
Spirituality in Indian Organizations

Gurinder Singh, Alka Maurya, and Veenus Jain

Man is a transitional being; he is not final... There is Power within that knows beyond our knowings; we are greater than our thoughts. (Sri Aurobindo)

1 What Is Spirituality?

Spirit means essence. It is beyond human and social discourses. Spirituality is about living inwardly and being in the present. Spirituality is the science of heart. It focuses on values such as honesty, compassion, co-operation, group harmony, dignity, patience and generosity. In general, it includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. When we learn to connect with it we will find everything we are seeking. Most amazingly, when we tune ourselves to the same frequency or vibratory plane we realize that we are all connected to each other through our hearts; we are all one.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, spirituality is something deeply religious, something relating to the spirit and sacred matters. There are many definitions of spirituality in different religions, many great leaders gave their own perspective of being spiritual and in today's world faith leaders have also defined spirituality and are guiding their followers on a spiritual path. In a nutshell, all the definitions of spirituality focus on the soul because defining spirituality without a soul doesn't make any sense.

India is a ground of immense spirituality. It is a territory, which has witnessed a lot of spiritual upheaval. Indian history is full of examples where powerful rulers and sovereigns suddenly arrive at a spiritually realized state and give up the

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material goods, status and supremacy they possessed to pursue the blessed path to true, inner sovereignty and freedom.

The Upanishads explain the concepts of *karma* (action), *samsara* (reincarnation), *moksha* (nirvana), *atman* (soul), *Brahman* (Absolute Almighty). They also set forth the prime Vedic doctrines of self-realization, yoga and meditation. The knowledge contained in the Upanishads is deemed to be higher knowledge as it deals with the knowledge of the self and the transcendental states of awareness. From the ancient times, the Upanishads attracted the attention of scholars from various religions and schools of philosophy. Jains, Buddhists and Hindus alike tried to understand and interpret them according to their own beliefs and traditions. The Bhagavad Gita is considered to be a summary of the knowledge contained in the Upanishads. The Jains believe in 24 tirthankaras who belonged to royal families and gave up kingship to become '*Jinendra*' (*Jina* means to conquer and *indra* means senses). This was the Jain manifestation of spirituality. It states that victory over one's senses is a higher goal than victory over people, land, treasure, kings and kingdoms.

When the British ruled the Indian subcontinent, many European and Indian scholars introduced the Upanishads to Europe and the rest of the world, drawing attention of scholars and philosophers alike.

In the modern world many leaders have advocated the path to spirituality. Mahatma Gandhi was a great leader who through his principles of non-violence, non-cooperation (i.e. non-cooperation with evil is as good as cooperation with the good), sacrifice, truth and righteousness set examples of spirituality for others to follow. Gandhi's philosophy focused on the spiritual liberation of man. He distinctly advocated that human welfare depends on the spiritual advancement of man, not on his material progress. Humans tend to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of life and set their eyes on money and power. This is a sheer blow to humanism. It neglects basic goodness. For Gandhi morality was more important than theology. "There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness." Therefore according to him there is truth in each and every religion. He argued for '*sadbhava*' (goodwill and tolerance). Swami Vivekananda is one of most admired spiritual leaders of India. The world knows him as an inspiring Hindu monk. His motherland regards him as the patron saint of modern India and a source of spiritual power, mental energy, strength-giving and open-mindedness. Swami Vivekananda, one of the great Indian thinkers, promoted *spiritual humanism*, which renders loving service to the Divine, seeing its presence in all beings. According to him, spiritual humanism embraces the whole of humanity, regardless of race, culture, country, religion, or social affiliation. Swami Vivekananda stressed that the fall of a country or culture is caused by its spiritual bankruptcy. In the same way, its rise depends upon spiritual awakening. Spiritual falling brings in its wake moral fall, moral fall brings intellectual blindness, and intellectual blindness brings material downfall.

In today's world many faith leaders are guiding people towards the path of spirituality. In India, Ramakrishna Mission, Art of Living, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Vipassana Meditation, Brahmakumaris and many more organizations are guiding

people on how to lead a stress free life full of inner contentment in the VUCA world.

