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## Rational decision making: Vedic perspective

**Hemanth Goparaj and Radha R Sharma**

### Abstract

Ancient Indian Literature that comprises of Vedas and other texts focused on how a person becomes rational and how the rationality enables him to take appropriate decisions. Vedas culminate in to Vedanta which have Upanishads embedded within. There are 108 Upanishads available. Spiritual guru, Adi Shankaracharya, studied nearly sixteen of them. Taittiriya Upanishad, written by him, explains the philosophy of various kosas/ sheaths covering the soul. The same concept of kosas was explained in his book 'Atmabodha' with greater clarity. *Panchakosaadi Yogena, Tat Tanmaya Iva Sthitah, Suddhaatma Neelavastraadi, Yogena Sphatiko Yathaa.* (When covered with a blue cloth, a pure colourless crystal looks like a blue crystal. Atma with union of five Kosas, appears to have borrowed their qualities upon it). The Five Kosas are: Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya and Ananda Maya. Shankaracharya, said "the supreme goal of human beings is "self-knowledge". Just as rice is obtained by pounding paddy and separating the husk, bran etc., pure Atma gets separated from the five Kosas that have encircled it through careful discrimination. This detachment makes individual realize knowledge of the self and makes him rational to think and act effectively in decision making. The concept has been discussed in the paper.

**Keywords:** Vedic perspective, ancient Indian literature

### Introduction

Ancient Indian literature is vast and covers several topics those are very critical for the present day managers. Rational Decision making is one such issue that is expected from every senior business leader across globe while taking people to next level in organization. In several situations, leaders hesitate to take decision and think no. of times and remain in a state of dilemma in taking decision. Ancient Indian texts, Vedic treatises, Upanishad doctrines, shlokas of Bhagavad Gita, and works of Shri. Shankaracharya have stressed the importance of rational decision making. An attempt is made in this article how ancient Indian literature has focused on methods to be adopted in rational decision making by individual.

### Modern Literature on Rational Decision Making

Rational thought does not come natural to human beings. From our evolutionary journey we have arrived and programmed to survive in a hostile and unpredictable environment (Glimcher, 2004) [17]. Every individual has feelings, hopes, aspirations, desires, and prejudices. Individuals believe that making decisions based on feelings, hopes, aspirations, and prejudices is only natural. However it is proved scientifically that feelings, hopes, aspirations, and prejudices find a place in the rational decision-making process (Goleman, 1997) [14]. Every action has certain consequences. Individuals can choose his actions, but cannot choose the consequences of those actions. The consequences of each and every decision taken by individual are determined by the action taken by that individual. Reality is a network of interconnected systems (Noorani, 2003) [28]. Decisions are usually influenced by the systems in which individual lives and grow.

From managing oneself, to managing his family-the place where individual lives, managing the work place- place where an individual works, every individual becomes busy designing and managing various systems. If individual make decisions based on how he feels at the time, he will be managing his feelings and not the situation at hand. Decisions made based on feelings will lead to the miss management of any system that could deliver the benefits he wishes to pursue. So individual needs to make every decision very methodically following an objective rational process and the Rational Path.

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### **Rational Decision Making**

The first requirement for making a rational decision making is that Individual has to separate facts and principles from his feelings, fantasies, and opinions. This will enable an individual to be proactive and respond to new situations with purpose, instead of merely reacting to feelings. It gives an opportunity to question oneself what he is trying to accomplish, and why he need to do that (Noorani, 2003) [28].

The rational, or analytical, decision-making method is a normative decision model in which an individual carefully evaluates various alternatives and weighs their pros and cons in order to make a decision that best achieves the desired outcome. Academic researchers have outlined a formal process for rational decision-making. With rational decisions: one can be more productive in terms of his individual efforts, improve the performance of his organizations through better crafting and implementing of strategic initiatives, and help build a better future for the human family through public policy.

### **Rational Decision Making Indian Perspective**

Indian Literature says that rational decision making happens when individual is focused on himself. Every individual has great potentials. Those potentials should get enriched in a proper system. However great potentials an individual has or however mighty individual is, he at times remains in state of confusion.

Bhagavad Gita the greatest treatise on Indian Sub continent begins with a description of the breakdown of a healthy, competent human being in a very stressful and conflicting situation. Stress was due to the stake involved and the immediacy of the crisis and conflict because of lack of acceptable choices. So Bhagavad Gita's focus is a healthy mind in temporary crisis, which if not solved may deteriorate into mental, physical and social illness. Arjuna's mental state is referred as "Dharma Sammoodha Cheta"-which means the state of dilemma that aroused out of confusion. Arjuna was searching for righteous act.

