

## PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA, ITS BELIEF AND INFLUENCE IN INDIAN WORKPLACE

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### ABSTRACT

*Karma is a universally known and widely acknowledged Indian philosophical concept. Its impact is often accepted by individuals in various forms, in both personal and professional lives. This paper, therefore, aims to study the belief in the philosophy of karma and its influence in the Indian workplace. This is studied through the responses recorded over a questionnaire by professionals belonging to various age groups, backgrounds, and fields. The questions considered here deal with, how strongly people believe in the philosophy of karma, to what extent they attribute the events (good or bad) occurring in their life and other peoples' lives to this theory, time period in which the fruits of one's actions are borne, belief in rebirth, whether the impact of karma is believed to be limited to single life or not, and the belief in the goal of humans to be free from the cycle of birth and death. Through these basic questions, an attempt is made to know the extent to which the belief of the people is firm in the philosophy of karma, and its related concepts.*

**Keywords:** Karma, Belief, Influence, Indian Workplace.

### Introduction

The philosophy of *karma* is a distinguishing and inherent part of the Indian philosophical system. It comprises of two basic factors namely, *karma*(action) and *karma-phala* (the result of an action), according to which everyone reaps the fruit of their actions. Consequently, it can be defined as the principle of actions performed, and their results that had been / shall be / are being obtained. Also, the difference in the time of the fruition and performance of acts remains a mystery. Since *karma* is identified to be an eternal law pervading the entire universe, it is also associated with rebirth. It must be noted, no action can be nullified, though it can be performed without the desire of result (*Nishk ma karma*). Thus, the points of concern are, can it be determined whether people truly believe in the philosophy of *karma* or not? how we may know whether we are reaping the fruits of our past actions or not? how this principle works? how *karma-phala* is provided? if rebirth is true and this is not our first birth? also, if rebirth is true, freedom from it is possible or not? Though an answer to all of these questions cannot satisfy every human psyche, yet they play an important role in forming the belief of people towards *karma* and *karma-phala*. The response towards this philosophy is further the cause of the attitude of individuals, influencing their morals, ethics, and forming an important part of their behaviour at their workplace. A workplace is characterized by professionalism, commitment, ethics, organizational aims, performance, deadlines, laying pressure on professionals at the individual level for their performance. As a result, it can be termed as a place with the regular demand of *karma* with the equal intensity of the expectation of results. Individuals may find it tempting to take the steps which are unethical, wrong, or not recommended for desired outcomes, or they may follow the righteous path and may fail to obtain the desired outcome.

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*Karma* has a special impact on the Indian mind and a special place in the Indian lifestyle. Being an eternal and highly involved principle, it is necessary to understand its philosophical nature so as to know its implications and understand the extent of its application. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan defined *karma* as follows:

*Karma* has a cosmic as well as psychological aspect. Every deed must produce its natural effect in the world; at the same time it leaves an impression on or forms a tendency in the mind of man. It is this tendency or *sa sk ra* or *v sana* that inclines us to repeat the deed we have once done. So all deeds have fruits in the world and effects on the mind. So far as the former are concerned, we cannot escape them, however much we may try them. But in regard to mental tendencies we may control them.<sup>i</sup>

*Karma* as stated above is functional in the entire cosmos, that is, it is ever-present. For this reason, its influence can be felt everywhere in the world, from gross level to subtle. For an individual, the impact of *karma* at a gross level is manifested in the physical world and at the subtle level in the mental world, influencing a person's psyche as well. This also means *karma* has a dual impact; firstly, the psychological tendency (*sa sk ra*) the doer develops on performing the action, and secondly, on what a doer receives as the result of his action in future. When the action is desired to be repeated, it takes the form of *v sana*, here new action occurs with an inherent desire for a certain effect. Interestingly, escape from the future result of the action is not possible, but an effort can be made to train oneself to cease the formation of *sa sk ra*, thereby controlling the *v sana* as well. Since *sa sk ra* is crucial in shaping our behaviour and attitudes, effort to eliminate the formation of *sa sk ra* also helps in leaving behind only the future result of *karma*, an escape from which is not possible. Since *karma* is continuously performed, the choice remains in choosing the action and the manner of performing it.

