

Man Management- A Book Review

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"Men are more valuable than all the wealth in the world" says Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Sri Sathya Sai Baba is revered as God by his devotees. He is also known for undertaking massive projects for helping humanity, His dictum "My life is My message" stands testimony to it. "**Man Management**" based on the talks given by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba (as aptly as it is titled) is a good book in its simplest form of definition and a priceless treasure trove of knowledge on any given day. From the point of view of a management book, the book seamlessly integrates the highest concepts of spirituality with the management techniques of conducting day to day operations in an efficient manner.

'Man Management', as humbly claimed by the compiler Prof. Racherla Kumar Bhaskar (Faculty of Management and Commerce, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning), is an attempt to immortalize the lessons given by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in His discourses on topics related to management, commerce and business. The discourses compiled in the book were delivered by Him to the students and faculty of the department of business management, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning on various occasions. The compiled work also includes discourses given by Bhagawan on similar topics to people outside the Institute with the view of providing the reader a comprehensive idea on critical aspects regarding managerial excellence as given by Bhagawan.

Man Management is not only an attempt to immortalise the golden words of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba but it is also an attempt to help all those who seek knowledge for various reasons. It is a ready-reckoner or a guiding force for those who are already working as professionals, employees, businessmen and essential for those who are in places of authority. It is also helpful for students and knowledge seekers to know and prepare themselves about the dos and don'ts of the business world. The tagline which follows the title of the book 'a values-based management perspective'; speaks about the focus area of the text and the basic ideology of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba with regards to the art of management.

The book is in itself an inspirational read which provides the seeker much food for thought. It persuades the seeker to turn his enquiring gaze inwards i.e., to think in a manner which is introspective and rich in nature and guide him or her in their professional and personal lives.. The fall of huge business empires, reports of unethical behaviour by the management, siphoning of public funds, unjustified layoffs (the number going into thousands) and the sly actions of organisations which harm the environment etc. has now become a common feature of the daily headlines (Chakraborty, 2001). A society or rather a nation which is working on such shaky grounds of distrust is bound to collapse, taking everyone with it and given the global nature of the modern world it would have a ripple effect resonating in all corners of the world. In such a dismal and dark situation the wise words of Bhagawan Baba paves a lighted path for those who wish to envision and create a corruption free country which stands on the strong foundation of Truth, Righteousness, Peace and mostly importantly the powerful emotion of Love. Despite the impossibility of the task, this attempt at a book review is to help the first timers to have a bird eye view of this intellectually and spiritually enriching management guidebook.

M-A-N-A-G-E-R:

On the occasion of the inauguration of the department of business management in the Prashanti Nilayam campus of Sri Sathya Sai Institute Higher Learning (of which He is the Founder Chancellor), Bhagawan expostulated in detail on every letter of the word 'manager' which would not only make one the manager of a factory but also the manager of the universe. Bhagawan's definition of a manager is the expansion of the word itself viz.:

M- Mind of man
A- Awareness of atman
N- Nature of Nations
A- Aspects of environment
G- Guidelines for goodness
E- Enquiry into ethos
R- Role of rules

Each of the letters and their particular expansions provide a holistic viewpoint on the prerequisites of a being a good manager. Bhagawan's definition takes into consideration not only the real-world knowledge required by a manager but also the far more important spiritual knowledge which enriches the soul and makes the foundation strong to be able to face any adversities (moral and otherwise). **M** for 'Mind of man' is an advise to people to pay heed to their thoughts since that becomes the root cause for all actions undertaken and they in turn decide our joys and sorrows. **A** for 'Awareness of atman' is the realisation and implementation of the knowledge, which provides the spiritual backing to human endeavours. It is the primal awareness of the all-pervasive Atman which is manifested in the entire creation and is the sublime truth and force of the world. **N** for 'Nature of nations' is about the practical knowledge that a manager should possess such as taking into consideration the nation that one is planning to set up his business or diversify. With the multinational corporation style of management being the order of the day and every business aiming to be global (and nowadays 'glocal') it is necessary for the modern manager to possess the knowledge about the nature, traditions and culture of the country concerned. That constitutes as the culture of the nation and Bhagawan says that every nation has a nature of its own and understanding that nature is crucial for the success of any endeavours undertaken. Following in the same vein of thought, **A** for 'Aspects of environment' is an advice to pay close attention to the elements of the surrounding environment of the area of operations i.e., whether it is suitable to the type of business being undertaken (for example, cotton mills require moist atmosphere) but not concluding only at that 'aspects of environment' also connotes about the company that man should keep around himself. Bhagawan emphasises on the importance of being only with such people who will help in the development of good values. **G** or 'Guidelines for goodness' is to remind people about their innate nature to do always the right thing which is due to the presence of the atman or conscience (as some would like to call it) in every being. Following of one's conscience will always result in the good of the individual and also others. **E** for 'Enquiry into ethos' is to make people realise the greatness of Indian ethos. Bhagawan emphasises on the emulation of the values adhered to by the great men of this country who led ideal lives to know as to how one should conduct oneself. Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba succinctly advices on two points with one letter i.e., **R** for 'Role of rules' is to highlight the importance of being disciplined in one's life and at the same time stress on the absolute necessity to keep up the standards set with regards to quality of the product. This is not only

important for ethical purposes but also for the fact that low quality products will take a beating in the market, along with tarnishing the brand image.

