

# Chapter 8

## Impact of Spirituality: Views of an Entrepreneur in India\*

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### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I want to give my views on spirituality from an Indian perspective. Spirituality is closely related to religion. Therefore, I will elaborate on this relationship. Based on my own experiences, I believe success is our birthright, not the monopoly of just a few. Even a leaf cannot stir without the will of God. One must do one's karma to the best of one's ability, and he should not worry about the gains, as the result lies in the Lord's hand alone. I also believe service to humanity is the best work of life. I try to give back to society through my work at the Priyadarshni Academy.

#### 8.1.1 *Spirituality and Religion in India*

India is the only country in the world where a large number of religions have not only evolved but flourish and have grown from strength to strength. Religion is an integral aspect of life in India. Religion has a great impact on the personal lives of the people of India on a daily basis. India is a secular state, where the constitution honors all religions equally. It is one of the few countries of the world where the social and religious identity of the nation has remained intact despite numerous invasions, persecution, colonialism, and political upsurges.

India has traditionally been a land of faith and spirituality. It is home to the adherents of all the major religions of the world. Out of these, four were born in India, while the others came with invaders, travelers, and missionaries from abroad.

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\*The information in the boxes is provided by Sharda Nandram based on meetings between her and Nanik Rupani in Mumbai, Nariman Point, February 2009 and "Success is our Birthright," Nanik Rupani's biography.

While India is the cradle of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, Islam can be compared to an adopted child as it has been part of our social and cultural fabric for centuries. Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Baha'ism also have their followers in India, but they are very small in number. Despite the multitude of faiths prevalent in India, the country has, by and large, been free of any internecine strife. Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority in the country, and it is a creed, which is renowned for the catholicity of its outlook. For Hindus, religion is a tool to achieve a one-to-one communication between God and man. However, Hinduism became too ritualistic, and in the sixth century B.C., a great social churning took place in the country out of which emerged Jainism and Buddhism. Jains place self-conquest above everything else. It is one of the most ascetic of faiths, with its votaries living in the most spartan manner imaginable. Buddhism, on the other hand, was exported to the Far East, although its philosophy was almost snuffed out in the land of its origin. An iconoclastic faith, such as Buddhism, could not compete with ritualistic Brahmanism that cleverly co-opted Buddha into their 'holy pantheon' of gods. I think it is not possible to explore India without understanding its religious beliefs and practices. A number of world religions originated in India and others that started elsewhere were strengthened here. To understand India, it is important to understand its religions as religion casts its shadow on every Indian, right from their very birth.

*When I first met you at a Gala Diner of the International Foundation of Human Values (IFHV) in Brussels you told me about your spiritual connection and your business philosophy. First, please tell me about your personal spiritual plane.*

Ever since I was little, my parents took me to the Wadala Krishna Temple regularly. Since then, I have formed a very close bond with Lord Krishna. I still remember the joy and peace felt when I heard the sweet sounds of bhajans songs. Even today bhajans are a source of comfort and inspiration to me. Life without God can be compared to a rudderless ship drifting aimlessly in a big ocean. Spirituality helps you discover and overcome weaknesses, to know and use your strengths.

Spirituality only enhances one's aptitude to excel at work. I find introspection crucial to remain in charge of whatever one is doing rather than being trapped in a flow of events and happenings that are unfolding on their own. We ourselves have to decide what is right and wrong. This comes out of our inherent values and code of ethics. I believe in karma. Whatever has to happen shall happen. God is the owner of everything. He can take back whatever He likes and any time He wants. This reality makes it easier to face life even with all of its setbacks.

*Can you explain this reality in the context of your entrepreneurial activities?*

Everyone dreams of success, yet only a few make it to the top. In my career so far I founded various companies and if I look back I can say there is

a six-step formula to success: dream, think, plan, organize, implement, and supervise. The first is dream: what happens is that everyone dreams, but for many, dreams are not fired by the power of faith and perseverance on the part of the dreamer, so they fail to take off. I do not think a person is poor if he has no money but this is certainly the case if he has no dreams. In dreamland, there are no barriers, no obstacles, your mind and imagination can stretch even to the stars. But dreams are simply starting points. You have to put everything down on paper, as clearly as you can.