*Karma* based on time in fruition is of three kinds, namely, *pr rabdha*, *sa cita* and *g mi*. *Karma* is characterized as *pr rabdha* when a person begins to get the *karma-phala* based on the impressions of actions performed by him in his previous human life. *Sa cita* is also the *karmas* from the previous life, whose fruition is yet to occur, and its impressions are like seeds. Lastly, *g mi* are the *karmas* of this life, whose impression an individual receives. Interestingly, *sa cita* and *g mi* can be overcome through *jñ na* and expiatory rites whereas *pr rabdha* cannot.<sup>ii</sup> The reason is, it is the *g mi karma* which becomes *pr rabdha* and *sa cita* in next life. In the former, it is already fruiting, therefore cannot be overcome.

*Karma* on the basis of virtuosity and wickedness are of four types, namely *ukla* (white/virtuous), *ka* (black/wicked), *ukla-ka* (white-black, i.e., partly virtuous and partly vicious), and *akla* (neither black nor white, i.e., neither virtuous nor vicious). In *akla*, the actions are pertaining to self-renunciation and meditation, which in turn are not associated with *karma-phala*. Conclusively, no new *karma* is formed, and only the past *karmas phala* are borne. During this process of non-accumulation and annihilation of *karmas*, the *karmi* attains True Knowledge, and after the completion of this process, he becomes free from *karmas*.<sup>iii</sup> Thus, the same step becomes *karma* for a normal person bound in the cycle of *karma* and *karma-phala*, and is not associated with a self-renounced person. It is this association of *karma* and *karma-phala* whose belief and influence are studied in this research work in particular reference to an Indian workplace. Since this principle is believed to be a well-established belief in the masses, whether its influence is felt in workplaces is a matter of deep concern. The reason behind it is, one's scale of belief in *karma* determines the psychology behind their association of action and result. The more an individual believes in it, the more association he will feel in relation to virtue and wickedness while performing his own actions with care. Whereas the less the belief is, the less association is established with virtue and wickedness, resulting in actions free of their concern.

A workplace is characterized by dynamic force and factors, where actions are performed with a desire to obtain specific rewards. This indicates, its environment is strictly of *karma* and *karma-phala*, though in a professional manner, where everything is calculative. This makes the study of peoples' belief in *karma*, and its influence felt in the workplace a necessary and curious factor. It becomes necessary, as the belief in it leads to the realization of responsibility that *karma* brings with itself in the form of its result. Having stated the same, though virtue and wickedness of behaviour are not entirely based on *karma*, yet a failure in believing in it eliminates the responsibility that accompanies one's actions along with the freedom of choosing the action. Thus, this study becomes important in understanding the *karmic* psychology one has for a better workplace, a better work environment along with improved organizational behaviour, spirituality at the workplace, and commitment.

For this research, a questionnaire<sup>iv</sup> (White, 2020) of selected questions was asked to be filled by the candidates in the online mode. 144 responses were obtained, making the sample size for this research. These respondents belonged to different age groups, types of employment, and religious backgrounds. The responses obtained, comprised of 50.7% females and 49.3% males; 36.1% belonging to the age group of 25-34 years followed by 30.6% from 18-24 years, 26.4% from 35-44 years, 6.3% from 45-54 year age group, and rest 0.6% from the 55 and above; 56.3% students, 21.5% private sector employee, 18.8% public sector employee, and rest 3.4% owning a business; and lastly in religious terms, the followers were 86.8% *Sanatan* (Hindu), followed by Islam, not religious, Sikh, and others. The responses were recorded on 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This paper deals with the questions related to *karma*, whether its influence is felt in the events taking place in life, their time of influence, rewards and punishments received, general treatment faced, belief in rebirth, and the ultimate goal of life. Through the questions based on these categories, the influence of *karma* as believed is deeply studied in this research paper.

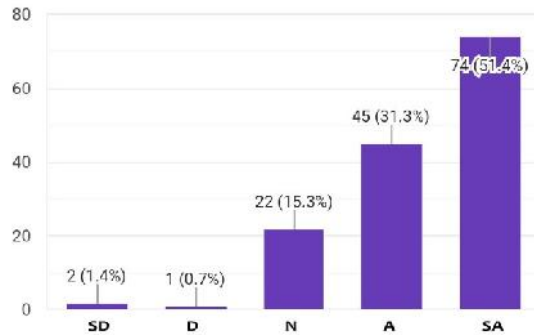
The responses recorded for various questions are stated as, SD- Strongly Disagree, D - Disagree, N - Neutral or neither agree nor disagree, A - Agree, and SA - Strongly Agree.

