The Importance of Bhagavad Gīta teachings in Managing Workplace Politics: With Reference to Mahābhārata

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Abstract
Workplace politics is one of the most debated topics in modern organizations because it plays a significant role in an organization's overall success. It is critical to understand that while workplace politics is unavoidable, productive efforts can help minimize adverse outcomes and steer them in a positive direction. Previous research on this topic has primarily focused on the negative aspects, such as gossiping, lobbying, evil plotting, divide and rule, and so on, which result in adverse outcomes such as stress, depression, and burnout. Based on their findings, researchers proposed solutions such as employee motivation workshops, psychological therapy, etc. However, the effectiveness of such solutions is temporary and may not address the underlying cause of the problem. It is critical to emphasize that "workplace politics" is not novel. Instead, if we sift through the ancient scriptures, we will find numerous instances that confirm its presence during the Vedic era. It would not be an exaggeration to say that modern workplace politics are inspired by ancient Hindu scriptures such as Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. As a result, this theoretical study aims to extract aspects of workplace politics from the characters of the great epic Mahābhārata and understand how these features still manipulate the work culture of modern-day organizations. The solution to workplace politics is suggested in the form of Śrīmada Bhagavad Gīta teachings to be introduced as part of a value-based education system. Furthermore, to widen the scope of this paper, Bhagavad Gīta in management science is also discussed in the form of potential suggestions on how an executive can achieve work-life balance.

Key words: Workplace Politics, Mahābhārata, Bhagavad Gīta.

Introduction:

The ancient Indian classics constitute the cornerstone of corporate politics. Texts like Vedas, Upaniṣad, Rāmāyaṇa, and Mahābhārata (MB.) brilliantly exhibit the principles of *dharma*[1] and *adharma*[2] that continue to have relevance in today's

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[1] The basic principle of divine law in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, or the path of righteous.

society and organizations. However, modern society often prioritizes materialistic goals over spiritual and moral principles. Spirituality and dharma are the core of Indian culture. However, the shift from the ethical values of Satyuga to the current state of Kalayuga has led to a decline in *dharma*, as evidenced in the progression from limited deceitful plans in Tretāyuga to the dishonorable acts of disrobing as depicted in Dvāparayuga. The reason is that pre-Mahābhārata era, people held positive virtues, compassion and moral values. For example, in Rāmāyaṇa, the cunning maidservant, Mantharā deceitfully poisoned the mind of queen Kaikeyī to send Rāma to exile for fourteen years.[3] When Rāma returned to Ayōdhyā after fourteen years, he touched her feet by calling her mother. Such high morals were followed at that age. In contrast, the Mahābhārata features the dark side of politics with themes of power, desire, and unethical behaviour.

It offers insight into political, management, and economic theories that are still relevant today. It is not merely a source of themes for movies or theatrical productions (Tiwari, 2015) but a treasure trove of managerial wisdom that helps to understand life's complexities and ways to overcome them (Bodhananda, 2010). Its core theme, i.e., four Puruṣārtha (*Dharma, Artha*, *Kama, and Moksha),* illustrates the multi-faceted politics encompassing power games, strategic planning, leadership incompetencies, and ethical dilemmas.

'Dharma' is the critical context of Mahābhārata (Bodhananda, 2010). As per the scriptures, 'the first and foremost dharma of any king is to protect its people.[4] Failing to perform this duty allows the strong tyrant to oppress the vulnerable easily. For example, during the game of dice, Draupadī approaches all the elders of the Kuru family, including Dhṛtarāṣṭra, to save her from disrobing. However, Dhṛtarāṣṭra,' a weak king, blind in love with his audacious son, silently witnessed everything (Bodhananda, 2010). In today's organizations also, such weak leaders prevail, despite perceiving the injustice with the subordinates, prefer to keep silent to support their favourites' teammates. Characters in the Mahabharata reflect the different facets of politics in modern organizations and can serve as cautionary tales. A few notable characters

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[2] The path of unrighteousness.

[3] *tau varau yāca bhartāram bharatasyābhiṣēcanam l*
pravrājanaṃ ca rāmasya tvaṃ varṣāṇi caturdaśa ॥ (Ramayana 2.9.20)

[4] *ḍharmo ẏat raja rakśati prajah l*
Bhutanam hiyatha dharmo rakśanamparma daya ll (MB. Shanti Parv)

are addressed below, each representing various aspects of workplace politics –

Table 1. Correlating actions and decisions characters in Mahabharata with workplace politics