I believe in macro and micro planning. The macro planning involves large-scale and long-term activities like collaborating with companies, bidding for projects, expansion, etc. Micro planning means strategizing and structuring activities around targets, namely working out the minute details. In my case, my macro plan was to earn enough to live a comfortable life and then devote a lot of time to social activities. And my micro plan was to set up profitable business activities which I did with Enkay, Neutron, Adino, and Architectural Audio. Another activity which is of utmost importance is building a reliable team.

Teambuilding is an on-going process, the team needs to be trained, conditioned and inspired. I communicate my vision to my teammates and thereby make my vision theirs. Next, I delegate powers to them to enable them to implement our plan. This is an art which requires time, patience and understanding. I try to treat them with dignity and fairness and I consider each member as a unique person. The motivation to lead my team is ‘one and one make eleven (1+1=11)’ (*ek aur ek gyarah hote hai*). If I come across people who are not interested in contributing to the organization’s growth, or who are self-centered, I call the person for a private meeting and explain to him that his actions are against the philosophy of the company. I never make it a public confrontation.

Once the project has left the harbor and is sailing smoothly towards its destination, the captain still needs to supervise. At this stage, other projects can be planned, executed and supervised simultaneously. Today, I have delegated the day-to-day running of the companies to my trusted team members. They have comfortable leeway to operate, and they come to me only when a major decision has to be taken.

Interviewee: Nanik Rupani

Interviewer: Sharda Nandram

### 8.1.2 Impact of Indian philosophy

Indian religion and philosophy has always promoted ‘spirituality at the workplace,’ i.e., ‘corporate spirituality.’ Swami Vivekanand has rightly said that *the unique genius of India is that India is a spiritual country*. In the ancient Indian context, corporate spirituality was supported. Work is considered as Yajna or a

sacrifice. Work or karma or service purifies the mind, which is an essential prerequisite to any spiritual pursuit. Selfless service dedicated to God is the process of mind purification. The Travancore Maharaja used to call himself ‘daasa’ (servant) of Shri Padmanabha and ruled over his kingdom in his Lord’s name. India’s unique genius is spirituality, and we consider life itself as a spiritual journey. Though, in recent times, the West has adopted spirituality as a management tool, India has always been a spiritual country and has believed in work-life spirituality.

Even Kautilya (also known as Chanakya), India’s most illustrious political economist of all times, around 2,400 years ago in his Arthashastra suggested balancing of procedures and systems for avoiding malpractices. Kautilya’s recommendation at that time was – “The Government Taxes should be as low as the honey bees sitting on the flower and sucking the nectar without damaging the flower.” When taxation level is that low, there will be no evasion of taxes.

There is an emerging trend among big corporations and business houses to embrace Indian philosophy and imbibe relevant management strategies. The Tribune online notes that, in recent times, phrases from ancient Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad-Gita* and others have started popping up in management courses and on Websites of consultants. They also note that top business schools abroad as well as in India have introduced ‘self-mastery’ classes that use Indian methods to help managers boost their leadership skills and find inner peace in lives dominated by work. Mainly overseas Indians have contributed to this development. The tribune mentions about 10% of the professors at places such as Harvard Business School, North western’s Kellogg School of Business, and the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business are of Indian descent – a far higher percentage than other ethnic groups.

More companies, nowadays, believe that one should have more than only monetary motives to run a business. There should be a holistic approach to business that takes into account the needs of all stakeholders; i.e., shareholders, employees, customers, society, and the environment. Some can even foresee the development of a management theory that replaces the shareholder-driven agenda with a more stakeholder-focused approach. “The best way to describe it is *inclusive capitalism*,” says C.K. Prahalad, one of the world’s most influential business thinkers. It is the idea that corporations can simultaneously create value and social justice. It is now called Karma Capitalism.