Bhagavad Gita gives a picture of the enlightened person -- Sthitaprajna -- which is the ultimate possibility of human life- a mind abiding happily in the happy self while engaged in the world with altruistic intentions, calm and free from emotional fluctuations. Self ignorance projects desire to possess and indulge leading to frustrations which leads to further desire prompted activities and the cycle repeats endlessly. Lord Krishna tells to Arjuna to enter in to a state called "Nistraigunyo Bhava" which is beyond all three gunas focusing on Atman.

The focus of Bhagavad Gita never deviates from the goal while dealing with the various means to reach the goal. -- All broods of ignorance are the root cause of human misery. These are mental impurities.

### **Bhagavad Gita talks on three different states**

- a) Why individual is not rational
- b) How to make individual rational
- c) What Individual is supposed to do while taking decisions

#### **a) Why individual is not rational**

Individual needs to be in self realized or in a detached state before taking decision. However, in general the mind of individual is covered by moha or illusion or lust.

Bhagavad Gita says "dhumenavriyate vahnir, yathadarso malena ca, yatholbenavrtto garbhas tatha tenedam avrtam" (B. G 3.38)

"As fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror is covered by dust, or as the embryo is covered by the sheath, the living entity is similarly covered by different degrees of this lust."

Avrtam jnanam etena, jnanino nitya-vairina, kama-rupena kaunteya

duspurenalena ca (B.G 3.39)

"Thus individual's pure consciousness is covered by his eternal enemy in the form of lust, which is never satisfied and which burns like fire."

It is said that illusion sits in the senses, mind and intelligence of individual thus making him irrational.

Indriyani mano Buddhir, asyadhistanam ucyate, etair vimohayaty esa

jnanam avrtya dehinam (B. G. 3.40)

"The senses, the mind and the intelligence are the sitting places of this lust. Through them lust covers the real knowledge of the living entity and bewilders him."

#### **b) How to make individual rational: To make one self rational, individual has to remove the lust/illusion:**

Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita says that tasmat tvam indriyani adau, niyama bhatarasabha, papmanam prajahi hy enam jnana-vijnana-nasanam BG 3.41

Krishna says to Arjuna that every individual has to curb lust at the budding stage by regulating the senses, and get rid of it which destroys individual's knowledge and his thrust for self-realization.

Indriyani parany ahur, indriyebhyah param manah, manasas tu para buddhir yo buddheh paratas tu sah BG 3.42

The working senses are superior to dull matter; mind is higher than the senses; intelligence is still higher than the mind.

Evam buddheh param buddhva, samstabhyatmanam atmana, jahi satrum maha-bahokama-rupam durasadam BG 3.43

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna that one should keep steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence Thus every individual should be transcendental to the material senses, mind and intelligence, then can conquer this insatiable enemy "lust".

Yad yad acarati sresthas, tat tad evetaro janah, sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate BG 3.44

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

Hence individual should understand that he should set himself as an example so that people who follow him will learn the good deeds.

#### **c) What Individual is supposed to do while taking decisions**

Karmanyevadhikaraste, ma phalesu kadacana, ma karma-phala-hetur bhur ma te sangostvakarmani B.G 2.47

"Individual has a right to perform his prescribed duty, but he should not be worry of the fruits of action. Every individual should not consider the cause of the results of his activities, and never be attached and should not avoid doing his duty."

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna to perform duty with self control. yoga-sthah kuru karmaani, sangam tyaktva dhananjaya, siddhy-asiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga ucyate B.G 2.48

"Perform your duty in a self controlled state O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga."

Durena hy avaram karma, buddhi-yogad dhananjaya, buddhau saranam anviccha kripanah phala-hetavah (B.G 2.49)

Before individual takes decision several thoughts keep penetrating the thought process. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna

to keep away all such horrible thoughts by mere service and submission to supreme self.

Human mind is disturbed by various impurities such as Kama, krodha, lobha, moha, ahamkara, raga, dvesha, phalecha, which can be removed by realising the ultimate knowledge. Here knowledge refers to knowledge of self. Knowledge of self enables an individual to understand more about him and the connectivity with supreme. Under such conditions there will not be any scope for lust to attack sense organs. Bhagavad-Gita says Nahi Gyanena Sadrusyam pavithramiha vidyathe --- that means in this world, there is nothing as pure (sublime) as knowledge.

#### Where to get the knowledge from

The basic scriptures of the India-- 'Vedas' have given the most required knowledge for people to learn about righteous deeds, practice them and use them amicably. Vedas don't belong to any religion in particular but are eternal, everlasting truths.

