

# Work and its impact on a wise person<sup>1</sup>

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Nobody can run away from work. Even abstaining from doing any work is also a form of work as it will invariably create work for others. Therefore it is not surprising that all of us are “busy” with some work or the other. It is also therefore natural that in several of the conversations between a pair of individuals, the mention of the type of work and its impact will be a common feature. Two housewives will exchange notes on the nature of the work and the challenges, so will two senior professionals and two students. Since work is so fundamental to all of us it is important to take stock of the impact of work on us. Let us begin by understanding the current situation in some detail.

## Impact of Work – Today’ situation

From what we hear, see and experience it appears that today’s work situation is not very rosy. There are many indications to this. For a number of us, work leaves a stressful impact on us that we develop health problems. Many people complain job burnout and mental stress and tension on account of work place related issues. Several others increasingly complain that they are deprived of meaning at their work place. It is all about chasing targets and meeting deadlines that it does not leave a good taste at the end of the day. We seem to get tired, feel overwhelmed with workplace demands and look for a way to escape the clutches of work. Another aspect of work is that it is “boring”. Students, people engaging in household chores and several others engaging in several other types of work share this dominant view.

All these have led us to develop certain perspectives about work and its impact on us. Some of them are as follows:

- Work can make us very tired and will slow us down. This is perhaps the reason that many of us are always busy with work and yet do not accomplish as much commensurate to the extent we claim to be busy in work.
- Work is the major source of drudgery and we need to find ways and means to get away from it. That is why modern society has adopted a model of “week end getaways” to address this problem. During the weekends we go to shopping malls, movies, picnic spots and mountaineering and spend time leisurely. By seeking external pleasures we believe that we can get ourselves relieved of the drudgery. Ironically, even the indulgence into this leisure is becoming drudgery. Also once we return to work, drudgery also returns.

Is this the way work affects the individuals? Is there an alternative perspective to this? Why this is happening and what is the remedy for this situation? Since *Bhagavad Gitā’s* core teachings are pertaining to the manner we need to approach work, it will be interesting to

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<sup>1</sup> Mahadevan, B. (2014). "Work and its impact on a wise person", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 12 (3), November, 2014, pp 17 – 19.

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know what Lord Krishna has to say on this issue. Let us take a look at one *śloka* in Chapter 4 in some detail to get alternative perspectives on this issue.

There are occasions in our life when time passes off so fast when we are engaged in an activity that we don't realize it. This experience can be articulated in a different manner viewed from a perspective of work. It appears as though we have not been engaged in any work, and therefore we are fresh, energetic or cheerful.

### **Work – No Work Paradox**

Lord Krishna introduces a paradoxical statement pertaining to work and no work to capture the essence of this and perhaps suggests that this how we can identify great work being done. He says that it is important for a person to develop a unique perspective about work which will enable him to see “no work” in the work he/she is engaged in (*karmaṇi akarma*) and work in “no work” (*akarmani ca karma*). Lord Krishna further suggests that such a person is wise among the human beings (*buddhimān manuṣyeṣu*), a composed person (*yuktah*) and will be in a position of having all the work done (*kṛtsna-karma-kṛt*). We need to first resolve the paradox of work – no work.

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येद् अकर्मणि च कर्म यः ।

स बिद्धिमान् मनुष्येषु स युक्तः कृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ॥ ४.१८

*karmani akarma yah pashyet akarmani ca karma yah  
sa buddhimaan manushyeshu sa yuktah kṛtsna-karma-kṛt 4.18*

### **Resolving the Paradox**

How can one find “no work” in work? The subtle point is when someone thoroughly enjoys the work that he or she is doing, then this is bound to happen. We have our personal life experiences on this aspect. When we get into deep sleep (*susupti*) we feel exactly this way. After a 5 hour deep sleep, we get up with a feeling of having slept very little (actually we feel little time only has passed, but the reality is a lot of time has passed!). When we watch the final of the T20 cricket match in which India is playing, we have the same feeling. We do not know how the time passed by. There are other examples like watching the movie of our favourite star or reading the new novel of the favourite author. A serious and involved researcher spending 5 hours in his laboratory working on something and forgetting his lunch is also another example. In all the above cases, there is no trace of the work and its impact on us. That is why even in the thick of work the effect of it is as though there is “no work”.

Finding work in “no work” points to the need to reach to the subtle aspects of work. What apparently is “no work” indeed is, most of the times, at the centre of great work and we need to develop this level of detail and keenness in observation. When a fan is running, the electricity is not running but is behind the act of the fan running and blowing the air. Similarly, when the engine of a train is running from Bangalore to Chennai, the diesel is not running but causing the engine to run. The common theme in these two examples is that mere superficial understanding of work may not reveal the true picture. Essentially the “no

work” aspect of every work is indeed the substratum and prime mover behind the work. Therefore, a search for the work aspect of an apparent “no work” will help us develop deeper understanding of the work and its implications. It also makes us very reflective.

### **Relieving us from the impact of work**

The key message in this *śloka* is that discovering the true joy of work happens only when the outcomes of work do not impact us anyway. Therefore, our journey to address work related problems does not lie in weekend getaways or simply running away from work. Nor can we address them using “a carrot and a stick” formula. We need to ask what makes us do work that will not produce any negative impact on us. A vast portion of *Gītā* addresses this aspect through a set of ideas known as *karma yoga*. Lord Krishna’s message on this is loud and clear. Work with “what is in it for me” makes us very stressful and tired. If we can take out “what is in it for me”, we will solve this problem. We can achieve this only when we develop *īśvara arpaṇa buddhi*.

This allows us to set targets and goals pertaining to various aspects of work that we do both in our individual life and professional life. It will also allow us to out in the best foot forward, commit all our resources wholeheartedly and work hard. However, it will endow us with *bhagavad prasāda buddhi* also. This is nothing but a mindset that when the results fructify, we will have the grace to take the results with folded hands, notwithstanding whether the results are favourable or otherwise.

The day we succeed in developing these traits and approach work, we will be a composed person and ready to take on anything that comes our way as Lord Krishna pointed out in the *śloka*. It will take us truly in the right path and help us realize the maxim that work can be as good as “no work”.