Character	Actions and Decisions	Political Behaviours
Dhṛtarāṣṭra (The blind king)	➢ A king, blind to sight and intelligence. ➢ His blind love for his incompetent son was the sole reason for the Mahābhārata war	➢ Nepotism ➢ Incompetency
Bhīṣma (Great grandfather of all Kuru)	➢ Abducted the princess of Kashi for an unfit foster brother. ➢ Exhibited allegiance to the wicked Kauravas.	➢ Cronyism ➢ Supporting incompetent candidate
Droṇācārya (Teacher of royal princes)	➢ Set a terrible example of favouritism for his devoted student '*Arjuna*.' ➢ Tricked *ékalavya* from being the best archer by asking his right-hand thumb under the pretext of '*ġuru ḍakśina.*' ➢ He denied accepting *Karṇa* as a student on the grounds of his lineage from a lower caste.	➢ Shackle the competencies of a deserving candidate to benefit the favourite candidate ➢ Unethical tricks ➢ Inequality based on Casteism
Yudhiṣṭhira (The eldest Pāṇḍav)	➢ Always followed the righteous path of *dharma*. ➢ Puts brothers and wife at stake in the game of dice.	➢ It is futile to follow the high moral if it leads to self-destruction ➢ No loyalty lasts forever in the competitive world. Managers can gamble on their favourite candidates for self-benefit
Draupadī (Wife of Pāṇḍavas)	➢ Married to five brothers, each of whom exemplifies a particular skill ➢ Loved Arjuna more than any other four Pāṇḍavas ➢ Her unbridled remarks towards *Duryodhana* became the reason for the Mahābhārata battle.	➢ Over expectations ➢ Nepotism ➢ Speaking off the cuff can be dreadful

Duryodhana (The eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra)	➤ Blindly followed *Śakuni,* who kept him ablaze in the senseless flames of jealousy, greed and wrath. ➤ Sensing *Karṇa's* archery talent and a formidable opponent against Arjuna, he immediately offered his friendship to him	➤ Bad company and wicked advice lead to self-destruction ➤ Opportunist
Śakuni (Maternal Uncle)	➤ The finest evil figure of that era ➤ Whole life engaged in conspiracies and malicious alliance	➤ Master of strategy and manipulation skills.
Kuntī (Mother of Pāṇḍavas)	➤ Never accepted *Karṇa* who was born out of her wedlock	➤ Hiding truth or worthy information
Vidura (Prime Minister)	➤ A true example of knowledge and wisdom. ➤ Always suggested the path of dharma to Dhritrashtra and opposed the wrong conduct of Duryodhana ➤ Saved Pāṇḍavas from the evil conspiracies	➤ Incredible intellectual potential ➤ Strong courage to speak up about the bitter truth ➤ Brilliant political skills
Kṛṣṇa (God Himself)	➤ An embodiment of truth, knowledge, and bliss	Best manipulator, politician, and diplomate

The political behaviors in the above table are the outcome of negative work politics. Important behaviors are - Nepotism, Cronyism, Favoritism, Incompetency, Inequality, Over-expectations, Disloyalty, Opportunist, selfishness, dirty tricks, and backstabbing. Among all these behaviors, the three traits, i.e., "situational manipulation," "dirty tricks," and "backstabbing," comes under Machiavellian techniques[5] (Cavanagh et al., 1981)

The outcome of these behaviours results in anger, ego clashes, humiliation, jealousy, stress, depression, etc. Narayanan and Bodhananda, in their book "Management and Mahabharata," state that time has changed everything, i.e., Food habits, mode of communication and travel, clothing, etc., but emotions such as anger, lust, ego, and envy are still the same, as reviewed by (Subramanian, 2010, p. 124).

Politics is the organization's dark side, Kumar & Ghadially (1989). Research shows pros and cons. Organizations should adopt Śrī Ka and Vidura's positive policies. CEOs and HR heads offer many ways to overcome unfavorable politics, but corporations need a grassroots solution. Fixing workplace politics requires understanding its cause. Two main reasons:

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[5] A technique where employees try to minimize the influence of others and hide knowledge with colleagues. For personal gains, they do all sort of manipulation. They tend to compete rather than be cooperative.

1) People prefer to cheat to succeed. Education is to blame.

2) British education prepares students for high-paying white-collar jobs. We value money over values, which corrupts millennials.

Thus, this study examines value-based education and workplace politics through Bhagavad Gīta teachings.

Literature Review

Workplace politics, or 'organizational politics,' is traditionally defined as behaviour that is "self-serving, contradictory to organizational objectives, and premeditated to cause individuals, groups or entities harm" (Hochwarter and Thompson, 2010, p. 1372).