- *Karma* as a force, believed to be impacting the events taking place in the lives of others and self has received the following responses,
  - for oneself: 1.4% SD, 0.7% D, 15.3% N, 31.3% A, 51.4% SA
  - for others: 2.8% SD, 2.1% D, 22.9% N, 33.3% A, 38.9% SA
- *Regarding* misfortune and good fortune, if they are believed to be brought by people upon themselves due to their previous behaviour in their life, is responded as follows,
  - for misfortune: 2.8% SD, 6.9% D, 29.9% N, 26.4% A, 34% SA
  - for good fortune: 1.4% SD, 8.3% D, 21.5% N, 31.3% A, 37.5% SA
- The consequences of good and bad actions if not immediately observed, then in some future in peoples' life, is also a question of great concern. Here the trends observed are,
  - for bad deeds: 1.4% SD, 4.9% D, 11.8% N, 33.3% A, 48.6% SA
  - for good deeds: 1.4% SD, 1.4% D, 9% N, 36.8% A, 51.4% SA
- *Believing* people to be good or bad, the question arises, does in a long run, people get what they are, that is, good is received by good, and bad is received by bad. To this question, the responses received are,
  - 8.3% SD, 8.3% D, 18.8% N, 25.7% A, 38.9% SA
- The *cycle* of birth and death, that is re-birth, is a concept associated with *karma*. Belief in rebirth in a new body post-death, as recorded by respondents is as follows:
  - 11.8% SD, 7.6% D, 18.8% N, 20.8% A, 41% SA
- Is *moral* behaviour of present life has an influence on one's rebirth, the responses are:
  - 11.1% SD, 9.7% D, 26.4% N, 21.5% A, 31.3% SA
- The belief of misfortune and good fortune due to behaviour in past life, is recorded as:
  - in misfortune: 6.9% SD, 4.9% D, 32.6% N, 27.1% A, 28.5% SA
  - in good fortune: 6.9% SD, 4.9% D, 25% N, 30.6% A, 32.6% SA
- With respect to the consequences of good and bad actions, even when not immediately observed, then also their occurrence in the future life is a question of great concern in comparison to this belief in the present life. Here responses are,
  - in bad deeds: 6.3% SD, 6.9% D, 18.1% N, 32.6% A, 36.1% SA
  - in good deeds: 4.2% SD, 4.2% D, 15.3% N, 36.1% A, 40.3% SA
- *Freedom* from the cycle of birth and death as the Ultimate Goal of life is also a concept in association with *karma*. Responses to the belief in this concept are,
  - 7.6% SD, 6.9% D, 17.4% N, 18.1% A, 50% SA

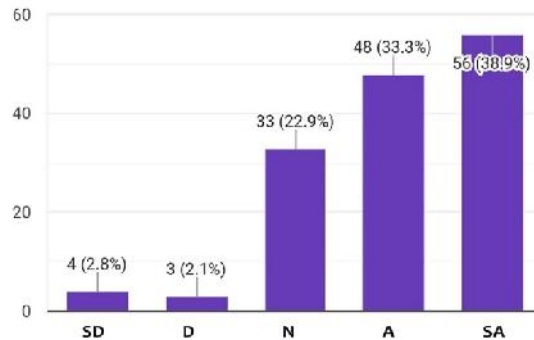
On observing the above-stated responses by the respondents, the influence of *karma* felt by them can be interpreted as follows:

- Respondents were observed to be relatively more certain about the influence of *Karma* on the events of their life in comparison to that of others. As reflected in the following graphs,

### Karma is a force that influences the events that happen in my life.



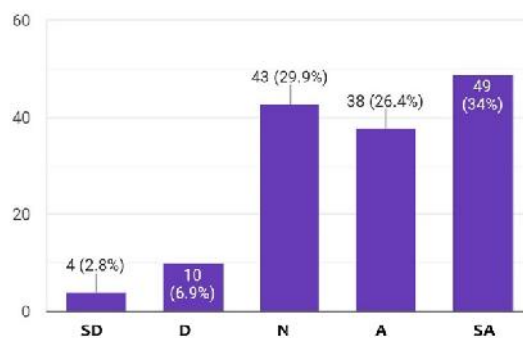
### Karma is a force that influences the events that happen in other people's lives.