The Tribune notes that while it used to be hip in management circles to quote from the sixth century B.C. Chinese classic *The Art of War*, the trendy ancient Eastern text today is the more introspective *Bhagavad-Gita*.<sup>1</sup>

Taking lessons from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, an ancient Hindu epic, will definitely present a management grid that links the profit-orientated approach with a purpose-orientated approach to running a business. Different aspects of aptitude and attitude towards competition and business sustainability can be taken from this epic.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.thetribuneonline.com/spiritualism.thm](http://www.thetribuneonline.com/spiritualism.thm).

Business is about meeting the market demand by having the capability, the capital, and the connections (3Cs) to sustain cash flow for the generation of profit. These 3Cs are cardinal features for attaining competitiveness.

*How does spirituality take form in your businesses?*

In my management philosophy, *karma* is a key concept. One must do one's karma to the best of one's ability. Not only in my business career, but also in my personal life, consistency and continuity have been the pillars. I don't leave things half done. You should never give up. Everything must be accomplished to perfection in accordance with one's capabilities and strengths. Sometimes, the results may go against the projections because certain external factors are beyond one's control. But you should go on because your karma is to go on. If you keep doing good, something good will definitely come back to you. For example, in my business career there were umpteen occasions when I could not sell my product, to my dismay. Still, I refused to give up hope. I went on trying, contacting the concerned person again and again.

Another relevant concept is the *kaizen* concept. I admire Japanese business partners because of their continuous improvement, an on-going process to do better and better, the so-called Kaizen principle. It also implies building permanent and long lasting relationships to bring a humane touch to professionalism. The Japanese have also learned about the importance of teamwork. What I like about it is that they go to such an extent that no one takes individual credit. I believe Indian management experiences positive effects of globalization. Earlier there was a nonchalant attitude of 'everything will be okay' ('*chalta hai*'). I am convinced that Kaizen shall get you somewhere but *chalta hai* will take you nowhere.

A third relevant useful concept is *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. Today we talk about corporate governance. I think the *Arthashastra* laid down the ground rules on financial management, taxation, social work, and resource creation. He also said "you should serve the custom, as custom is the king."

A fourth philosophy I embrace is of accepting change: '*change or perish*' is the idea. In Hindi '*parivartan hi sansar ka niyam hai*.' I think corporate houses that have strong Research and Development are most successful as they have the courage to change.

Interviewee: Nanik Rupani

Interviewer: Sharda Nandram

However, business thrives on truth and integrity and, more importantly, the attitude towards customers, stakeholders, and society with a view to maintain mutual trust and the management of expectations. Development of aptitude is usually evidence-based and profit-centric. But cultivation of attitude is experience-based and purpose-centric. Today, there are a number of professional

specializations in many aspects of management, for example, human resources, real estate, and wealth amongst others.

However, there is still limited research on the essence of management, which can emanate from ancient Hindu epics. The wisdom from the ancient Hindu scripture will, indeed, be very enlightening and beneficial to managers in bridging the gap between profit-centric and purpose-centric management.

*Tell me about your service to humanity*

Priyadarshni Academy is well known in India and on foreign shores for its prestigious Global Awards Programs. It is also involved in Education, Protecting the Environment, Promotion of Natural Living, International Cultural Exchange, Vedic Research, and a number of other activities. “Healthy Youth, Healthy India” is an initiative taken by Priyadarshni. This program addresses the growing rate of depression and suicide among students. One of our prominent and most important programs is “The National Integration through Dances and Music.” This provides a platform to encourage young upcoming artists in the field of classical music and dance.

I remind myself 100 times every day that my inner and outer life depend on the labors of other people, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.