The first mantra of Rig Veda says "Agnim EDE Purohitam Yajesya Devam Ritvijam Hotaram Ratandhatmam". It means that human life is meant to work hard towards both sides i.e., spiritual progress as well as pious materialistic progress. Therefore while discharging all moral duties right from childhood; one should also work hard to attain the knowledge of Vedas to know about pious deeds, matters and worship.

#### Vedas

The great wealth of knowledge available within sub continent of India is in the form of Vedas. Those who have tried to understand the essence of these Vedas found themselves immersed in its intricacies and overwhelmed by its multitude of ever increasing and unending fulfillments, pleasures, satisfactions and wonders. This is because; Vedas enable an individual to understand what he is made up of and his purpose of existence. In Sanskrit this type of pleasure an individual attains after realizing himself is called as 'Satchitanandam', which means sat, unending ever permanent, cit, full of knowledge and ananda, providing the highest pleasure. The Vedic hymn "Aroha Tamaso Jyotih" inspires us to come out of the dark well of ignorance and move towards the sacred glow of Gyana. Ignorance is individual's biggest enemy.

"Vedaha Akhilaha Dharmam Moolam" (Sloka 2/6, manusmriti) i.e., all the knowledge, science and deeds etc., emanate from Vedas. All the different branches of knowledge--physics, chemistry, botany, economics, music, etc.--are covered in the Vedas. These are concerned with the external world. Vedas have been considered dualistic because it talks about self and also about external world.

What is meant by Veda? One meaning is eruka (awareness). Another is thelivi (intelligence). A third meaning is viveka (discrimination). All those who wish to develop discrimination should be deeply interested in the Vedas. Vedas are "apauruseya" which means not human compositions". They are supposed to have been directly revealed, and thus are called śruti ("what is heard"). Veda is derived from the root "Vid", which means, "to know". The Veda teaches how to achieve purity of heart, getting rid of impurities. In the beginning there was only one Veda. To study it considerable time and effort was needed. Great sage on Indian Sub Continent, Vyasa divided it into 4 different parts-Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. This classification enables people to study as well as practice the teachings of the Veda.

The main embodiment of all these vedas is to understand relation between Self and Supreme Self. The word "Atman" (pronounced in Sanskrit like "Atma") is interpreted as the "Main Essence" of man, as his Highest Self. "A" in this word means to remove. "Tma" means "darkness". Therefore "A-tma" or "Atman" means "which removes darkness and bring shining". The word "tamas" that means "ignorance", "spiritual darkness" - has originated from atma. Atman is the Divine part of everyone's multidimensional organism.

#### Categorization of Vedas

Each Veda has four sections: Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. These four sections are placed in two categories they are Karma and Jnana.

Samhitas, Brahmanas, and Aranyakas constitute Karma while Upanishads constitute Jnana portion. Jnana means knowledge. Upanishads deal with Vedanta, which mean the essence of Vedas.

There are two paths or Margas specified in Vedas. They are Pravritti Marga and Nirvritti Marga. The Samhitas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas have been mainly concerned with the Pravritti Marga (the Path of Action). Only the Upanishads have taught the Nirvritti Marga (the Path of Knowledge). This means that, of the four Purusharthas, which are the four main goals of man- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha--the Karma kanda has dealt with only the first three. Upanishads taught the people of Indian Sub Continent on Moksha.

The Upanishads declared that the nature of the Supreme can be grasped only by the Path of Knowledge. Knowledge is of two kinds: Para Vidya (the Higher Knowledge) and Apara Vidya (the Lower Knowledge).

All that is learnt by the educational process today falls in the category of Apara Vidya (Lower Knowledge). Knowledge relating to Dharma, Artha and Kama also comes in this category. Only knowledge relating to Moksha (Liberation) constitutes Para Vidya (the Supreme Knowledge). Individual's quest is to acquire that Para Vidya. That knowledge is found in Vedanta. Understanding Vedanta makes a person think rational because he sees whole world as a single entity or substance called Brahman. This concept is clearly mentioned in one of the greatest Upanishad ISAVASYA Upanishad.

Om Purnamadaha Purnamidam Purnat Purnamudachyate.

#### Purnasya Purnamadaya Purnarnevavasishyate.

"The Whole (Brahman) is all that which is invisible. The Whole (Brahman) is all this that is visible. The Whole (world) was born out of the Whole (Brahman). When the Whole (Universe) is absorbed into the Whole (Brahman) the Whole (Brahman) alone remains."

Individual should start the quest on knowing who he is and why he gets trapped to maya/ lust/ illusion.