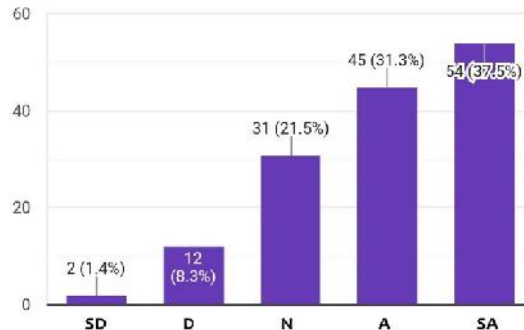
A curious observation here is, there is a large gap in the strong agreement of both positions. The graph is inclined towards oneself, indicating that people perceive themselves to be more influenced by the philosophy of *karma*. With the comparatively high gap in the two scales of disagreements, the responses show that people believe others are not facing the events due to their actions, while they themselves often do. With the position of increased neutrality, it can be stated that up to some extent *karmic* uncertainty also seeps in, in determining the reasonableness of the events related to others in comparison to one's own. Belief in karma as a force influencing the events occurring in one's own life more as compared to others is thus born. This belief in a workplace, accompanied with the whole environment of self and others actions, may lead towards the emergence of discriminations resulting in occasional dissatisfaction.

- In a similar fashion, the belief of respondents on the influence of their previous behaviour on fortune and misfortune is noteworthy.

### When people are met with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves by previous behaviour in their life



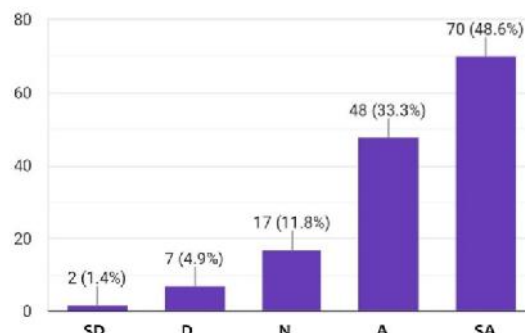
**When people experience good fortune, they have brought it upon themselves by previous behaviour in their life.**



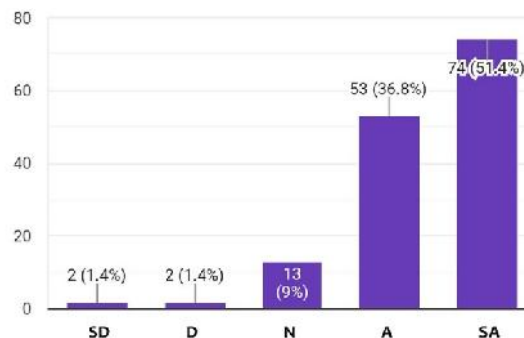
Respondents felt more certain in the matters of good fortune in comparison to that of misfortune. In both the conditions, the degrees of the strong agreement is highest and strong disagreement lowest. But the neutral position is the second most dominant belief closely followed by agreement, in the position of misfortune. This indicates people have a tendency of considering other factors to be responsible, before believing themselves to be the cause if there is no strong reason indicating their actions. Whereas, in good fortune, a sequential dip is observed in the responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This indicates that people want to believe that misfortune in comparison to fortune can be due to any reason. Also, the state of indecisiveness/confusion/absence of knowledge related to *karma* impacts the strong beliefs of previous *karma*'s influence on fortune and misfortune. This may lead an individual to develop the ability to self-assessing the situations in accordance with their previous *karmas* and the influence of others' *karma* on their respective life events.

- Respondents' opinion on future reception of rewards or punishments for their *karmas* if not received immediately, is again inclined towards good deeds.

**If a person does something bad, even if there are no immediate consequences, they will be punished for it in some future time in their life.**



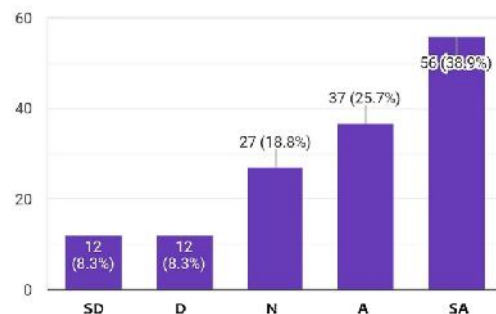
**When someone does a good deed, even if there are no immediate consequences, they will be rewarded for it in some future time in their life.**



Coincidentally, the percentages of strongly disagree is the same for good and bad deeds. But respondents are largely certain that they will gain benefit for their good actions, which ironically in the position of bad deeds observes a dip, with the increase in neutral and disagreement positions. This implies people are more ready for their gains, instead of for their losses. With increased neutral and disagree positions in bad deeds than good, respondents desire to believe that the futuristic results are not a necessity concerning bad actions. This implies, in a workplace with the future as a concern, people have the tendency of accepting and doing what they believe to be good than bad. Fear of bad influence on their professional life forbids them largely from doing what they believe is wrong or may go wrong. As a result, people would not be prepared for future punishments as a team for a bad act committed together, instilling a lack of unity amongst colleagues.

