

# Walking the 'Gita' talk – two thought provoking perspectives on soft power

M.R. VENKATESH | DC

'Sanskritisation' and 'Anglicisation' no longer seem strange bedfellows. The two books under review this week, is happily strung by a common thread of what may be termed, 'walking the Bhagavad Gita talk', though they belong to widely different realms of human endeavour.

The dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna in the 'Kurukshetra' battlefield in the epic 'Mahabharata', provides a renewed setting to the Indian psyche that now likes to play Prometheus in offering social and management theories with 'Indian roots' for a global platform. It is also part of a new Indian identity fired by goals of right-wing politics.

Authored by three highly articulate and well read achievers, Bala V Balachandran, J.L. Kellogg Distinguished Professor of Accounting and Information Management, Northwestern University, USA and founder of the Chennai-based 'Great Lakes Institute of Management', the inimitable and formidable TN Seshan, former Chief Election Commissioner of India and Nixon Fernando, former faculty of National Defence Academy, Pune,

'Yogyathwa', hopes to be a launch pad to a brave new world of management and political leadership in the digital age with a sharp Indian edge.

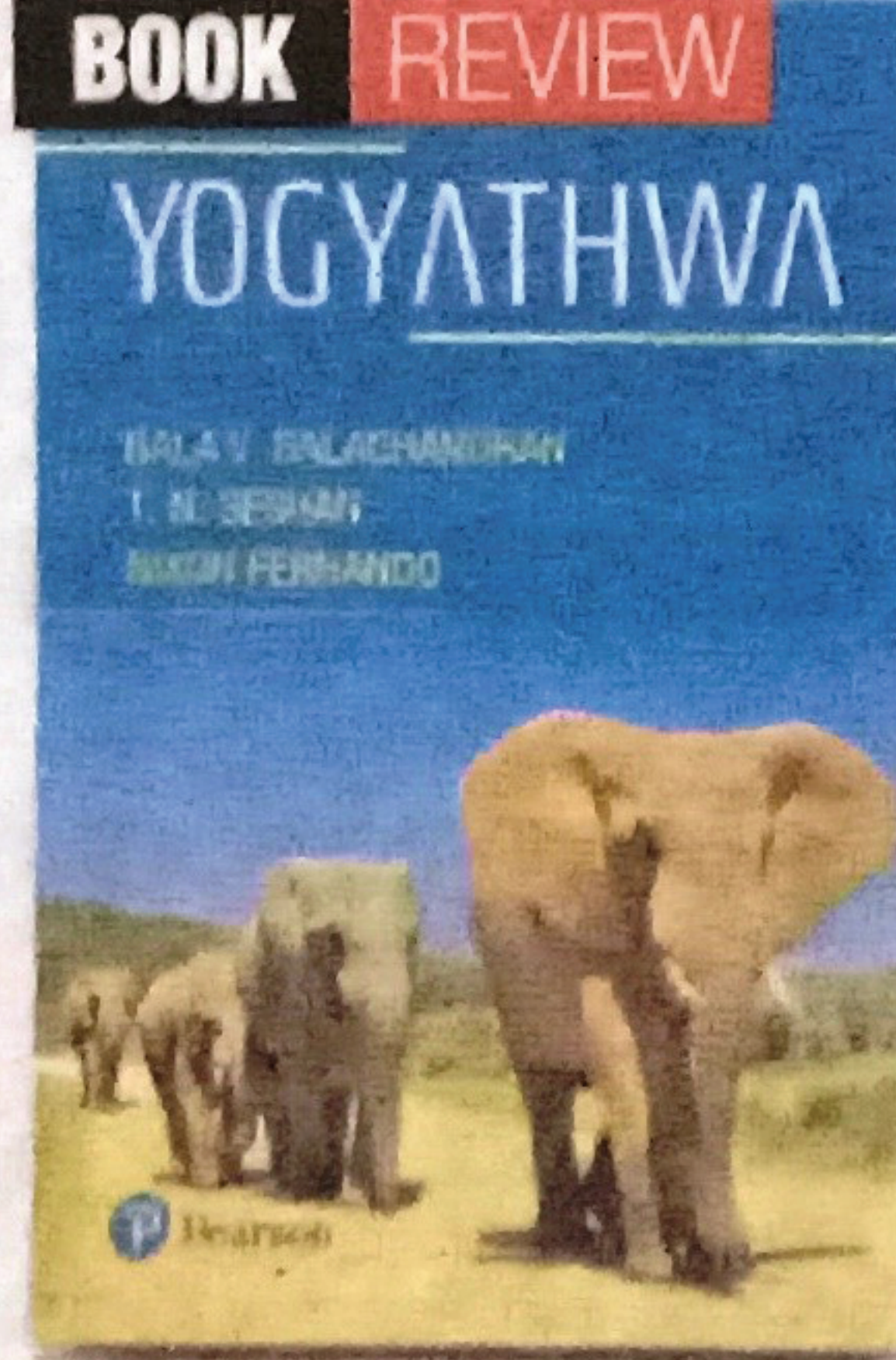
Articulating this improvised concept, 'Yogyathwa', a seeming build on 'Yogyatha' – which we are familiar with in ordinary language as 'fitness' or 'qualification' – is no apologia for a rigidified 'Hindutva'. Its breath of vision and purposeful commitment has been well affirmed in the foreword to the book, by an equally distinguished former civil servant, N. Vittal, former Chief Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) of India, stating within the classical framework of the 'Bhagavad Gita' philosophy whose core value is 'Nishkama Karma' (doing one's duty without attachment to the fruits of action), "the ultimate professionalism comes from a unique mix of skill, competence and ethics." This is also the essence of 'Yogyathwa', a quality that makes someone a "powerful and ethically successful leader."