#### Rational Decision Making & Vedanta

Vedanta which implies "the end of all knowledge" - by definition is not restricted or confined to one book and there is no sole source for Vedantic philosophy. Vedanta refers to a state of self-realization, attainment, or cosmic consciousness. Historically and currently Vedanta is understood as a state of transcendence and not as a concept that can be grasped by the intellect alone.

The word Vedanta is a Sanskrit compound word which can be treated as:

- veda = "knowledge" + anta = "end, conclusion": "the culmination of knowledge" or "appendix to the Veda"
- Veda = "knowledge" + anta = "essence", "core", or "inside": "the essence of the Vedas".

The ego ('I') principle is predominant in the Vedas. However, Vedanta has declared that the elimination of the ego ("I" and "Mine") alone can lead to Realization. The 'I' has to be rooted out. As long as individual adheres to the 'I', he gets bound to the phenomenal world. Individual cannot attain the Higher Knowledge. Hence one has to understand the distinction between the Vedas and the Upanishads.

Vedanta focuses on self-realization, which makes every individual understand the ultimate nature of reality (Brahman) and teaches that individual's goal to transcend the limitations of self-identity and realize one's unity (Atman's unity) with Brahman.

The Mahavakyas are the four "Great Sayings" of the Upanishads, the foundational texts of Vedanta. Each of the Mahavakyas is associated with one of the four Vedas and in Vedantic mysticism is said to condense the essence of that entire Veda in one statement.

All four statements indicate the ultimate unity of the individual (Atman) with God (Brahman)

The Mahavakyas are:

1. Prajnanam Brahma - "Consciousness is Brahman" (Aitareya Upanishad 3.3 of the Rig Veda)
2. Ayam Atma Brahma - "This Self (Atman) is Brahman" (Mandukya Upanishad 1.2 of the Atharva Veda)
3. Tat Tvam Asi - "Thou art That" (Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7 of the Sama Veda)
4. Aham Brahmasmi - "I am Brahman" (Bhadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10 of the Yajur Veda)

### Dissemination of Knowledge

The word knowledge has deeper meaning. It means the true knowledge of the world. Advait philosophy in the vedas says it is the Chaitanya, the productive power of the universe, which is ageless. Everything else is temporary & perishable. There are numerous fields of knowledge in this world but the Supreme Knowledge, transcending all other fields of knowledge, is the Knowledge of the Self.

The term "Atma Gyana" refers to the true knowledge and realization of one's own self, its origin, internal character, eternal existence and ultimate goal. Atma Gyana is affirmed as the highest state of Gyana in the science of spirituality. (Atma Gyan) which unravels the mystery of life. Similarly the nectar of ATMA (soul) discovered by various researchers, whose experience makes man truly wise, bestows upon him mastery over mental and material forces and energies.

Vedas focused on the self realization / Yoga Vasishtha too focused on self realization Bhagavad Gita too focused on self Realization and all Upanishads too focused on Self realization. If an individual understands himself and correlates his inner atman with external Brahman, he becomes rational.

### Knowledge focused in Upanishads

The primary philosophy captured in the Upanishads is that of one absolute reality termed as Brahman. The concept of Brahman – the Supreme Spirit or the eternal, self existent, immanent and transcendent Supreme and Ultimate reality which is the divine ground of all Being - is central to most schools of Vedanta.

The contents of the Upanishads are often couched in enigmatic language, which has left them open to various

interpretations. There are as many Upanishads to each Veda as there are Sakhas or branches (subdivisions) there are 21, 109, 1000, and 50 subdivisions to Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva Vedas respectively. Thus there are one thousand and hundred and eighty (1,180) Upanishads.

Out of these 1180 Upanishads commentaries were written to 108 Upanishads by various scholars in making common man understand himself better.

Out of these 108 commentaries, Adi Shankaracharya wrote nearly sixteen of them. Most famous among his commentaries is the one written on Taittiriya Upanishad.

### Shankaracharya's works

Shri. Shankaracharya, in his greatest literary work, Aparokshanubhuti, quotes "Koham kathamidham jatam ko wa karthaasy viddhyathe.

### Upadaanam kimastheeh vichaarah soyeedhwashah

"Who am I? How is this created? Who is the creator? Of what material is this made? This is the way of that enquiry", - Shankaracharya in his another literary work Panchikaranam quoted "Chidhaathmaaham nithya shuddhabuddhamuktha sadadhwayah".

"I am the Atman, the pure consciousness, eternally pure and Intelligence Absolute, ever free and one without a second". – This thought makes him superior and cut above the rest of all. Atmabodha is the commentary by Shri Shankaracharya, on Taittiriya Upanishad. In this book he explained the philosophy of various kosas/ sheaths covering the soul.