- Good things happen to good and bad to bad people, is an old belief based on *karma*.

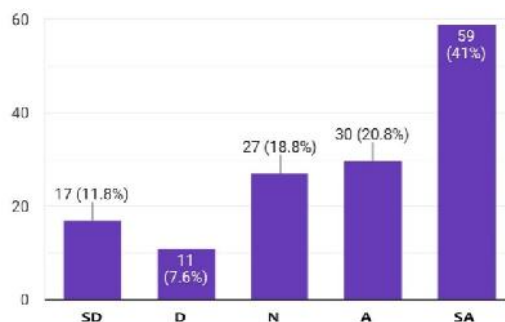
**In long-run run, good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people.**



To this belief, an approximately two-thirds majority of respondents are in favour, yet, there is significant doubt and disbelief. Hence, it can be stated that people believe in the reciprocation of what we do and what we are, yet in conjunction with previous outcomes, at a workplace, it can be stated that people are not certain of the impact of *karma*. The influence of previous *karmas* and their results, which people are usually unable to understand, forbids them up to some extent to believe in this principle. Thus, in a workplace individuals may not expect entirely magnificent results due to the inherent goodness or bad results for badness. This, up to a certain extent would make them prone to irresponsible or wrong acts.

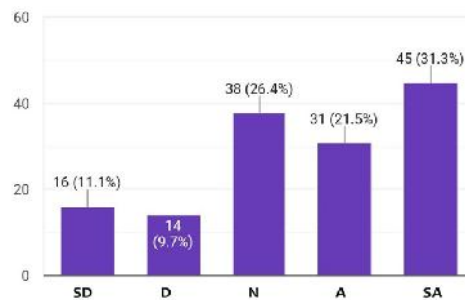
- Rebirth, which is the result of *karma*, is believed by respondents as follows:

**After people die, they are reborn in a new body.**



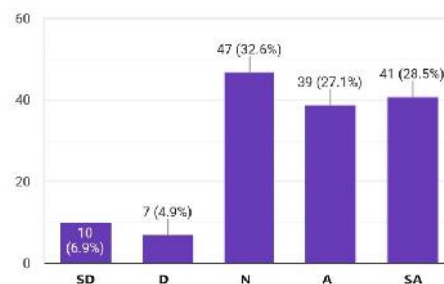
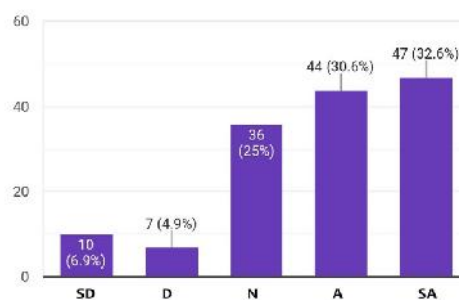
Rebirth is strongly agreed (41%), almost twice that of agree (20.8%), followed by neutral. This means, in a workplace, the believers of re-birth have the probability of considering the influence of one's decisions on not only this life but also on the next life they will receive. Apart from this, they may also develop the tendency of finding the reasons for certain events in a previous life in addition to the present one. Negatively, an individual may develop the tendency of escapism, and positively a careful and responsible attitude due to belief in rebirth. Also, concerning the rest of the population, which is either indecisive or non-believer of rebirth, has chances of doubting *karma* itself owing to questions that remain unsupported due to a lack of verifiable proves. Further, the non-believers of rebirth may or may not exhibit moral behaviour, as this is the only life according to them.

- On the belief of influence of present life's moral behaviour on another life or rebirth, responses received are:

**People's moral behaviour during their current life influences their rebirth in a future life.**

These responses show that people can be careful about their acts for better next birth. In a workplace, believers will be tempted to perform carefully, which indicates that all the believers of rebirth, are not the believers of this influence, as a significant dip in the strong agreement and significant rise in the neutral position is observed. Here a curious observation is, a significant number of populations disagreed and strongly disagreed with this thesis. Also, a noteworthy percentage of respondents were indecisive of the influence. In a workplace, the believers will develop the tendency towards morality and the non-believers shall behave according to their freewill. Whereas, the respondents with neutral stand may develop the tendency of indecisiveness in certain situations.