2 Spiritual Organizations in India: Helping Humanity to Understand the Essence of Spirituality

2.1 Art of Living

The Art of Living (AoL) is an educational and humanitarian movement started by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in 1981. The organization is creating awareness about importance of spirituality among individuals and organizations. It is present in 155 countries, touching the lives of over 370 million people across the globe. The Art of Living is a multi-faceted organization with one of the largest volunteer bases in the world. Its international headquarters is in Bangalore, India. Outside of India, The Art of Living Foundation was formed in 1989 in the United States of America and in Germany. Since then, local centers have been established across the world. AoL offers programs focused on eliminating stress and experiencing inner peace based on Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's philosophy of peace: "Unless we have a stress-free mind and a violence-free society, we cannot achieve world peace." According to Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, "God is not someone sitting far away in the skies, he resides within us all. This is the essence of all religions—be it Vedanta, Sufism, Islam etc. In Christianity, it is said, that the kingdom of God is within you. . . Repose in yourself and you will experience waves of deep bliss arising within you that very moment". The AoL has spread peace across communities through humanitarian projects including conflict resolution, disaster relief, sustainable rural development, women's empowerment, prisoner rehabilitation, education for all, and environmental sustainability. According to a recent study conducted by doctors and researchers at the Fatebenefratelli e Oftalmico Hospital in Milan, Italy, SKY (*Sudarshan Kriya Yoga*), AoL's yoga-based breathing technique significantly reduces levels of anxiety and depression (Art of Living 2015a). The work of AoL is recognized all over the world and the founder, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, has received several international awards and recognition for his selfless service for the betterment of society. Some countries observe Human Value Week/Happiness Day in honor of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Art of Living 2015b).

2.2 Vipassana Meditation

Vipassana is a Buddhist meditation technique that aims for a complete understanding of three characteristics: 'dukkha' (suffering or un-satisfactoriness), 'anicca' (impermanence) and 'anatta' (not-Self). It is one of the India's most ancient techniques of meditation. It was rediscovered by Gautama Buddha more than 2500 years ago and was taught by him as a universal remedy for all ills.

According to the Vipassana Research Institute, the promoter of Vipassana Meditation in India, Vipassana is a part of Buddha's teaching and can be accepted

and applied by people of any background. The Buddha himself taught ‘Dhamma’ (the way, the truth, the path). He did not call his followers Buddhists; he referred to them as Dhammists (those who follow the truth). Vipassana is based on the belief that all human beings share the same problems, and that a pragmatic method can be universally practiced to eradicate these problems.

Vipassana means to see things as they really are. This is a logical outcome of mental purification. Vipassana is a way of self-transformation through self-observation. Vipassana enables us to experience peace and harmony: it purifies the mind, freeing it from suffering and its deep-seated causes. The practice leads step-by-step to the highest spiritual goal of full liberation from all mental defilements. Vipassana can be learned by partaking in a 10-day residential course under the guidance of a qualified teacher. The courses are conducted at established Vipassana centers and other places. For the duration of the retreat, students remain within the course site and have no contact with the outside world. They refrain from reading and writing, and suspend any religious practices or other disciplines. They follow a demanding daily schedule that includes about 10 hours of sitting meditation. While they observe silence with their fellow students, they are free to discuss meditation questions with their teacher and material problems with the management.

There are three steps to the training as depicted in Fig. 1 below.

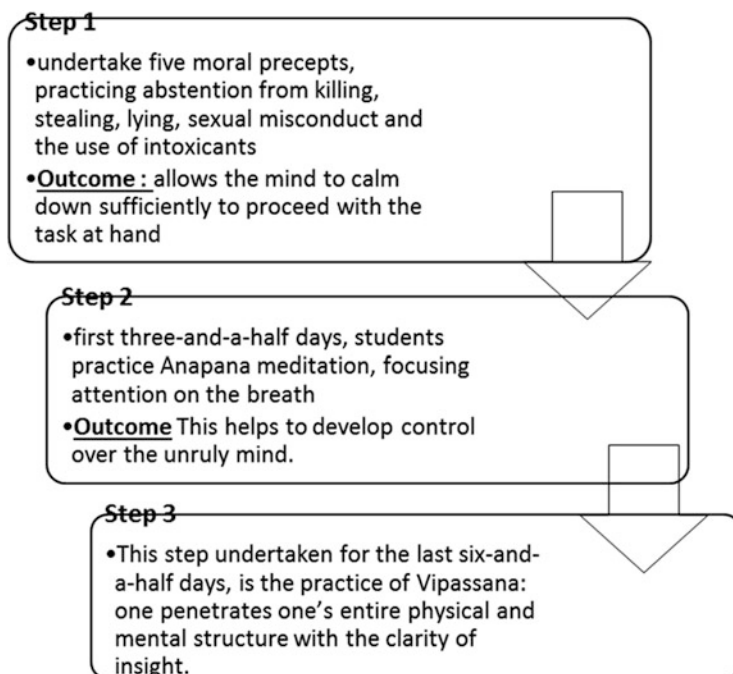


Fig. 1 Meditation during 10 day Vipassana course

The internationally renowned Vipassana guru Shri S.N. Goenka was invited to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland where he spoke to world leaders, including Bill Clinton, on true happiness.

