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TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KARMA YOGA

Individuals across organizations and roles are increasingly seeking a meaningful and fulfilling experience in their activities. Towards that, the Bhagavad Gita advises the practice of Karma Yoga. However, the conceptualization of Karma Yoga in extant management literature is shrouded in confusion with little agreement on its dimensionalities. In this paper, employing qualitative method, we offer an alternative conceptualization of the construct. Accordingly, we define Karma Yoga as a persistent positive state of mind that is characterized by absorption and service consciousness. Further the findings also suggest the importance of sense control and equanimity being the necessary prerequisites for individuals to practice Karma Yoga.

Keywords: *Karma Yoga, Bhagavad Gita, Happiness, Absorption, Service Consciousness, Sense Control, Equanimity, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda*

INTRODUCTION

The perennial craving of mankind is happiness. It's argued to be the prominent aspect of one's life with every fiber of the body humming in its realization (Ventegodt et al. 2003). The pursuit of happiness even engaged philosophers of yore like Aristotle (2000) who reasoned in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "happiness in particular is believed to be complete without qualification, since we always choose it for itself and never for the sake of anything else" (Book 1, p. 11). Similarly, Murray (1988) holds that "all human beings pursue happiness when unimpeded", it being a quest that is "embedded in human nature". Most of us believe that happiness is our birthright and would miss little chance towards obtaining the same (Moffitt Jr., 1938). One of the well-known enlightenment philosophers, John Locke (1894), in an influential essay notes that "the highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness", which he asserts "is the necessary foundation of our liberty". In fact, it shall not be erroneous to state that the expected 'eventual' outcome of any human activity out of volition is happiness, and it is arguably the extremely cherished goal in many societies (Diener, 2000).

In workplaces too, despite not being explicitly stated, happiness has been the subject of interest, symbolized by various constructs. The most important has been the construct of job satisfaction that has been extensively researched both as dependent and criterion variable (Brief, 1998; Fisher, 2010). Further, there had been a torrent of related constructs like affective commitment, employee engagement, growth, autonomy and self actualization that have served as surrogates to the broad concept of work place happiness (refer to Fisher, 2010 for an extensive review). The focus on workplace happiness has increased manifold post globalization for there has been an unprecedented increase in number of man-

hours spent by employees in their organizations. For e.g. the percentage of male workers (in their late 20s to early 40s) who work more than 60 hours a week in Japan, against the legally mandated 40 hours, exceeds 20% (Ogura, 2009). However, research suggests that such increased engagement is claiming its pound of flesh not only from the employees but also from the organizations, thereby discounting decades of research on workplace happiness related constructs. Employees and organizations in pursuit of economic superiority are in actuality positioned far from happiness that sometimes is expressed in acute psychological, health and social disorders. For e.g. one of the most infamous incidents of industrial violence recorded in recent times was in the premises of the car manufacturer Maruti Suzuki's plant located at Manesar (India), where the deputy general manager (Human Resource Management), Mr. Avnish Kumar Dev was murdered by a section of workers (Teltumbde, 2012). Similarly, the number of deaths by "Karoshi" (death by overwork) has been reportedly increasing at disturbing rates in Japan in recent years (Karunakaran, 2014). Further it has been estimated that approximately 20% of legal profession suffers from clinically significant level of substance abuse, depression, anxiety, or some other forms of psychopathology (Daicoff, 2008). All the above impose massive hindrances in efficient functioning of the organization by imposing unforeseeable costs. For e.g. Greenberg et al (1993) assessed the aggregate workplace costs attributed to employee mood disorders (major depression, bipolar disorder, dysthymia) to the tune of approximately US\$ 24 billion in 1990, while Wagner & Harter (2006) estimated the loss incurred by the US economy to be between US\$ 250 to US\$ 300 billion a year, which they attributed to lost productivity due to disengaged employees. Clearly, organizations are turning into furnaces of frustration. Srirangarajan et al. (2011) attributes the reason to "excessive consumerism" and "greed" that encourages "a skewed attention to mere economic criteria" in the organization which in turn leads to a disconnect from societal and environmental factors with employees sensing a hollowness. Similarly Singh (1999) laments, "survival and growth, more often than not at the cost of others, is contingent upon intense and sometimes negative competition coupled with degeneration in values with ends taking precedence over means". Thus it is not uncommon today to notice frustrations, tensions and anxieties, directed towards the job or the work environment in general, as a natural companion to every employee (Swaminathan et al. 2010).