- **'Man' in Man Management and Self-development:**

"We should be concerned with 'Man Management'. The proper study of mankind is man."

Bhagawan has relentlessly reiterated about the management of 'self' as being the appropriate style of management. Bhagawan's stress on managing oneself before attempting to manage an organisation stems from the ubiquitous truth that the human capital of an organization is responsible for the effective utilisation of the other resources. The actions of man has varying range of impact i.e. one can see his impact right from the obvious results of major actions such as policies and decisions concerning the entire organisation to the subtle effect of his persona on the employees and the kind of atmosphere he creates in the workplace. Bhagawan particularly talks about the acronym 'MBA' to illustrate His point further. Bhagawan elaborates on MBA by talking about the expansion of it i.e. Masters of Business Administration. The word 'masters' here does not relate to the degree or qualification conferred by a university. The value of such degrees which only provide bookish knowledge and no training on the development of a strong character makes the upcoming managers only weak in the foundation and hurl them to the whirlpool known as the world without any anchor. Hence the word 'masters' here connotes the mastery of the self which includes control of mind, ceiling on desires, balance of senses, inculcating integral values such as honesty, righteousness, love for country, and morals etc. all of this should be done by persons occupying seats of authority.

- **Spirituality: The basis of all existence, even in business:**

Employee empowerment is the order of the day in the corporate world and is topic of discussion in every organisation. The realisation of the inherent divinity or the presence of the atmic principle in each and every one of us gives me the same feeling; it is an empowerment of a different kind, and is much more lasting as it the eternal truth (as stated by the Holy Scriptures).

The foundation of an organisation is based on the desire to make profits. How is it possible to integrate the Divine Principle into an entity whose existence is for materialistic purposes?

Is it really possible to make business 'divine'? The book provides further credibility to the reasoning that spirituality in business does not mean foregoing of profits but rather making the business style wholesome, sustainable and meaningful. Spirituality in management requires one to look inwards rather than outwards. It requires the performing of action without anticipating for the fruits. This in turn asks for a sense of detachment while living in the current world. This finally results in selflessness and an attitude of service to society which ultimately paves way for a sustainable way of life.

- **Spotlight on different facets of business management:**

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's philosophy on various matters with regards to effective and sustainable business management is centered on the individualistic effort to be put by leaders, managers, CEOs etc. Bhagawan's finishing touch to a holistic model of business development is showcased by His advice about the responsibilities of the manager in handling not only the 'internal' factors but also the organisational factors such as finance, marketing, human resources activities, and Total Quality Management etc. to ensure all round success. This is to make one realise that successful management requires mindfulness about the technical knowhow along with good inter personal and intra personal skills. The core management functions such as financial management, marketing, and communications (ancillary) etc. according to Bhagawan can become a spiritual *sadhana* if the guiding principle behind all the activities is the truth that the Divine Principle (Atman) pervades the entire universe and all beings in it. A prerequisite along with this guiding principle is the strict adherence to a strong value system with special emphasis on morality and ethics. This guiding principle provides the foundation for all business activities; the finer details for which are also mentioned by Bhagawan in His discourses.

- **Rural development:**

Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has always emphasized on the need for people to actively participate in the upliftment of the rural masses and in particular He has stressed on the great role that student (here management students) have to play in this mission. Most of the major projects undertaken by Bhagawan have been for the all-round, sustainable and holistic development of the villages in and around the areas of Puttaparthi. Bhagawan eschews an education which cannot cater to the needs of the poor. According to Bhagawan, true