In Indian politics, Mr. Vittal says only two leaders come to his mind who come close to fulfilling the attributes of 'Yogyathwa', Rajaji as a great leader in the

Indian freedom struggle and Gandhiji's conscience-keeper, and former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, who boldly introduced the economic liberalisation policies in the 1990s. "They demonstrated the concept of powerful leadership through Yogyathwa," says Vittal, adding, the present Prime Minister, Narendra Modi "too represents perhaps the very effective and appealing message of 'Yogyathwa'."

Notwithstanding these 'Image Traps', to use an expression of the late lamented social scientist from Tamil Nadu, MSS Pandian, such a new concept in chaste Sanskrit is bound to evoke in a multi-cultural country, the authors of 'Yogyathwa', in a brilliant 222-page treatise, have shown how it draws sustenance from the roots of 'Dharma'.

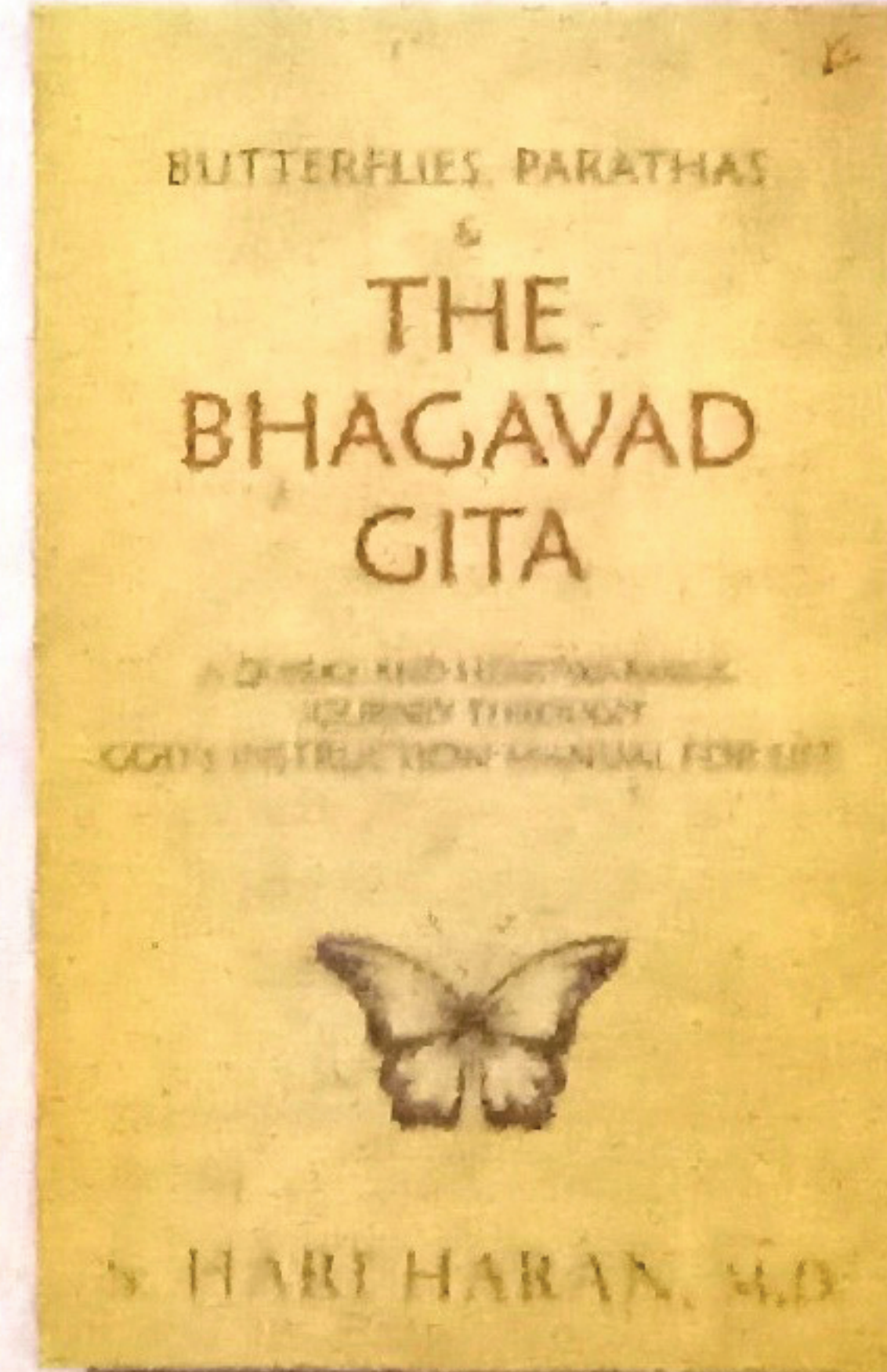
Inspired by the Upanishadic mystical unity of 'Brahman' or the 'universal soul', the authors have pegged their narrative on two interesting notions: first of the 'Common Soul', the primordial urge of one 'Being' wanting to be 'Many', how any successful leader, be in an organisation or society at large, should vibe with the