2.3 Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are spiritual organizations engaged in humanitarian and social service activities. The organizations were founded by Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886), the great nineteenth century saint from Bengal, who is regarded as the Prophet of the Modern Age, and Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). These twin organizations have been silently working for more than a hundred years to catalyze the spiritual regeneration of humanity and propagate a non-sectarian and universal spiritual movement. The motto of the twin organizations is *Atmano mokshartham jagad hitayacha*, "For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world."

2.4 Brahma Kumaris

Prajapita Brahma Kumaris Ishwariya Vishwa Vidyalaya (also called Brahma Kumaris) is an international non-governmental spiritual organization with its headquarters located at Mount Abu, Rajasthan in India. Brahma Kumaris is a spiritual institution focusing on self-transformation through spiritual education. Various programs offered by Brahma Kumaris concentrate on re-discovering and developing human potential. This is done by providing a deep and clear understanding of self, God and human existence. The Brahma Kumaris' primary teaching is Raja Yoga meditation. Raja Yoga meditation replenishes mental and emotional energy thereby enabling individuals to develop new attitudes and responses to life. It empowers individuals with a clear spiritual understanding of self and connection with the Supreme Soul. The Brahma Kumaris offer various other courses for dealing with issues such as stress, failure in relationships, work-life balance etc. All these courses are offered free of cost and are based on the principles of Raja Yoga meditation.

3 Spirituality at the Workplace

Different authors have different viewpoints about spirituality in organizations. "Integrating spirituality into the workplace means creating a place where people can bring their whole selves, with all their talents and complex emotions; where there's enough safety so that people can speak the truth openly at meetings, rather than secretly in the hallway afterward; where there's an elevated sense of integrity. These ideas are not new, and may even seem obvious, but it's amazing how infrequently they are applied in the corporate environment and how harmful their

absence can be” (Marguerite 1999). The work environment these days is changing faster and more dramatically creating heightened stress. This leads people to look for more meaning in their daily lives. On an average we spend 8 hour a day at our workplace, if we add to it the time we spend commuting and attending meetings and conferences, the time spent at workplace goes up to 10 hour a day, which is 55% of our waking hours. On a highly stressful day at work the essence of an individual is lost in the number game, an unending effort to reach the targets. The countless hours that we spend in this stressful environment result in a need for renewal and fulfillment at the workplace. Therefore employees in this stressful environment dream of a workplace where they can attain the purpose of their life while enjoying their work. Moreover, in today's highly competitive global marketplace companies need to create and innovate continuously to succeed. This can be achieved only if employees are loyal, committed, balanced, trustworthy, responsible, take pride in their work and have the ability to lead business successfully in the complex environment. Therefore there seems to be a growing acknowledgment of a need for spirituality in the workplace. This is because a spiritual organization understands the emotional needs of its employees and strives to satisfy the needs of workers, customers and the community. A spiritual organization is stronger, more sustainable and is often quite profitable. Spiritual organizations provide a transparent atmosphere which promotes the expression of talent, brilliance, genius as well as sense of belongingness and contentment.

4 Spiritual Practices in Indian Organizations

Indian history is full of examples of great kings ruling the subcontinent only with the help of the strength and insight they gain from their spiritual practices. Asoka the Great began his reign by enlarging the kingdom his grandfather had established. He was successful and ruled almost the whole of India. But the battle of Kalinga resulted in such a loss of life that Asoka deeply repented, resulting in his spiritual transformation. Emperor Asoka put an end to his cruel ways and called off all military expeditions. He turned his efforts towards building schools, hospitals and spreading '*Dharma*'. The Dharma preached by Ashoka is explained mainly in terms of moral precepts, based on the doing of good deeds, respect for others, generosity and purity.

The contents of Asoka's edicts make it clear that all the legends about his wise and humane rule are more than justified and qualify him to be ranked as one of the greatest rulers. His decrees spoke of both a state and an individual morality. He hoped that the state morality upon which he based his administration would lead to a more just and spiritually-inclined society. He recommended and encouraged individuals to practice personal morality. Both these types of morality were imbued with the Buddhist values of compassion, moderation, tolerance and respect for all life.