Hence, off late, there is a growing demand for alternative approaches to work that may eradicate the experienced "hollowness" (Srirangarajan et al. 2011) within employees while converting the same to more satisfying, meaningful and happy endeavor. To this effect, renowned, wise, and authoritative individuals (for e.g. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 1980, 2001; Swami Vivekananda, 1896; Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 1995; Sri Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, 2002) have hailed Karma Yoga, enunciated in the Bhagavad Gita, as a panacea to all the problems that afflict the man engaged in action. The

Bhagavad Gita (literally meaning “The Song of God), which forms a part of the epic Mahabharata, is a conversation that takes place prior to the famous war of Kurukshetra, between Lord Krishna (referred to as “Bhagavan”, meaning “The God” in the text) and Arjuna, the warrior prince. Through examples and analogies, Krishna enlightens the disillusioned and enfeebled Arjuna, who is consumed by pre-battle remorse on the prospects of warring against his evil cousins and relatives, the nature and supremacy of duty as well as several philosophical tenets for everyday living (Jeste & Vahia, 2008). Thus the Bhagavad Gita is not just a concise description of Hindu philosophy, but also a compass to a meaningful life. According to Easwaran (1997), “there is no significant problem in life which cannot be referred to the Bhagavad Gita for a perfect solution”. In recent years, the Gita has been recognized as a perpetual source of wisdom in many fields such as psychiatry (Jeste & Vahia, 2008), management, administration, leadership etc. (Sharma, 1999), thus bringing it acceptability beyond Hindu religion and the Indian shores. Specifically, in the Western community, it is contributing to a steady wane of the influence of *The Art of War*, the Chinese political text that describes various strategies for assured victories in war (Business week, 2007).

It must be mentioned at this juncture that according to the Bhagavad Gita, there are three (or four) fundamental kinds of *yoga* (or “*way of life*”, Kauts & Sharma, 2009; “*device*” Mulla & Krishnan, 2006), any one of which is said to be effective in the attainment of human perfection and happiness (White, 1971). These include the *yoga* of selfless action (*karma yoga*), the *yoga* of devotion to God or Divine (*bhakti yoga*), the *yoga* of knowledge (*jnana yoga*), and (either independently or in conjunction with the others) the *yoga* of psychophysical control (*dhyana yoga*, known to the later Indian tradition as *raja yoga*). However, Karma Yoga, arguably the most commented theme of the Gita, shall be the construct of interest in this study since work is fundamental to every individual and is unavoidable (Gandhi, 1980/ Bhagavad Gita). Hence studying Karma Yoga shall enable us to identify more closely as well as examine discrepancies, if any, with the individual work practices prevalent in organizations. Moreover, since happiness and despair are argued to be the consequences of good or bad actions respectively, it is thus in one’s interest to be in cognizance of the triggers of such actions (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006) thereby increasing the relevance of studying Karma Yoga. This paper is thus divided to two distinct parts:

1. The first part discusses the extant academic literature on Karma Yoga, the limitations contained therein, and specifies the research question.
2. The second part elaborates the methodology utilized to identify the distinct dimensions of the Karma Yoga construct and discusses the relevance of such findings to management research and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is essential to note that while literature on Karma Yoga is in a nascent state in the realm of management research, yet the concept arguably remains the most widely discussed, commented yet misunderstood aspect of the Indian worldview (Mahadevan, 1958). This ought not to be surprising for the said concept is enshrined within the Hindu philosophy [i.e. functionally equivalent to “Indian philosophy” (Fenton, 1988)], which is characterized by an extraordinary degree of plurality (Hodge, 2004) in comprehension and practice. For e.g. Reat (1990) notes that even familiar concepts such as “Brahman” and “Dharma” can signify a broad range of divergent and distinct concepts among numerous spiritual schools within the religion. However, owing to our stated focus on workplace happiness in the current research, we restricted the scope of this review specifically to conceptualizations and studies on Karma Yoga directed at employees (workplace context).