## YOGYATHWA: SIMPLE ACCESS TO POWERFUL LEADERSHIP

by Bala V. Balachandran, T.N. Seshan and Nixon Fernando  
Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd., Noida

'Common Soul' by understanding and responding to collective aspirations and how they see 'Dharma in the present age', and second the concept of 'Suzerainty' in simple terms how one takes a position of authority to give substance to leadership. And when dovetailed with the concepts of



## BUTTERFLIES, PARATHAS & THE BHAGAVAD GITA

by S. Hari Haran  
Amaryllis, Imprint of Manjul Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi

the three 'Yogas' and 'Dharma' as explained in the 'Bhagavad Gita', Bala and Seshan unveil a new interface of 'Yogyathwa', to benchmark leadership.

An 'inspirational leader' by that yardstick moves to a higher realm of enlightened consciousness – "entering regions through the knowl-

edge that there is a 'Common Soul', as the authors put it – and equally have an uncanny ability to connect with the humdrum world of everyday life. Thus the authors' precise representation of 'Yogyathwa' with Venn diagrams, is similar to the 'ascent' and 'descent' phases in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of 'Integral Yoga', wherein on evolving into a higher plane, the 'supramental consciousness' or the 'divine will' descends into earthly life for the greater good of mankind. It is certainly a book that will be talked about even outside the portals of IIMs'.

The second book, Butterflies, Parathas and the Bhagavad-Gita, by Dr S Hari Haran, a dermatologist and an alumnus of the Government Tirunelveli medical college and Raja Muthiah medical college and now placed in Coimbatore, is again revisiting how to live out the eternal values of the Gita, seen through the prism of the tumultuous lives of two boys from the dusty, highly polluted port-town of Tuticorin, who grow up to become medical professionals under varying circumstances.

One of their much-loved

schoolteachers, Bharat Sir, stokes their curiosity to read the 'Bhagavad Gita' to pen an essay on it. That quietly sets off a chain of 'karmic events' for the next 25 years or so, for Venki and Sandy, the protagonists of this seemingly autobiographical metaphysical fiction. Both even part ways for years, as Venki tries to plod through the profundities of the Gita as he matures, amid Sandy, as Santosh is called, an LLL (love's labour lost) case, hooked to hedonistic ways in despondence. Yet, finally, as the moment of truth reckons for Sandy, he turns around to find loads of wisdom in what Venki had been trying to plead about the significance of the 'Bhagavad Gita'.

The crisscrossing time zones of the two boys growing up and maturing in inter-personal relationships and other characters who impinge their lives, provide a parallel track to narrate in a simple, engaging style the key teachings of the 'Bhagavad Gita', laced with insights from Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharishi; and Sufi mystics. It is hardly in the genre of the racy heal-thyself-doc-

tor stuff, or miracle-aiming self-help books, but Hari Haran's work definitively represents a recent, yet sober, trend of small town India – reinterpreting Bharat's newfound religiosity, a shade similar to how Kapil Devi and later M.S. Dhoni rewrote the ethos of Indian cricket.

**BOOK RECEIVED: 108 DIVYA DESA DHARSHAN** by Usha Raja. Published by Palaniappa Brothers, Chennai.

This is a timely compendium on and friendly travellers guide to the 108 sacred shrines of Sri Vaishnavism, with the 1000th year birth anniversary celebrations of the great Saint-teacher Sri Ramanuja just a few weeks away.

The author, Ms. Usha Raja, a post-graduate in English literature and a media professional, has lucidly explained the significance of each 'sthalam', how and why the deity of Maha Vishnu is known in each of those temples, brief history of each temple and other vital information on how to get there for 'darshan'. It is a welcome addition to this genre of religious handbook to both pilgrims and tourists.