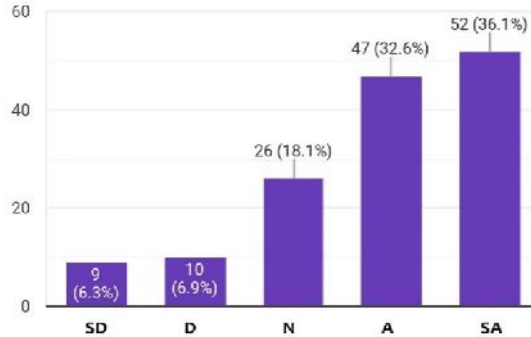
- The fortunes, both good and bad, whether are due to past life, is yet another question related to *karma*.

**When people are met with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves by behaviour in a past life.****When people experience good fortune, they have brought it upon themselves by behaviour in a past life.**

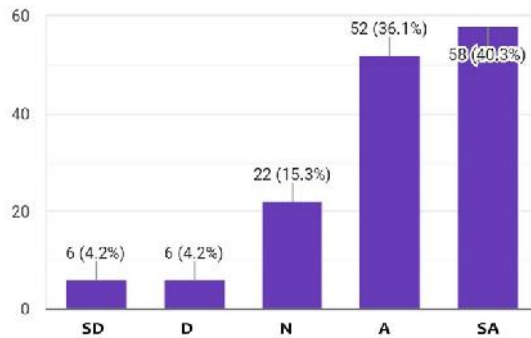
The answer to this lies in the two degrees of disagreement, which ironically are the same. The difference lies in a dominant neutral position in misfortune and high to moderate belief in the rest of the positions of good fortune through a past life. Here again, people believed and associated more with good, instead of bad. Since the question deals with the past life *karma*, the indication is of the tendency of belief in having committed good instead of bad, and non-acceptance of bad *karma* committed. This may generate confusion and frustration within believers and employees, considering it to be their misfortune on not receiving positive outcomes for their work or actions they consider to be good.

- The occurrence of the results of good and bad actions in a future life, without immediate consequences in this life, is believed curiously by many.

**if a person does something bad, even if there are no immediate consequences, they will be punished for it in a future life.**



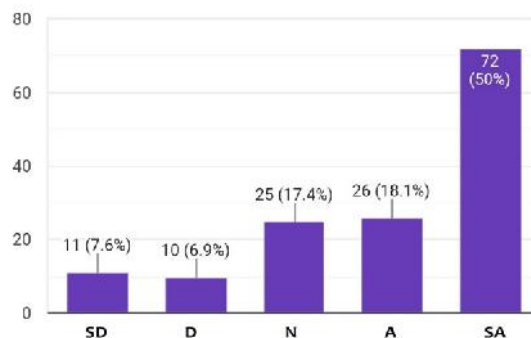
**When someone does a good deed, even if there are no immediate consequences, they will be rewarded for it in a future life.**



Here, the believers 76.4% (both strongly agree and agree) people were in favour of the rewards in any future time and life. A great inclination towards associating more with good than with the bad is again observed. This neutral position is harmful to the individuals in a workplace, as they may float between right and wrong actions indecisively.

- The Ultimate Goal of life in the philosophy of *karma* is freedom from the cycle of birth and death, that is rebirth. This is strongly agreed by half of the respondents.

**The ultimate goal of life is freedom from the cycle of birth and death.**



Through this achievement, an individual would not be bounded with the principle of *karma*. This indicates an inherent desire to be free from this world, which is believed by a majority of the respondents (50% + 18.1%). This along with other previous responses indicates towards the presence of the seed of spirituality with the inclination towards good is noteworthy. This spiritual quotient is further of great importance in getting rid of this mortal cycle, which somehow seems to be a necessity to the individuals. Interestingly, with these beliefs, people tend to become selfless, adding great value to the moral and ethical behaviour of a workplace while impacting co-workers as well.