The mighty mogul monarch Akbar became, Akbar the Great when he left fanaticism and integrated a secular and humanistic spirituality into his

administration. He rolled back Jazya (a tax levied by Islamic states on non-Muslim subjects) on the poor Hindus. He understood the spiritual healing capacity of music and made Tansen (one of the great Hindu Indian classical music composer, musician and vocalist) one of his Navratnas. (*Navratanas*—or “nine gems” was a term applied to a group of nine extraordinary people in an emperor’s court in India).

In this era of globalization, India has carved a place for itself on the world map. Indian companies now figure in the Fortune 500, Indians are figuring in Forbes’ list of billionaires, Indian companies are competing alongside global corporations and Indian IT professionals have created a niche for themselves in the world market. Employee satisfaction, retention, motivation are a few of the problems being faced by Indian companies while operating in this cut-throat competitive atmosphere. Regular training programs, compensation, rewards and increased salaries are few of the approaches adopted by companies in India to encourage loyalty of the workforce. In addition, Indian companies have realized the importance of spirituality for management practices and to create an atmosphere which is conducive for peaceful coexistence within an organization. Spiritually oriented organizations focus on the following seven activities:

1. Leadership practices that support growth and well-being of others.
2. Wellness programs for the employees. Wellness information displayed and distributed for the betterment of the employees.
3. Programs aimed at integrating work/family.
4. Programs that encourage personal and spiritual transformation.
5. Servant-leadership i.e. the intent to lead through service
6. Integration of core values and core business decisions and practices.
7. Practices to support the growth and development of all employees.

4.1 Spirituality at Workplace

Most of the companies in India observe “Wellness Week” where the emphasis is on the importance of physical, mental and spiritual aspects of employee health and better work environment. Employees have access to yoga lessons, aromatherapy, acupressure, weight-loss and dietary tips, clay pottery classes and tips on coping with workplace tension. Many organizations have a meditation room where employees can relax and let go of the stress from work pressure or other professional problems.

Many companies in India find that spirituality increases levels of employee retention. It also results in a more loyal workforce through forging strong bonds between the employers and employees. The objective for this move towards spirituality is also to equip personnel to cope with the work pressure, failure, competition and stress in today’s increasingly competitive and uncertain environment. Some of the companies that have institutionalized yoga and pranayama include Indian Railways, Intel, Snapdeal, Jabong, Infosys and Maruti Suzuki. In Mumbai, employees of Benzer get a 10-day break to learn the practice of

Vipassana. There are Vipassana centers in almost all parts of the world including USA and most European countries. Escotel, Oriental Insurance, Wipro, Dabur and Vam Organics are some of the companies who offer Vipassana retreats to their employees. Hero Honda Motors, TVS Motor Company, Satyam Computers, Hewlett Packard and Airtel have taken up Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation (TM) courses to improve employees' effectiveness, relationships and self-knowledge. Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a simple, natural, effortless practice whereby the mind easily and naturally comes to settle at the source of thought, Transcendental Consciousness, the source of all creative processes. Practice of TM settles down the individual's awareness evoking a unique state of restful alertness. The experience of Transcendental Consciousness brings the individual's latent creative potential to the forefront while dissolving accumulated stress and fatigue through a deeply restful state. The Maharishi Institute of Management has a separate cell that deals with corporate development programs. Companies such as ACC, Reckitt & Colman, Indian Petrochemicals Corporation, the Oriental Bank, SRF Ltd, Tata Tea and Tata Chemicals among others have benefitted from these programs. Eicher Consultancy Services holds personal growth, communication, yoga and meditation workshops for its employees. Mahindra & Mahindra provides Rational Emotive Therapy for stress-management. Rational Emotive Therapy is used to acquire attitudes and behaviors to be more peaceful towards ourselves, our families and neighbors, and ultimately, society (Varughese 2000). The Art of Living Foundation's Sudarshan Kriya is based on sahad yoga, combined with meditation and breathing techniques. They are gaining followers worldwide. Outside the corporate world, the foundation has offered numerous courses in troubled areas such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, India after the Gujarat earthquake, New York for those affected by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and in Asia in the aftermath of the recent tsunami disaster. Hughes Software Systems does not confirm employees until they have completed an Art of Living course. A study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences on 1000 senior executives in 25 companies who had done the Art of Living program had some interesting results. Around 88% of the respondents said they could handle stress better and deal with negative emotions. About 51% also felt that it enhanced their performance. Many organizations in India and abroad have benefited from AoL's programs for betterment of their employees.