education makes the students sensitive to the plight of those less fortunate than him (/her). His idea of rural development doesn't end or rather even begin with handing out loads of money to some arbitrary institution or NGO's or to fulfill the legal requirements for CSR activities. Bhagawan's idea of contributing to the rural society is to dedicate one's body, mind and soul to it. It should be considered as a divine task and a rare opportunity to do service. The chapter begins with the need to create awareness about rural development in a sustainable manner. A country can be called developed only if its food production unit is working well i.e. the rural areas on which the country depends for its sustenance. Bhagawan goes on to attribute the decline of 'quality' life in villages to the overall decline of morals and rampant laziness among the people of the village. Where in the yester years villagers would take pride in being self-sustaining (in fact provide sustenance to others) and wholesome in its outlook towards life, nowadays people are bent upon the idea of aping others i.e. village inhabitants are now interested in making quick money and taking shortcuts by taking a leaf from the book of their less scrupulous counterparts in the cities. They are eager to sell away their lands for constructions or growing of cash crops. Bhagawan calls out to the youth, urging them to move forward and burden their own shoulders with the troubles of these unfortunate *annadatas* and give them respite. He hails the youth of the country as the panacea for this grave illness in the society. Bhagawan places great faith in these young and brave hearts, but at the same time He provides pointers on how one should undertake such a task. He emphasizes primarily on the cleanliness not only of the surroundings but most importantly the cleanliness of the mind and soul of those offering a helping hand. Bhagawan also advises on the need to develop a sense of gratitude among those involved in the task for getting a chance to do something for the society. Bhagawan also mentions a sustainable rural development as the need of the hour; development should be such as to help the rural community to stand on its own feet. Therefore, primary efforts towards rural development should be in the areas of education, health with special emphasis on hygiene and sanitation and water supply which are the first roadblocks to not only growth but also for any other efforts put by anyone to develop an area.

Going back to the roots: Integration of Indian ethos and culture with modern business concepts:

As mentioned earlier, the integration of the beliefs, ideologies, values and culture of the parent nation in the management style is of utmost importance. Bhagawan's emphasis is apparent by the number of times he refers to the Indian scriptures for direct lessons of management which suit the temperament and nature of the Indian population. Bhagawan's ideology is particularly time sensitive as it comes to our aid right when the corporate scenario of our country is distressing. The advent of 'MNC' culture and the blind imitation of western methods of business are slowly eroding the country from all directions. The culture of a country is specific to it and is a complicated mixture of people's sentiments and is embedded in every part of the country. Ignoring its potency and force fitting of another way of life will lead to more number of problems than the gains earned. This is evinced from the growing number of cases of employees feeling burned out, stressful and also the failure experienced by management when trying to adapt foreign methods to Indian enterprises. A foreign organisation planning to setup business in India should do a thorough study of the complex and contradictory way of life lived by the people here. This should be done not only for ensuring smooth functioning of the organisation but also to understand the customer mentality.

Bhagawan also leans on the glorious ancient scriptures of our country to drive this point home. Bhagawan gives many examples from the various holy texts of our land to show how management policies could be derived from our culture and ethos. He provides excerpts from the scriptures and episodes from the lives of great men not only for the personal life but also for the development of a sustainable and suitable style of business management.

Other aspects of the book:

Man Management is the result of a highly committed team who made it possible for people across the globe to access this treasure trove of knowledge. It is worth mentioning that the book was published by Sri Sathya Sai Students and Staff Welfare Society situated in the abode of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba i.e. in Prashanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi, Andhra Pradesh, the dedication of the students and staff of Bhagawan's very own Institute adds a lingering sweetness to the work. The discourses delivered by Bhagawan on management in particular were spread over the

time period of many years and also at different occasions, further the discourses did not follow any particular sequence. It is a fact to be inspired by, that Bhagawan though multi linguistic, kept true to His motherland, mother tongue and delivered the speeches in Telugu. For easier accessibility and greater understanding the compiler translated the discourses into English despite the risk of losing in the resultant work that 'something' which can be only due to the original language of the discourse. It is to be noted that with the idea of elimination of redundancy and to help improve the relevancy in the reading material, the compiler has grouped similar topics under one unified title or chapters. The book consists of nine parts with 3-4 chapters in each part, on an average. The book opens with a charming photo of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba followed by a foreword from Prof. Vishwanath Pandit, the Vice Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in the year 2009. The foreword is followed then next by a message from the then Dean of School of Business Management, Accounting and Finance, Prof. U. Srinivasa Rao which is trailed by a succinct summary about Bhagawan and the works undertaken by Him. The next part of the book includes a preface by the compiler himself and a note from the publisher. After the contents page which displays the division of chapters and their unique titles, the true essence of the book is unwrapped with the prologue which is actually the inaugural address given by Bhagawan on the inauguration of the faculty of business management in the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in the year 1986.

Following the engrossing prologue are the chapters which are presented in a logical manner so as to prevent confusion and enable easier and systematic understanding for the reader. The content of the chapters are liberally laced with easy-to-understand examples, anecdotes and short stories (as told by Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba during the discourses) which not only drives the point of discussion home but also provides the book with pleasant interruptions for the reader to ruminate upon. A special mention of the 'points to ponder' section is a necessity since these bullet points at the end of every chapter gives the reader not only a chance to revisit the major points in the chapter but also really makes one ponder upon the ideas presented in the chapter. This leads to further internal probing which is essential for anyone who wishes to change and develop. All in all the book in its entirety is meant to uplift mankind, to encourage them to realise their true worth, their true divinity. It simply revives the pure desire to be true, to be good; which is after all the only identity of mankind.