The philosophy of *karma* thus helps in cultivating workplace spirituality, influencing one's behaviour at the workplace, workplace commitment, employees reaction to their environment, and organizational citizenship behaviour. This is impacted through their various beliefs and behavioural attitudes. Believers though are more inclined towards believing themselves to have been committing good deeds in place of bad, as a result, they tend to be more towards relating with receiving good instead of bad outcomes. Also, individuals are unaware of the pattern of *karma* they are living and reaping. This motivates them to either develop a higher tendency towards spirituality in their lives, impacting their professional attitude as well; or in developing a sense of being right, making them prone to ignoring their faults. Spiritual tendency generates a level of satisfaction and commitment towards the life events, keeping people committed to their work, and hence to the workplace thereby developing the behaviour of organizational citizenship. Whereas, the tendency of believing oneself to be right, and worthy of good, results in self-pity in adverse situations. Noticeably, the population which stands neutral to the belief in the philosophy of *karma* and its associated philosophy may face indecisiveness to the situations such as what ought to be done in moral and immoral situations, especially in a situation where morality is towards the difficult path. Similarly, the non-believers may develop the attitude of deciding their actions not on the basis of *karma*, but based on their freewill and gains. What ought to be noticed is the ability to develop or suppress behavioural responsibility based on *karma* or on the desire of escaping from the results one considers self to be ineligible of. Further, the attitude of assessment may develop within the believers of this philosophy, resulting in the improvement of oneself and one's workplace morally, ethically and spiritually.

*Karma* is the principle of actions and their fruits, *karma-phala*, is the principle working in the entire cosmos. Generating *sa sk ra* and *v sana*, their influence on the Indian workplace becomes important to know. The reason is, a workplace demands professionalism, which entails commitment, belief, trust, ethics, aims (organizational and personal), along with situations that may tempt individuals to go astray for their benefits. Hence, the belief in the philosophy of *karma*, and its influence as felt by people on their life, on others' life, along with the belief in rebirth and the possible impact on it, shape individual's performance in both, his personal as well as professional life. Due to impact in professional life, influence in the workplace is evident. It is this influence, due to which respondents were more certain on the questions concerning them. They related the influence of *karma* more on their life and the events related to it, in comparison to others. Also, the respondents associated more with the *karma* of good in place of bad. As a result, they responded highly in the favour of the impact of their previous good behaviours felt on their good fortune in place of their previous bad behaviour on their misfortune. Similarly, on the reception of rewards or punishments for one's *karma* in future instead of immediately, the inclination is observed more towards the result of good deeds. Note worthily, this inclination towards the reception for good deeds is also observed in the belief regarding rebirth also. As a result, the morality of one life is believed to influence an individual's next life, which is altogether in a new body post-death. Since behaving morally is also *karma*, and the results indicate the desire of receiving the pending *karmas* of good deeds in comparison to bad, a biasness comes to play. Also, a high percentage of respondents believed good happen to good people and bad to bad people in a long run, yet the doubt regarding the principle of *karma* and *karma-phal* persists in their minds. This doubt raises disbelief in people, though the impact as the data reflects is low, yet it makes a huge difference in a workplace. The reason is, no one is unable to understand why the timing of the fruition varies with each *karma* and also person. This variation creates disbelief in the long run, as the future is unseen, and the short-term results are not always favourable. Besides, the influence of bad as evident from the inclination towards good is not desirous though acceptable in relevant degrees. It can thus be stated, though people believe in the reception of the results of bad deeds also, they either believed themselves to be morally a better person or wished to believe or portray so, as they are completely aware of their perspective. Whereas on others' perspectives and life events, they are usually not much aware or are unable to relate. This impacts one's behaviour in a workplace, where they are unable to evaluate the struggles, and work of others' and own perfectly and unbiasedly. Since one's *karma* influences one's desires, they also influence the desire of receiving the good, thereby generating the tendency of evaluating oneself as a better person. This self-evaluation may also lead to the inability of evaluating one's wrong and good deeds impartially, on the same parameters without biasness. Yet, the important point remains, people are aware of their *karmas* and are ready to face the misfortunes and punishments to a large extent. This indicates towards the cosmic understanding of *karma* where people do not ignore the other side of the *karma* as well, however undesirous it is. Also, with the Ultimate aim of *moksha* or freedom from the cycle of birth and death,

the impact on the workplace is of the inducement of the flavour of spirituality in the environment of one's workplace. With this belief, the workplace gets spiritually energized reducing the wrong. Hence, it can be stated that the influence of *karma* is highly felt by individuals in the Indian workplace. It is the principle they believe in, though they may face the occasional indecisiveness and disagreement in the principle due to various reasons.

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