

Research Article

The Sanctified Vocation: A Treatise on the Divine Ontology of Labour, the Imperative of Excellence, and the Determinism of Providence

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Abstract

This comprehensive treatise presents a philosophical and theological framework for labour that challenges the modern, transactional view of work, which often leads to alienation and a false hierarchy of professions. The analysis posits that all forms of work possess an inherent equality in dignity, a concept explored by deconstructing the sociological distinction between "menial" and "strategic" labour. Drawing on comparative theology—specifically the Vedantic concept of Yajna, the Protestant doctrine of vocation, Catholic Social Teaching, and the Islamic theology of Rizq—as well as empirical evidence from organisational psychology, the text argues that the value of work is determined by internal orientation rather than external status. Central to this argument is the imperative for uncompromising excellence. The notion of "easy" work is refuted through an examination of the Japanese spirit of Shokunin, the psychological principles of deliberate practice, and theological arguments which frame quality craftsmanship as a moral and spiritual obligation. Excellence is thus presented not merely as a performance metric but as a form of spiritual discipline and reverence for the task's intrinsic demands. This intense commitment to process is complemented by a doctrine of providential determinism regarding outcomes. By synthesising the Vedantic principle of Prarabdha Karma with the Islamic concept of Rizq, the treatise argues that material recompense is cosmically fixed. This belief is framed as a liberating force, freeing the worker from the anxiety of results and the corrosion of envy, thereby enabling a state of detached diligence, or Nishkama Karma, where effort is focused solely on the quality of the action. Ultimately, the analysis concludes that this model of a "Sanctified Vocation"—a synthesis of divine assignment, process excellence, and acceptance of material destiny—offers a robust and sustainable antidote to the modern crisis of meaning in the workplace, transforming labour from a mere economic transaction into a profound path for spiritual integration, dignity, and inner peace.

Keywords

Sanctified Vocation, Equality of Work, Imperative of Excellence, Determinism of Providence, Comparative Theology of Work

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1. Introduction: The Crisis of Meaning and the Universal Philosophy of Work

A significant and profound metaphysical divide characterises labour in the modern era. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the innate connection between the worker and their work has been gradually and progressively broken, resulting in what Karl Marx famously described as "alienation." Similarly, Max Weber referred to this process as the "disenchantment" of the world. In today's secular, essentially rational framework, work is mainly regarded as a simple transaction: an exchange in which individuals trade their time, effort, and skills for financial compensation, social recognition, and status. This transactional perspective inevitably leads to a hierarchy of dignity and respect, where highly paid intellectual and professional roles are celebrated as "big" work. In contrast, lower-paid manual labour or service jobs are often regarded as "small" or "menial" work, and sometimes even looked down upon.

The idea introduced for careful examination and analysis—that is, the notion that "No work is inherently large or small," and that each task is ultimately "assigned by divine providence," with rewards considered "fixed" or predetermined—presents a significant and radical shift in philosophical perspective that offers a corrective to the current crisis or predicament. This concept advocates a reintegration or reconnection of the worker with the larger cosmos or universe, suggesting a transformation of the workplace from a mere marketplace driven by utility and profit into a more profound and meaningful theatre or stage of divine service and worship. Such a perspective is not merely a comforting or soothing platitude intended to provide relief or consolation but constitutes a strong, robust, and deeply rooted theological and psychological framework. This framework is supported, reinforced, and validated by centuries of accumulated wisdom traditions, spiritual teachings, and philosophical insights, as well as by modern empirical research and scientific studies.