As stated earlier, with the slow yet increasing popularity of the Bhagavad Gita towards addressing organizational problems in recent years (Sharma, 1999), there has been a growing interest among management researchers in exploring the concept of Karma Yoga. Thus Chakraborty (1993) asserts the same to be energy conserving and mind purifying for it urges one to work for a cause higher than one’s ego. Similarly, while affirming that a belief in Indian philosophy (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006) or Indian worldview (Mulla & Krishnan, 2009) is a necessary condition for practicing Karma Yoga, the concept is defined by them as a “technique for intelligently performing actions”, or a “technique for performing actions in a manner that the soul is not bound by the effects of the actions” (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006; Mulla & Krishnan, 2007).

Moving further, the operationalization of the construct differs widely across studies. Hence while Narayanan & Krishnan (2003) provide a two factor conceptualization of the construct, i.e. *doing one’s duty* and *not being attached to the outcomes*, Menon & Krishnan (2004) conceptualize a four factor model comprising of the dimensions of *significance of work*, *successful work*, *detachment from work* and *setting an example*. In later years, Mulla & Krishnan (2006) argued for a separate two factor model of Karma Yoga comprising of the dimensions of *duty orientation* and *absence of desire for rewards*, however they later revised the same to a three factor model (Mulla & Krishnan, 2009) by including *equanimity* as a third dimension of Karma Yoga.

Karma Yoga has been found to relate extensively with transformational leadership, emotional intelligence and spirituality (Mulla & Krishnan, 2007, 2008, 2009). Further Srirangarajan et al (2011) assert that the practice of Karma Yoga would lead to a win-win situation for the employee and the business

organization. While the employees shall be rewarded with job satisfaction, personal growth and fulfillment, the organization experiences higher productivity and quality performance.

A critical review of the above discussion reveals that the operationalization of Karma Yoga lacks consensus, which can render research and findings involving the same a suspect. We noticed that the earlier attempts towards operationalization were sketchy and simplistic with dimensions imposed than theorized. For e.g. Narayanan & Krishnan (2003) cared little to explain the rationale guiding their derivation of the dimensions, i.e. *doing one's duty* and *not being attached to outcomes*. Similarly Menon & Krishnan (2004) provide no basis for their four-factor operationalization of Karma Yoga. Mulla & Krishnan (2006), in a seemingly comprehensive attempt, did present a more reasoned operationalization of the construct, deriving the dimensions of *duty orientation* and *absence of desire for rewards* from a content analysis of Gandhi's (2001) interpretation of Bhagavad Gita. However basing the same solely on Gandhi's interpretation resonates an inherent subjectivity that demands a relook. The later attempts are in effect modifications of Mulla & Krishnan's (2006) study, with frequent inclusion and exclusion of factors sans explanation. Thus, Mulla & Krishnan (2009) added equanimity as a third dimension of Karma Yoga, while in another study (i.e. Mulla & Krishnan, 2008), they abandoned equanimity and stuck to their original two factor conceptualization (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006). Surprisingly, the same authors re-introduced equanimity as a third dimension of the construct in a subsequent study (Mulla & Krishnan, 2012).

Thus it's evident that there exists a dearth of clarity on the dimensional structure of Karma Yoga in the management literature, which this research shall attempt to resolve. Consequently we state below the research question that shall help guide the direction of this study:

Research Question 1(RQ1): What are the dimensions of Karma Yoga?

METHODOLOGY

To uncover the various dimensions inherent within the concept of Karma Yoga, we embraced qualitative research methodology. The philosophy underlying qualitative research is based on the assertion that product and processes flow from the data than pre-established theory and frameworks (Glaser, 1992). It is principally employed towards development of concepts rather than applying them (Wilson, 2006), thereby positing the same as relatively more appropriate in the present study where identification of interacting constructs forms the principal objective. Further, since Karma Yoga is an evolving construct in management literature, with its morphological nature in disarray, we believe qualitative methods shall help light up the grey areas prevalent in the construct.

