'Karma.' This is the gist of the Law of Karma. "As is a man's desire, such is his resolve, as is his resolve, such is the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself."² The goal of every soul

1. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad, III, ii, 13.

2. Ibid., IV, iv. 3.5.

according to the Upanishads, is 'moksha' or release from the cycle of Karma. It can be attained here in this very life if our actions are likewise. The principle of 'Karma' is the counterpart in the moral realm, of the physical law of causality. Anticipations of the Karma doctrine are to be found in the Vedic Concept of ṛta, which meant not only the ordered course of things but the moral order as well. The Philosophy of the Upanishads postulates that right here, now, "when all the desires that abide in one's heart are cast away, then a mortal becomes immortal, he attains 'Brahman' here.³ Moksha thus attained assures freedom from 'samsara,' absolute bliss and peace. The course of life one should adopt to attain moksha is one of 'Karma-yoga.' The entire philosophy of Indian ethics is summed up in the three imperatives: "dharmyata," "datta," and "dayadhvam"⁴ meaning, cultivate self control, be generous and have compassion, which should be cultivated through a spirit of renunciation. Renunciation here does not mean inactivity but giving up of material desires only. We therefore see that work and reward spoken of together in motivation have really nothing in common between them.

3. Western Approaches to Motivation

Western approaches to motivation have been from three sides mainly: (a) the 'content' side (b) the 'context' side and (c) the reinforcement side. The motivation theories and techniques to suit the Indian context must stress the above three and in addition concern themselves with the cultural and philosophical aspects affecting motivation. The concept of 'work' as we view it has much to do with our religio-philosophical convictions because our tradition and religion and rich cultural heritage influence us in no mean manner in our day-to-day lives. whereas the westerners look upon work as a material necessity and a means of earning their livelihood, to us it is truly a form of worship or 'Karma.' An overriding importance bestowed on the performance of one's work in a spirit of Karmayoga, is therefore not incongruent in the Indian context. Motivation theories propounded in the west and much in use presently, all concern themselves with providing for good working environment, catering to basic physiological and psychological needs of man, whetting appetites for affiliation, affection, self-esteem and power and satisfying these needs by suitable motivational

3. Katha Upanishad, vi, 14.

4. Brhadāranyaka V, 2-3.

techniques. Western theories and techniques are handicapped because of the non availability of a spiritual and philosophical background and basis as we do have.

We believe that the ultimate aim of our lives is the attainment of 'self' or 'Brahman' through selflessness and self-abnegation. Karma Yoga in the performance of deeds without attachment or desires which in turn releases the fetters which bind us and helps us to exhaust the accumulated effects of our past deeds done under the influence of infatuation, passion etc. We are convinced that it is up to man to decide what gains he wants in life. The oriental faith in an "eternal moral order" inspires optimism and makes man master of his own destiny and capable of planning his actions suitably.

4. Motivation and Mahabharata

The epitome of Indian Philosophy is the 'Mahabharata.' The Mahabharata enunciates the doctrine of Karma and states that by knowledge (jñana) a person becomes unfettered. We also meet in its discussions on the different types of Karma, on whether destiny or self-effort prevails in life, on the four 'purusārthās' (human ends) and on Dharma which is the code of Indian life. The summum bonum of life is to have peace of mind and joy, both here and hereafter. The point to ponder is whether money, status, esteem, social acceptance etc would provide this ultimate happiness. The shanti parvan ordains, "do not do whatever is not conducive to social welfare."

5. Law of Karma and Karmayoga in Bhagawad Gita

The concept of Karmayoga is highlighted in the Bhagawad Gita in Ch: III 16 where it says "Kamyānām Karmaṇām nyāsam sannyāsam Kavayo Viduh." The ideal of the Gita is Nişkāmakarma and not Naiskarmya, not the negation of actions but performance of actions in a detached spirit; the giving up of desire, of reward, or thoughts about action and fruits thereof. Prof. M. Hiriyanna⁵ says, "The Gita teaching stands not for renunciation of action but for renunciation 'in' action." Actions are our sphere, fruits of it are not our concern. In spite of unattachment, we should be active. Everyone should act for the good of the people, for humanity at large, with as much selflessness as a lotus leaf, which though living in

5. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London) 1932.

water is not being contaminated by it: "lipyate na sa pāpena padmapa-tram ivāmbhasa" (Gita v.10).⁶ The Gita therefore recommends the subjugation of and merging of all desire in one supreme desire—desire for the development of spiritual life and it is this that should be the motivating spirit behind the actions. The betterment of our spiritual life is the single motive for all our actions.

The doctrine of Karmayoga is associated with Manu and his Dharmasastra. Manu regarded it as the philosophical basis of the life of kings. Manu has determined a Hindu code of conduct for all time. He believed that if each section of society performed duties specifically chalked out for it, then the organisational hierarchy would be maintained and motivating factors like need for affection, achievement, power etc. so earnestly debated about by Mc Clell et. al. will be met without any problem.