1.1. The Sociological Context of Alienation

Sociological inquiry has historically been deeply engaged with understanding the consequences and implications of how labour and tasks are divided within societies. Emile Durkheim, a prominent figure in sociology, argued that specialisation of work creates a form of social cohesion known as organic solidarity, which emerges through mutual dependence among individuals. However, he also warned that this very specialisation could lead to a state called *anomie*, or normlessness, especially if the worker who performs a highly specialised task begins to lose sight of the bigger picture or the collective whole. In the modern context, many workers find themselves performing repetitive, often fragmented, or narrowly defined tasks on a routine basis; this usually hampers their ability to perceive how their individual contributions fit into the larger

system or the enterprise as a whole. The philosophy of "Sanctified Vocation" offers an alternative perspective to address this issue. It emphasises that the dignity of one's work is grounded not merely in the nature or complexity of the task itself, but rather in the conviction that the *source* of their assignment—believed to be God—confers inherent dignity and worth upon their *labour*, regardless of how small or routine their role may seem.

1.2. The Psychological Necessity of Meaning

Recent research in organisational psychology has shown that human beings have an innate tendency to seek and crave a sense of meaning in their work, often more than simply pursuing efficiency or productivity. The concept of the "meaning of work" is not an inherent property of the tasks themselves; rather, it is a mental and cognitive construct that the worker actively creates and assigns to their activities. When individuals perceive their work as a "calling" or a "divine assignment," even physically or mentally demanding tasks can transform into sources of deep, profound satisfaction and fulfilment. On the other hand, if work is divorced from this sacred or spiritual dimension, even roles that carry high status, prestige, or importance can lead to feelings of emptiness, existential crisis, and burnout, which is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion and disengagement.

2. The Ontology of Equality: Deconstructing the Hierarchy of "Big" and "Small" Work

The statement that "No work is either large or insignificant; all types of work hold equal importance" fundamentally challenges and questions the very core principles underlying social stratification and societal hierarchy. To truly grasp the implications of this idea, it is essential to carefully analyse and understand the various sociological mechanisms and processes that collectively contribute to the creation and perpetuation of social inequality. Additionally, one must explore the theological and spiritual frameworks that often undermine, challenge, or dissolve these societal divisions and hierarchies.

2.1. The Sociological Construct of Dignity and "Dirty Work"

Society typically assigns dignity to work based on three variables: autonomy, complexity, and remuneration. Tasks that involve handling bodily fluids, waste, or repetitive manual labour are often labelled "dirty work" and stigmatised, stripping the worker of social dignity. [5]

1) *The Physical vs. The Symbolic*: Research suggests that

the negative social perception associated with what is often called "dirty work" is a constructed notion created by society. Studies, including those conducted by Ashforth and Kreiner in 1999, have demonstrated that workers occupying these roles actively resist and challenge this stigmatisation by consciously reframing and redefining the nature of their work, thereby working to alter the societal narrative surrounding their jobs.

- 2) *The Equality of Necessity*: The concept of the equality of necessity holds that, from a functionalist point of view, every role in a hospital setting is of equal importance to patient survival. For example, the hospital cleaner plays an essential role comparable to that of the surgeon. If the environment is not kept sterile, the patient's surgery is likely to fail, underscoring the importance of maintaining cleanliness. This perspective holds that the importance of each task can be assessed in a binary manner: it is either necessary—making it crucial and of utmost importance—or unnecessary—rendering it redundant and dispensable. According to this view, there is no spectrum or gradient of importance among essential tasks; instead, their significance is absolute and all-or-nothing.
- 3) *Jacques Rancière's "Equality of Work"*: Jacques Rancière's concept of "Equality of Work" emphasises the idea that all types of work should be considered equally valuable. The philosopher Jacques Rancière advocates for what he calls the "relative equality of work," which involves rejecting the traditional distinctions and hierarchies that assign different values to various activities. He argues that recognising and valuing all forms of activity without prejudice forms the essential foundation for establishing a truly inclusive and cohesive community. According to Rancière, when we see all work as fundamentally equal, we lay the groundwork for a society built on genuine equality and mutual respect. [6]

2.2. The Theological Leveller: Work as Divine Liturgy

Religious traditions universally reject the secular hierarchy of labour, positing that God looks at the heart, not the job title.