Thus we reviewed five texts, authored by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, and Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, that discuss extensively the concept of Karma Yoga. The individuals described are widely acknowledged to be authorities on the specifics and message of Bhagavad Gita. For e.g. Easwaran (1997) recognized Gandhi as a Karma Yogi (one who practices Karma Yoga) who not just preached the Bhagavad Gita but also lived by its tenets. Similarly Swami Vivekananda is hailed as an “iconoclastic ascetic” (Jawed, 2007) and is credited with the introduction of Vedanta to the western world. Swami Sivananda Saraswati, founder of The Divine Life Society, is an acclaimed preacher and practitioner of yoga, as well as the author of over 200 books on the subject. Finally Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of Self Realization Fellowships, is hailed as an illumined sage and seer in many circles (Chopra, 2013), who introduced many westerners to the path of meditation. The specific texts authored by the above luminaries that we adopted for this research are *The Bhagavad gita* (Gandhi, 1980), *The Gospel of Selfless Action* (Gandhi, 2001), *Vedanta Philosophy: Eight Lectures on Karma Yoga* (Vivekananda, 1896), *The Practice of Karma Yoga* (Sivananda, 1995) and *God Talks with Arjuna – The Bhagavad Gita* (Yogananda, 2002).

Each of these texts was carefully read in entirety by individual authors and references, explanations, insinuations etc. pertaining to Karma Yoga were isolated and noted elsewhere in verbatim for further investigation.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A large amount of data (sub texts) was gathered from the texts, which were analyzed further in two steps as elaborated below.

In Step 1, the data was re-read in seclusion from their source, and organized into broad thematic segments derived from reflection on the same. The broad segments thus identified were labeled as “Experience” and “Pre-requisites”. While “Experience” consisted of all those statements and sentences that discussed, defined, explained or described the construct of Karma Yoga, “Pre-requisites” comprised of those statements that indicated the psychological and physical training necessary on part of the individuals to practice Karma Yoga. After a discussion on the suitability of the above categorization between the authors, the second author independently repeated the process of classifying the sub-texts under the above listed broad thematic segments. The consensus between the authors was determined to be more than 90%. On sub-texts where consensus was not reached, the discussion emerged and continued between the authors till all of them were assigned to either of the two broad themes. Thus, an independent evaluation of the process was incorporated to reduce subjective interpretation of the results.

In Step 2, data encapsulated within each of the broad categories was examined further, mutually by both the authors, to uncover probable hidden themes and concepts. This is to derive a more comprehensive meaning from the data. The authors engaged in an extensive discussion between themselves while doing so, sometimes reverting to the original text to gain additional clarity. Initially the data organized underneath “Experience” was studied repeatedly, which in turn resulted in recognition of two smaller meaningful chunks (Leech et al, 2007), which we labeled as *absorption* and *service consciousness*. Similarly data enlisted under “Pre-requisites” were found to be separable to two themes – *sense control* and *equanimity*.

DISCUSSION

The framework presented here begins with defining the two dimensions of Karma Yoga that emerged from this research, followed by a description on the “Pre-requisites” necessary for being a Karma Yogi. Examples from the five texts as well as existing theoretical insights are used to illuminate the concepts. Here pure forms of the identified concepts are discussed, however it ought to be noted that individuals may display various levels of the same in actuality.

Dimensions of Karma Yoga

Based on our findings, understanding and reflection from the study, we define Karma Yoga as a persistent positive state of mind that is characterized by *absorption* and *service consciousness*. Below, we discuss each of these dimensions:

ABSORPTION

Absorption may be comprehended as a state of full concentration and deep engrossment in one’s work (Schaufeli et al. 2002). Many authors have indicated its synonymy with “flow” (for e.g. Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Schaufeli et al 2002) which is defined as a state of optimal experience that is characterized by focused attention, clarity of mind, mind-body unison, effortless concentration, complete control, loss of self-consciousness and intrinsic enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Individuals seem to focus less on others and hence more engrossed in activities in hand while experiencing a state of transcendence and a loss of time consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It’s the state of “total attention” where all mental resources are engaged (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). Individuals high on absorption possess the ability to “forget” their surroundings, by focusing attention on a single object, while ignoring other stimuli (Kreutz et al. 2007). However, it must be noted that the objects of absorbed attention need not be entirely internal events (for e.g. a memory), but can also be external, like a sunset (Tellegen &

Atkinson, 1974). We provide below selected excerpts from a reviewed text that suggests the emergence of absorption as one of the dimensions of Karma Yoga:

“The rightly guided devotee is intensely active in a divine way, disengaging his mind from restlessness and desires. By following moral principles, bodily discipline, practice of life-force control, meditation, spiritual service by interesting others in the divine path, interiorization of mind, and samadhi (ecstasy), the true student lifts himself from the eddies and whirlpools of wrong activities and rides the crest of the rhythmic waves of good activities toward the vibrationless inactive state of Spirit.” (Yogananda, 2002)

“The idle slothful man is helpless; his soul is ruled by body and mind. The ordinary man cannot help being active, voluntarily or involuntarily; but he is restlessly active and actively restless. The calm yogi can whirl his body and mind into intense action without being identified with them, and can then instantly return to his inner action-free state of meditative communion with Spirit. He is ever calmly active and actively calm.” (Yogananda, 2002)

SERVICE CONSCIOUSNESS

Service consciousness may be understood to originate from a deep conviction on the interconnectedness of various beings in the universe, i.e. feeling of being part of something bigger than the self (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), and hence the felt responsibility of each to look after the welfare of others selflessly. It means remaining sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, which in turn must lead to opening up of one's arms for providing comfort (material, physical, psychological or spiritual) in a genuine feeling of oneness of all life (Badrinath, 2006). It's being compassionate while being content (Vivekananda, 1896), with the desire to work intelligently, ambitiously and keenly not for personal gain but for welfare of others (Yogananda, 2002). Easwaran (1999) too affirms that it is “not to think about ourselves, not to dwell upon ourselves, not to brood upon ourselves, but to live for the good of all” and “to turn purely personal passions into a universal passion for welfare of all”, thus providing meaningfulness to one's work (Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, 2003). The dimension of service consciousness largely resembles the dimension of duty orientation (Mulla & Krishnan, 2012; Hannah et al. 2014) that represents an individual's volitional orientation to loyally serve other members of the group, to strive and sacrifice to accomplish the tasks and missions of the group, and to honor its codes and principles (Hannah et al. 2014). However the scope of the term “group” may differ across individuals depending on the breadth of their identity. Thus if a person consider oneself as an offspring, then her/his duty to her/his parents is supreme. Alternatively, if one identifies oneself as a citizen of the nation, then the duty towards one's nation gains precedence (Mulla & Krishnan, 2012). Below we present some excerpts from one of the

reviewed texts to illustrate the emergence of service consciousness as one of the dimensions of Karma Yoga:

“The highest ideal is eternal and entire self-abnegation, where there is no “I” but all is “Thou”, and whether he is conscious or unconscious of it, Karma Yoga leads a man to that end.” (Vivekananda, 1896)

“...Now you see what Karma Yoga means; even at the point of death, helping any one, without asking questions. Be cheated millions of times and never ask a question and never think of what you are doing. Never vaunt of gifts to the poor or expect their gratitude but rather be grateful to them for giving you occasion of practicing charity to them...” (Vivekananda, 1896)

PRE-REQUISITES FOR KARMA YOGA

Since Karma Yoga calls for unparalleled dynamism (Yogananda, 2002), with a demand for “intense activity” (Vivekananda, 1896) on the part of the individual, it is likely to result in phenomenal depletion of energy as well as burnout. Evidence does exist to suggest that intense interaction and psychological engagement with work leads to burnout (Leiter & Schaufeli, 1996). Further Maslach & Leiter (2008) suggest that both increased workload depletes the capacity of people to respond to the demands of the job thereby causing exhaustion. To counter this, all the texts reviewed by us advise the practice of *sense control* and *equanimity* by the individual desirous of being a Karma Yogi. They assert that such practices shall ensure conservation, expansion and meaningful utilization of one’s physical and mental energy, thus enhancing the Karma Yogi’s tolerance for uncertainty. To sum up Sivananda (1995) asserts forcefully “he who has reduced his wants and controlled his *indriyas* (sense organs) can do Karma Yoga”. The concepts of *sense control* and *equanimity* are detailed as follows:

SENSE CONTROL

Sense control is not to be understood as denial of sensory inputs, rather it is a conscious mental hold on all the senses organs from participating in senseless indulgence, which if left unchecked, jangles the nervous system, adds to the restlessness of mind and clouds judgments (Easwaran, 1999). Sivananda (1995) asserts that a prospective Karma Yogi must make efforts to calm the surging, bubbling emotions and the impulses. One must destroy all unnecessary, useless and vain thoughts, which in turn shall add to one’s reserve energy. Only a careful discrimination of the importance and utility of the numerous competing sensory inputs, trying to invade the mind through the sense organs, and thus limiting their approach can help limit the emergence of such vain thoughts (Gandhi, 1980/Bhagavad Gita). Gandhi labeled the same as *Brahmacharya* and emphasized that in its absence, the individual shall be devoid of strength physically and mentally (Gandhi, 1932; Lal, 2000). Thus physical and mental control ought not

to be relaxed ever on the sense organs towards which Yogananda (2002) advises moral and bodily disciplines. Below we present selected excerpts from the one of the analyzed texts to illustrate the importance of sense control:

“If we make the senses dance as we wish, instead of ourselves dancing as they wish; we would be directors of the drama of life. Even the evil-minded Duryodhana asks his warriors to remain in their positions and protect the patriarch Bhishma. If, likewise, we protect the director of the drama, who dwells within us, play our part in accordance with his instructions, the director would not become weak.” (Gandhi, 1980)

“Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that he who controls the senses— passionately beats them down into submission and reins them in, as we do a horse— and sits meditating on Him, self-controlled, is a man established in samadhi.”(Gandhi, 1980)

EQUANIMITY

In simple terms equanimity may be understood as being emotionally undeterred by the success or failure of one’s undertaking. A person of equanimity is disinterested in happiness as well as undisturbed by sadness. Such an individual is in a continuous struggle to remain mentally equipoise, where she/he tolerates the sensory distractions and consciously refuses to be led by them, for she/he realizes that indiscriminating reciprocation shall lead to loss of psychological equilibrium, thereby resulting in an unfocussed and unstable mind with diminished intellect, that in turn lowers the probability on the part of the individual to experience peace (Gandhi, 1980/Bhagavad Gita). Accordingly the actions and reactions of the equanimous individuals are seldom guided by “personal and visceral emotions” (Astin & Kneen, 2006). Faced with hardship, they engage in a psychological exercise of making meaning from the experience (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011). They attempt to maintain “a sense of deep composure and centeredness” through engaging in a continuous “search for the silver lining” in a difficult experience by reframing the situation, which in turn may lead to a more examined and less reflexive constructive action (Astin & Kneen, 2006). We present below a few of the many instances from our review, which helped us identify and characterize equanimity as one of the pre-requisites of Karma Yoga.

“He should have a cool and balanced mind. He should have presence of mind also. He should have equal vision. He should rejoice in the welfare of others. A man who is easily irritated and who can be easily offended over trifling things is absolutely unfit for the path of Karma Yoga.” (Sivananda, 1995)

“How can a man of luxury, with his Indriyas revolting, serve others? He wants everything for himself, and wants to exploit and domineer over others. Another qualification is that he must have a balanced mind. He must be free from Raga-Dvesha (likes and dislikes) also.” (Sivananda, 1995)

“Worldly people are generally elated by success and depressed by failure. Elation and depression are attributes of mind. If you want to become a real Karma Yogi in the right sense of the term, you will have to keep a balanced mind at all times, in all conditions and under all circumstances.” (Sivananda, 1995)

PROPOSITIONS

The above discussion may be summarized in two propositions as stated below:

Proposition 1: Karma Yoga is a positive persistent state of mind that is characterized by *absorption* and *service consciousness*

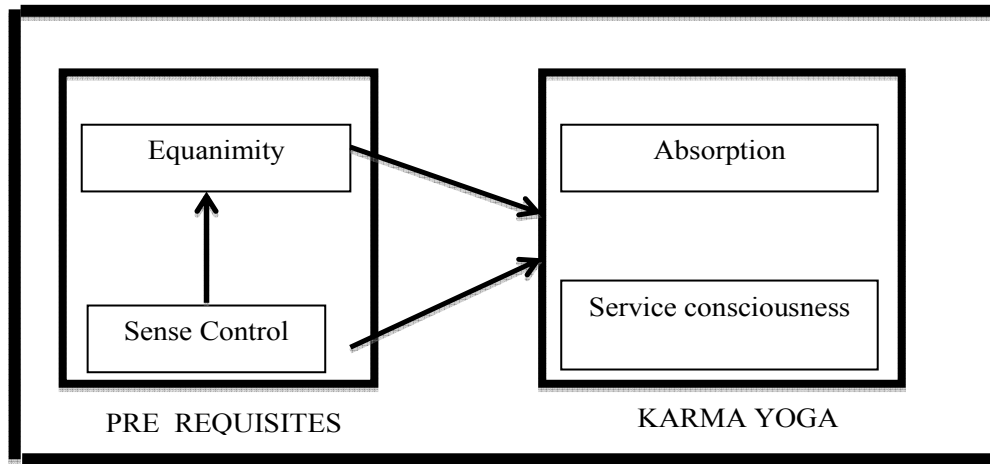
Proposition 2: *Sense control* and *equanimity* are energy preserving pre-requisites that are related positively to Karma Yoga.