AoL experts conducted programs for the employees of Mumbai fire brigade on the occasion of its 125th anniversary in February 2013. The AoL experts visited each fire station in Mumbai to conduct the Pranayama (breathing) lessons. The employees found the program very beneficial for dealing with stress and leading to a healthier life. They plan to continue the sessions in order to keep reducing stress in their lives (Times of India 2013). AoL sessions were conducted for the prisoners at Groenpunt Maximum Security prison in Free State province, South Africa. Many of the prisoners were very violent and had been convicted for rape, murder, smuggling drugs or abusing children. Many of them were HIV-positive and could expect to die in jail. Inside prison, violence was common among the inmates. The yoga sessions conducted by AoL experts helped the inmates to discover ways to calm themselves and adopt a more positive look at their lives, even if they never get out from behind bars (BBC News 2008).

In June 2015, Maruti Suzuki introduced sessions on spirituality by the Brahma Kumaris for all their 18,000 employees. Brahmakumari Shivani conducted the sessions on spiritual well-being. The aim of these sessions was to help the employees keep stress levels in control and avoid conflicts at work. Similar sessions were conducted by Brahma Kumaris at companies including Hero Honda Motors, Honda Motorcycle, Yamaha, Parle G, IFFCO, FCI, GAIL, Indian Oil, GMR, Spicejet, TCS, Wipro, Moser Baer, Honda Sael, Suzuki Powertrain, SBI and UBI (Economic Times 2014).

4.2 Spirituality Quotient (SQ): As Job Pre-requisite

Organizations are practicing spirituality to manage their Human Capital effectively. Right from recruiting new entrants into the organizations to talent retention, organizations are seeking to develop their spiritual dimension. Other than organizing the special training programs, the organizations are now looking for Spiritual Quotient (SQ) in aspiring candidates. Top management feels that people with high spiritual intelligence will be able to balance their professional and personal life more effectively. Moreover, an executive with a high SQ will look beyond profit margins and devote time to voluntary work and the betterment of organizations and employees. Senior management positions will require more SQ in addition to having high levels of IQ and EQ as jobs require creative insights (vision) and concern for ethical, environmental and larger issues.

4.3 B for Business S for Spiritual

Leading business schools in India are ardently promoting spiritual practices in business. These academic institutions have included courses on spirituality to equip their students to maneuver in a challenging, VUCA business environment. Many leading business schools started an elective course titled 'Self Incorporated', 'Human Values and Community Outreach' which draws on insights from spiritual texts like the Bhagavad Gita and applies them to a management context, promotes selfless community service and inculcates human values. Other schools have developed compulsory credit courses on topics such as 'The Science of Spirituality'. The objective of these courses is to equip students with qualities like internal cohesion, external resilience, ability to deal with stress and an ability to operate beyond the ego. Such qualities are required in today's world with its uncertain economy, job security and even volatile compensation packages (Economic Times 2013). Spiritual organizations, too, have opened management centers, including the Sri Sri University by Art of Living and Mata Amritanandamayi Math's Center for Value-Based Management Education in Coimbatore, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Maharishi Institute of Management and the Sri Sringeri Sharda Institute of Management. All these Institutes advocate yoga, pranayama and meditation and promote values such as social sensitivity, team spirit and the development of intuition and vision. Schools

and higher education institutes also have yoga and meditation sessions as a part of their curriculum, to ensure that spiritual foundations are laid in the early years.

5 Conclusion

When a person is engaged in a task, his or her intellect alone cannot ensure success. But the person should attempt a holistic approach where the body, mind and soul should be involved in the task. Organizations have now realized the importance of cultivating these values. They have made it part of their organizational responsibility to move towards a spirituality-based management system. Spirituality can help organizations to efficiently equip their employees to face the challenges in the VUCA world. In addition to hiring managers and leaders who have high spiritual quotient the organizations must focus on creating a spiritual culture within the organization enabling employees, on one hand to thrive in the VUCA world and, on the other hand, to help them be at peace from within. Organizations must focus on providing values and environment that can help the employees counter volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity with vision, understanding, clarity, and agility.

Reflective Questions

1. Explain spirituality as defined in Hindu Upanishads?
2. Discuss the role of organizations like Art of Living and Vipassana in promoting spirituality? How are programs offered by them beneficial to business organizations?
3. What initiatives have been taken by organizations in India to ensure peace and solace for their employees? Trace the impact of spiritual practices in Indian organizations operating in VUCA world
4. Critically analyze the need of preparing spiritually oriented professionals in the present era. Discuss the role of academic institutions in enhancing spiritualism in India?
5. Compare and contrast the role of SQ and IQ in managing business in VUCA world?

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