Karma Yoga consists in the performance of the obligatory duties in a spirit of desirelessness for the fruits; the duties pertaining to one's role in life. Karmayoga is thus not a direct means to liberation but the means to a means. It is not also only a preliminary discipline to be abandoned after purification of mind but to be continued for strengthening devotion. It is the pathway to perfection, difficult to achieve, but blissful in itself. In the light of this sublime view of work and achievement, western attempts at motivation techniques pale in significance, because they reiterate the value and expectancy of reward regarding any work. In the Indian philosophical and religious context, the question of placing a definite value in terms of work does not arise at all. Expectancy of reward becomes preposterous; if anything, something blasphemous, when such lofty ideals as selflessness and unattachment are held out.

6. Japanese Religious Philosophy and Motivation

Just as the Japanese culture and Confucian philosophy is "the basis of the ringo-seido decision-making process, where a consensus opinion evolves from discussion of issues among all managers likely to be involved in their outcome,"⁷ here too, at home, we are at liberty to evolve a system of management, managerial techniques and motivational tools which have as their basis, the Indian culture, at the roots of which are the

6. Bhagawad Gita. V, 10.

7. 'Management.' Bedeian (Arthur G) and Gluek, (William.F), Ed.3., Dryden Press, New York (1983).

respect for authority, family, seniority, and respect for and dignity of work per se. The dignity of labour has always been proclaimed as worthy of emulation and its virtues exalted and extolled by none less than Gandhiji himself. Working for the sake of work, for the welfare of the family and respecting elders at the work place; all these sentiments, if generated and nurtured, will yield good results. Another motivational technique so popular today, the concept of Quality Circles, also has a Japanese origin. The Japanese promote grass-root participation in all work and encourage healthy discussion on work-related problems.

Some research has been done in this area. One researcher believes that "in the Indian context, a better strategy than job enrichment, is of mass awakening of the feeling that work is worship" and that "happiness is the first and foremost motivator of every human being."⁸ This supreme happiness can be had, not (as one believes) from possession of material wealth. Money is a motivator, no doubt, but only as a mere means of sustenance, the root cause being the peculiar economic matrix of India. In more tangible material terms group success can to some extent salve the thirst for achievement. Group work or team spirit if cherished and encouraged, the need for affection, social acceptance, and caring can be satisfied. This patronage, protectiveness by other members of the group and by seniors, can be more gratifying than mere salary and other monetary benefits. If, all in the group feel in the same manner about work, then there can be no quarrels about division of labour and joint efforts towards a goal will become realities. So, motivation for Indians, in a far-fetched sense, hinges on the ideals of selflessness, non-expectancy of rewards, worship of work, fear of one's karma and its consequence and universal brotherhood and common social well being. This feeling of oneness has been inculcated into the Indian system, right from the days of Gurukula. At the Guru's ashram, all lived in perfect comraderie: rich and poor, prince and pauper. We also have the joint-family system where there are many families living under the head of the family; and his word is law and he, as the eldest is respected, revered and obeyed. There is respect mixed with fear. This can be done for companies too.

7. Fear and Punishment vs Motivation

The Theory X and Theory Y of Douglas Mc Gregor can be modified to suit our needs on the basis of the Law of Karma and principle of Karma-

8. Kumar Srivastava, P. 'Human Motivation and Indian Perspective' in *New Horizons in Management* 1985. Printwell Publishers, Jaipure (1985) P.P. 108-111.

yoga. Fear is one concept that works miracles as a motivational technique. The tool here is the Law of Karma itself. If the Indian really believes in that his present Karmas or deeds will catch up with him here, and hereafter, for better or for worse, then, as the Theory Y states man only needs to be given the push. His innate drives will prod him to better actions, better out put even if, by fear alone. The threat of punishment could dispense with the Theory X concept that man is innately lazy. It has been observed that "because of the lack of demand for something to provide for external peace" it became a missing link in the motivational paradigms."⁹ Maslow makes a passing mention about "ultimate happiness." Management must pave the way for the fulfilment of the natural urge. This spiritualism also has as its basis fear of punishment. Our Hindu religion holds that, even belief in God, is based on the fact that otherwise we will be damned. Motivation without fear is like education without examination.

8. Conclusion

Motivational techniques for the Indian context must be, in conclusion, geared to make work pleasurable, elevating and capable of taking the person towards sattvic happiness. To the Indians, work per se can be a motivating force, when it is perceived and accepted as a motiveless action, a form of worship; and a means to the manager of quenching his thirst for all the various psychological needs such as affiliation, achievement and power and a way to help him weed out expectancy of outcomes and valence as a whole. The occidental behaviourists have been blinded to the above and have limited their concern to Tamasic and Rajasic happiness and satisfaction, both of which are at best transient in nature.

9. Kumar Srivastava, P. 'The Missing Link in Motivational Paradigms' in *New Horizons in Management*, Printwell publishers, Jaipure pp. 139 (1985).