A critical look at the discussion on sense control and equanimity reveals that the degree of equanimity experienced is contingent upon the control one has over the sense organs. Since mental states have been argued to be in a causal relationship with the sensory inputs (Block, 1980), limiting the latter shall help limit the former, thus freeing the mind to apply itself on the work at hand. This is corroborated by Yogananda (2002), who argues that the man of sense control can abandon attraction and aversion alike, the root cause of entanglement of mind, thereby using his obedient, unprejudiced, unentangled senses to work rightfully and joyously. Accordingly, based on the above flow of thoughts, we are inclined to believe that equanimity shall mediate the relationship between sense control and Karma Yoga. Thus:

Proposition 3: *Equanimity* is likely to mediate the relationship between *sense control* and Karma Yoga

Fig. 1 summarizes the above discussion in entirety.

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF KARMA YOGA



CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As elaborated earlier, the existing conceptualizations of Karma Yoga are at best nebulous, with little effort directed towards establishing the construct’s morphological characteristics. There were disagreements on the nature and number of dimensions, which varied across studies. Hence the primary motive underlying this research was to uncover the nature of the Karma Yoga construct. Employing a qualitative approach, we reasoned that Karma Yoga constitutes the sub-constructs of *absorption* and *service consciousness*. While *service consciousness*, through its representation as duty orientation (Mulla & Krishnan, 2012), had been argued to be a dimension of Karma Yoga in its earlier conceptualizations, it is the emergence of *absorption* as an additional dimension in this research that constitutes a major contribution. Thus Karma Yoga is an energetic involvement by individuals where languor is denied and energy is channeled discretionally in selfless actions.

Apart from the above, the study diverges from the existing literature in number of ways. First, the ambiguity over the presence and position of “Equanimity” as a dimension in the conceptualization of Karma Yoga has been addressed. Presenting appropriate rationale, we had argued that equanimity is a pre-requisite to Karma Yoga, much against Mulla & Krishnan’s (2007) proposition. Second, our conceptualization of Karma Yoga does not limit its practice to individuals who believe in the Indian Worldview (Mulla & Krishnan, 2009). Rather our conceptualization is consistent with the Bhagavad Gita (Gandhi, 1980), which asserts on universality of work, and hence the universality of Karma Yoga, thereby

opening the gift of happiness at work to every individual across races, organizations and nations. Third, we diverge from the existing conceptualizations by anchoring our theory on a relatively “larger” sample in order to overcome the usual shortcoming of inherent subjectivity that plaques such qualitative methods.

Future research may focus on validating the conceptual framework thus presented by cross verifying with other interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita. Further, anchored on the provided theoretical base, efforts to construct and validate an instrument to assess Karma Yoga may be initiated. Finally, the relevance of this conceptualization needs to be empirically verified using quantitative methods, thereby contributing significantly to the understanding of Karma Yoga among academicians and practitioners.

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Abstract: <i>Individuals across organizations and roles are increasingly seeking a meaningful and fulfilling experience in their activities. Towards that, the Bhagavad Gita advises the practice of Karma Yoga. However, the conceptualization of Karma Yoga in extant management literature is shrouded in confusion with little agreement on its dimensionalities. In this paper, employing qualitative method, we offer an alternative conceptualization of the construct. Accordingly, we define Karma Yoga as a persistent positive state of mind that is characterized by absorption and service consciousness. Further the findings also suggest the importance of sense control and equanimity being the necessary prerequisites for individuals to practice Karma Yoga.</i> Keywords: Karma Yoga, Bhagavad Gita, Happiness, Absorption, Service Consciousness, Sense Control, Equanimity, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda	
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