Shankaracharya in his book Atma Bodha Quotes "Anaadyavidya Anirvaachyaa, Kaaranopaadhi ruchyate, Upaadhi Tritayaadanyam Atmaanam Avadhaarayet"

Shankaracharya talks on individual lacking knowledge of self and also explain what individual is made up of. Avidya or ignorance has no meaning and does not add value. Every living body is made up of Karana Sareera/ Avidya (Causal body). It has two main Sareera's or bodies called Sthoola Sareera (Gross body) and Sookshma Sareera (Subtle body). Atma/self is not a part of these, however, is the witness to these three bodies. Atma is self luminous the self consciousness portion that illumines the activities of the gross and subtle bodies. Atma is itself detached from all the bodies. Because of ignorance we think and attribute all the qualities of the three Sareera's to Atma.

In his another verse Shankaracharya says

"Panchakosaadi Yogena, Tat Tanmaya Iva Sthitah, Suddhaatma Neelavastraadi, Yogena Sphatiko Yathaa". This means that a pure color less crystal, when covered by a blue cloth, looks like a blue crystal. Similarly the Atma of an individual with union of five Kosas appears to have borrowed their qualities upon it. Every individual is made up of Atma and five Kosas. The Five Kosas are: Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya and Ananda Maya.

Annamaya Kosa is the physical body. Pranamaya Kosa is the one that has five

Pranas that breathes life into this physical body. Manomaya Kosa is responsible for our twin feelings like happiness and sorrow. It controls our mind. Vijnanamaya Kosa controls our intellect. Pranamaya, Manomaya and Vijnanamaya constitute the Sookshma Sareera.

The Anandamaya Kosa which belongs to our Karana Sareera and controls our emotions is not real Ananda. Real and Saswata Ananda belongs to Atma. It is therefore established that none of the three Sareera's is Atma.

**Vapus Tushadibhih Kosaih, Yuktam Yuktya Avaghaatatah, Atmanam Antaram Suddham Vivichyaat Tandulam Yatha.**

Just as rice is obtained by pounding paddy and separating the husk, bran etc., pure Atma gets separated from the five Kosas that have encircled it through careful discrimination. When one clearly realizes the soul to be distinct from the Kosas, he becomes detached from them. This detachment is followed by knowledge of the self.

**Sada Sarvagato Apyatmaa, Na Sarvatra Avabhaasate, Buddhaaveva Avabhaaseta, Swaccheshu Pratibimbavat.**

Atma pervades everywhere. But it will not shine in everything. It will manifest only in the purest form of Buddhi. As a perfect image is reflected in a perfect mirror, Atma can shine only in the purest form of Buddhi or intellect which is an integral part of Sookshma Sareera.

**Conclusion**

Famous quote Bhagavad-Gita quote- "Brahmanyaadhaaya karmaani, Sangam tyaktvaa karoti yaha, lipyate na sa paapena, padmapatram ivaambhasaa". (B.G—5.10). Every individual has to understand himself. He who understands himself and continuously hunt for the truth on where he has come from, does actions, and relate the actions as service to god and remain unaffected by any problems, He is not tainted by sin, He gets unaffected the way a lotus leaf remains unaffected by the water on it.

Vishnupuran quotes that "tat-karma yan-na bhandaaya, saa vidhyaa yaa vimuktaye, aayaa saayaa param karma, vidyaa- anyaa shilpa naipunam" (VP 1.19.41). This means "Those acts alone which help one to avoid bondage and free the inner self to co-relate with external supreme self are the rightful/righteous acts and that learning alone leads one to realize is real knowledge or vidya. All other acts end up only in fatigue and all other learning is a mere waste.

Popular verse from Vishnu Sahasranama says "Indriyaani mano buddhih sattvam tejo balam dhrtih, Vaasudevaatmakaan yahuh kshetram kshetrajanam eva ca".

"Sense organs, manas, buddhi, sattvaguna, tejas, balam, firmness, the body (kshetram) and the soul (kshetrajna) -all these have Lord Vasudeva as their inner controller or Atma". The body- soul relationship (shareera-Atma bhaava) between the Lord and the universe is explicitly stated in this verse.

**The following Bhagavad Gita verses also emphasize that**

tad-buddhayas tad-atmanas, tan-nisthas tat-parayanah, gacchanty apunar-avrttim jnana-nirdhuta-kalmasah

"When one's intelligence, and mind are all fixed in the Supreme, then one becomes fully cleansed of misgivings through complete knowledge and thus proceeds straight on the path of liberation and remains rational." (B.G. 5.17)

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