Interviewee: Nanik Rupani

Interviewer: Sharda Nandram

## 8.2 Spirituality and Business: Reflection and Conclusion

Spirituality and business might seem odd bedfellows at first glance, but is that because we view the latter as corrupt and materialistic? Companies today have become bigger than many economies. Companies are little republics. These are engines of efficiency and growth. If companies do not do responsible things, who is going to? Studies suggest that the companies now in crisis, like Lehman Brothers, Bear Sterns, Enron, and World Tel were not performing well on the CSR front. They neither had the right CSR policies nor a detailed stakeholder analysis. Well-managed CSR supports the business objectives and goals of the company and builds relationship with the key stakeholders whose opinion is valuable in such turbulent times. Moreover, Indian philosophy claims that a moral and balanced life would free us from a sense of guilt, tension, anxiety, stress, and frustration. This can be assumed to be secular concepts and values. As per Bhagavad-Gita teachings, a prayerful attitude, working in the name of God without attachment to the end results and accepting the results as God’s blessings would add a spiritual element to the secular values.

Corporations are not merely profit machines reacting to market forces. They are run by and for humans and have a symbiotic relationship with the world around them. These humans should put the individual stakeholders such as the customer and the employee at the center of the universe. Compassion for human beings and other ethical references point out good leadership and management of business and organizations. Love is a strange word to use in the context of business and management.

For those who may find the concept of 'love' too emotive or sentimental, the word 'spirituality' is a useful alternative. Spirituality is a perspective in its own right and it also represents ideas central to love as applied to business and organizations, i.e., the quality of human existence, personal values and beliefs, our relationships with others, our connection to the natural world, and beyond. Love, compassion, spirituality, and real ethical principles, actually, provided the platform for the formation and success of many very large and famous corporations. Dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some very big businesses were originally founded on loving and spiritual principles.

*Why does the business world need spirituality?*

Once upon a time, spirituality was left at the office doors; however, today, spirituality is focused upon as a management tool. There are a growing number of organizations, which are moving in a 'spiritual' direction. Along with physical, emotional, and intellectual elements, spirituality is also considered as a key factor for growth.

One of the features of spirituality at the business level can be traced by assessing business ethics policies or social responsibility of companies. In today's changing business environment, companies that conduct businesses in an ethical, transparent, and socially responsible manner are found to do better than their peers and they are rewarded by almost all stakeholders. Cities including corporate citizens in the future will have to become innovative and proactive to deal with burning issues such as climate change, food and oil shortages, and an economic slump affecting urban areas.

The current on-going global financial turmoil proves once again the importance of business ethics and good governance practices.

Global meltdown is largely due to failures in lending standards, risk management, and corporate governance by the world's major lending institutions. Today's financial crisis has its roots in corporate irresponsibility and unethical practices. If responsible lending practices had been conducted, then probably, the U.S. would have been in a better position now. What went wrong then?

We can relate a lot of problems of the financial crisis with individual greed, mismanagement, and bad decisions, but ultimately it goes deeper than that. It wasn't just that the loan seekers were at fault. The mortgage providers or the bankers are equally at fault. People were getting home loans with no

verification of income or assets. It wasn't verified whether the home loan seekers were capable of repaying the loans. These practices were unethical in several aspects.

*Do you mean that there are many sources and forms of spirituality?*

Yes, as an individual, I relate it with my connection with God. In management practice, I get inspiration from different philosophies that embrace a long-term perspective of consistency in body, mind, emotions, and spirit and continuity in activities even in times of setbacks. At the societal level, companies should take a leading role from the notion of social responsibility. Let me stress it again: companies today have become bigger than many economies. Companies are little republics. They are engines of efficiency and growth. If companies don't do responsible things, who is going to?

Though spirituality has different forms in different settings, there should be no conflict between my business side and my personal side. There is no divide, no clash of interests, attitudes or principles. It is one thing to become a successful businessman, but quite another to be a successful human being.

Interviewee: Nanik Rupani

Interviewer: Sharda Nandram