"Organizational politics involves action by individuals to further their self-interest without regard for the well-being of others or their organization," according to Kacmar and Baron (1999). Politics can be divided into three categories: 1) Easy way to gain power; 2) Tactics to impress boss; and 3) Strategies for career advancement, according to Dubrin (1978). In an interview with 'Business News Daily,' Amplio Recruiting founder Chris Chancey defined it as "the manifestation of power dynamics among co-workers." He claims people use power dynamics to achieve their goals. People are naturally political and will do anything to protect their interests. Politics is necessary for team success, but too much of it is harmful, according to Chang et al. (2009).

In the same interview, Slingstone Group managing partner David Frankel defined workplace politics as positive or negative. Positive effects include job satisfaction, career advancement, motivation, reward and recognition, a sense of accomplishment, and organizational success. The downside causes job dissatisfaction, resource waste, performance issues, etc. According to David Frankel, leaders must overcome such unfavorable behavior because it lowers employee performance. It could kill the company if continued. Mintzberg (1985). Negative political behavior causes such dire consequences. Job satisfaction and anxiety negatively and positively correlate with negative politics, respectively (Kacmar and Baron 1999). At a Chennai educational institution, Sowmya & Panchanatham (2012) found a strong positive correlation between organizational politics and employee turnover intention.

Hence, leaders and researchers have suggested various solutions to the outcomes of workplace politics. For instance, Nakurmah (2022) has suggested four measures - Fair and transparent policies; Reducing uncertainty by keeping the policies, updates, etc., accessible to every employee; Transparency in incentives, promotions, etc.; Zero tolerance policy for damaging politics.

Sreejit Banerjee (Chief Operating Officer, Grease & Lubricant) told 'Economic Times – HR World' that ignoring workplace politics is best. "Ignoring" doesn't solve anything. Finding a long-term, cost-effective, global solution is crucial. The Bhagavad Gīta provides a practical solution to all doubts and tension. This holy text has 700 verses in 18 chapters. Its message is ideal for modern people. This revered literature discusses the Yoga of selfless action, knowledge, and meditation for God-realization. However, early Gītā instruction is essential. Our education system only values degrees. Thus, modern society needs value-based education. Despite its popularity, Patil (2013) claims education lacks morality. Without Spiritual Consciousness, education cannot teach love, peace, respect, tolerance, and forgiveness.

The Reasons for Workplace Politics –

Although politics might have a dark side, positive and strong leadership can help firms and their people flourish over the long term despite corporate culture's negative.

Table 2. Qualities of strong leadership, with key examples from Mahābhārata

Strategic Planning	Politics is not only about brute force. Instead, it is also about strategic thinking. Pāṇḍava strategy to escape *lākṣāgṛham[6], taking adobe in virāṭa[7]*, and plans against the atrocities of *Duryodhan*
Diplomacy & Negotiation	Being diplomatic and having superior negotiation skill is the most crucial trait of any leader. Such talent can result in peace and harmony. *Kṛṣṇa* diplomatic proposal to *Duryodhan* to give five villages to Pāṇḍava.
Deception & Manipulation	Politics should be free from deception and manipulation as it can lead to anarchy or indignation. *Śakuni's* deceptive plans lead to the destruction of the whole kingdom.
Leadership Skills	Leadership is not at all a suppression; instead, its vital requirement is to guide, inspire and lead. *Yudhiṣṭhira's* honest leadership skills lead to the prosperity of the whole kingdom.
Balance of Power	Less power leads to injustice. For example, *Bhīṣma* helplessness to save Pāṇḍava and *Draupadī* during the dice game. Excess power leads to oppression, like *Duryodhan's* wicked act of disrobing *Draupadī*. Hence, the balance of power is essential for maintaining peace and harmony.
Nobel Virtues	No matter how strenuous the path of dharma is, it always leads toward mental peace and liberation. Pāṇḍava's strong belief in dharma leads them toward victory and the coronation of Hastinapur.

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[6] The house of Lacquer

[7] The king of the Matsya Kingdom

Sadly, these principles of ethics and morals are often disregarded in the contemporary organizational culture. Instead, employees at all levels are susceptible to self-serving behaviour[8].

The most destructive aspect of workplace politics is the "Power Game" or "Power Conflicts" in modern workplaces. Unhealthy politics, if unchecked, leads to professional hostility. It can be useful in office politics if managed well. Competent leaders use power dynamics to achieve organizational goals by moving organizational conflict toward healthy competitiveness, which includes a progressive culture of work-sharing, support, trust, and so on.

Unfortunately, the flashy, abundant life has blindfolded the new generation to get money any way. This blind pursuit of wealth and comfort promotes greed, selfishness, and disloyalty and bad politics.

Solution of Organizational Politics -

Leadership style solves organizational politics. Leaders can either follow the right path or ignore workplace immorality.

"The path of the righteous is like the light

of dawn, which shines brighter and

brighter until full day. The way of the

wicked is like deep darkness; they do not

know over what they stumble."

Bible – Proverbs 4.18-19

Ignoring unethical behaviour may cause organizational failure. Thus, even minor incivility must be dealt with quickly or it will create a perception of weak administration, leading to employees circumventing management. Dharma is

difficult, but it improves employee satisfaction and the company's reputation. Integrating Gītā teachings into company policies and training can foster ethical workplace behavior thereby developing wise leaders.

Critical lessons for leaders include –

The Importance of Duty[9] – The Bhagavad Gītā underlines the significance of performing duties by following the path of dharma, despite all adversities of life.

Modern managers should be encouraged to uphold ethical standards in the workplace, rejecting self-serving behaviour for long-term business success. Despite the temptations of pursuing immoral shortcuts to achieve overnight success, leaders must maintain their ethical compass by practising meditation.

The Power of Meditation – Gītā emphasizes the power of meditation in achieving a disciplined mind. Kṛṣṇa says a disciplined mind is akin to a flame of a lamp in a windless place, *"yathā dīpo nivāta-stho neṅgate sopamā smṛitā"* (BG. 6.19)

To improve concentration and access the subconscious, management should consider workplace meditation. Focusing on the right things and awakening the sub-consciousness help with Svādhyāya (introspection) and correcting mistakes. Organizational conflicts decrease.

The Strength of Right Action[10] – Lord Kṛṣṇa counsels Arjuna to act by dharma without worrying about the outcome.

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[8] Self-serving behavior includes lobbying top management executives to seek special privileges such as promotion, extra salary hikes etc.

[9] *niyataṁ kuru karma tvaṁ karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇaḥ l*
śharīra-yātrāpi cha te na prasiddhyed akarmaṇaḥ ll (BG. 3.8)

[10] *karmaṇy-evādhikāras te mā phaleṣhu kadāchana l*
mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi ll (BG. 2.47)

Managers should be trained to make decisions aligned with organizational policies, bringing peace of mind, even if the results are not as planned.

The Power of Compassion[11] - Shri Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the importance of friendliness and empathy in promoting peace.

Leaders should adopt a zero-tolerance stance towards discrimination. They should hold a compassionate relationship with all the employees irrespective of their designation.

The Principle of Non-Attachment[12] - Attachment leads to sorrow, but detachment leads to liberation. Detachment from worldly pleasures is a crucial tenet of Gītā.

Leaders should avoid power, wealth, and control ambitions. Self-controlled, detached leadership creates a supportive workplace culture and employee satisfaction.

The Power of Self-Control[13] - The Bhagavad Gītā indicates that self-control is necessary to restrain desires at bay; otherwise, it can ruin the intellect.

Leaders should cultivate self-control in speech and action, which will help mitigate conflicts and prevent impulsive decisions that could cause harm. Though it may be difficult to uphold these principles in the dynamic workplace, a leader who embodies these values will drive positive

organisational change even amidst challenges.

Though Bhagavad Gītā workshops help build a supportive work culture, these efforts can control workplace politics to a limited extent only since the root cause resides inside our flawed education system, which prioritizes financial gain over instilling moral values, etc. Therefore, incorporating Gītā in the educational curriculum can help solve this issue and its future ramifications in the form of workplace politics. The Bhagavad Gītā helps students develop character and life skills. Its dharma and ethics lessons help students make ethical choices for life by teaching fearlessness, anger management, and stress resilience. Yoga and meditation build mental strength and focus. It encourages academic and workplace cooperation by emphasizing action over results. It fosters spiritual intelligence and leadership, making students well-rounded and successful.

Conclusion -

The Bhagavad Gītā provides insights into the complexities of human suffering and the path to happiness and contentment. It highlights the importance of elevated consciousness in overcoming adversity and achieving peace, even in challenging workplace politics. The discourse between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna serves as a powerful example of how the teachings of the Gītā can help leaders navigate ethical dilemmas and guide their organization towards a path of righteousness. For these teachings to have a lasting impact, they should be integrated into our education system. An education that prioritizes values and ethics can foster a harmonious and prosperous society and provide individuals with the tools they need to lead fulfilling lives.

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[11] *adveṣṭā sarva-bhūtānāṁ maitraḥ karuṇa eva cha l*
nirmamo nirahankāraḥ sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣhamī ll (BG. 12.13)
[12] *yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañjaya l*
siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga uchyate ll (BG. 2.48)

[13] *tasmāt tvam indriyāṇyādau niyamya bharatarṣhabha*
pāpmānaṁ prajahi hyenaṁ jñāna-vijñāna-nāśhanam ll (BG. 3.41)

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