2.2.1. The Protestant Reformation: Luther's Milkmaid

Martin Luther shattered the medieval distinction between the "sacred" vocation of the priest and the "profane" labour of the peasant. He argued that all legitimate work is a *Beruf* (calling/vocation).

- 1) *The Theological Mechanism*: Luther proposed that it is ultimately God Himself who provides nourishment, clothing, and healing to humanity. However, He accomplishes these acts through human agents, employing their hands and efforts. For example, he illustrated this by saying, "God is milking the cows through the vocation of

the milkmaid," [7] emphasising that divine work is carried out in and through human vocations.

- 2) *Implication*: If we assume that God is the primary agent acting *through* the worker, then the milkmaid's action can be regarded as just as holy and sacred as a bishop's prayer. To deem the act of milking a cow as "small" or insignificant is to dismiss and despise the method that God Himself has chosen to sustain and uphold His entire creation. The so-called "mask of God" (*larva Dei*) is symbolically worn by every worker who faithfully serves their neighbour and fellow human beings in their daily tasks. [7]

2.2.2. The Vedantic Perspective: The Universe as Yajna

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the cosmos is described as a great sacrifice (*Yajna*). Every being has a specific role (*Swadharma*) to play in maintaining the cosmic order (*Dharma*).

- 1) *Equality of Contribution*: The concept of Equality of Contribution is well articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, specifically in chapter 3, verse 35. It states clearly that "Better is one's own duty, even if it lacks merit, than the duty of another performed flawlessly." This verse suggests that the true spiritual worth of any action lies not in its outward appearance or the praise it garners, but in how well it aligns with an individual's inherent nature and divine calling. It emphasises that fulfilling one's own responsibilities and duties, as prescribed by one's unique spiritual and personal makeup, holds greater value than imitating or executing others' duties perfectly. In essence, this teaching underscores that the genuine contribution one makes is measured by the sincerity and authenticity with which one fulfils one's own purpose, regardless of external validation or perceived greatness, highlighting the importance of inner alignment over outward appearances. [9]
- 2) *S. K. Chakraborty's Analysis*: Professor S. K. Chakraborty, a renowned pioneer in the field of Management by Values, offers a profound insight into the nature of work and its spiritual significance. He posits that when individuals perform their work as an offering to the Divine, the usual distinctions we draw based on material or societal status tend to fade away. The "secular" becomes "sacred." A CEO's strategic plan and a janitor's swept floor are equal offerings if performed with the same *Bhakti* (devotion).
- 3) *Āyā Śārīra (The Body as Instrument of Offering)*: Vedantic philosophy further deepens the notion of the universe as *Yajna* through the concept of *Āyā Śārīra*, which may be understood as the *instrumental body*—the body given to an individual as a means (*āya*) to exhaust karma through action. In this view, the human body is not owned by the individual in an absolute sense, nor is it a vehicle for self-glorification or status accumulation. Rather, it is a functional instrument temporarily entrusted

to the soul for the execution of its *Swadharma* within the cosmic sacrifice. When work is performed through the lens of Āyā Śarīra, labour ceases to be an expression of ego (*"I am doing"*) and becomes an impersonal offering (*"this body is doing what it is meant to do"*). This has profound implications for the dignity and equality of work: if the body itself is merely an instrument in the Divine economy, then no action performed through it can be intrinsically superior or inferior. The sweeping of a floor, the writing of code, or the drafting of a strategic plan are all equivalent sacrificial acts when executed through the same instrument-body with surrender and precision. Thus, Āyā Śarīra dissolves the hierarchy of labour at its root by relocating agency away from social identity and toward cosmic function, reinforcing the Vedantic assertion that all work, when aligned with Dharma, participates equally in the universal Yajna. [8]

2.3. Case Study: The Hospital Cleaner and Job Crafting

The most compelling empirical evidence for the "equality of work" comes from Amy Wrzesniewski's research on hospital cleaners. [18]

- 1) *The Study*: Wrzesniewski studied cleaning staff in a major hospital. While some viewed their job as "menial" (just cleaning up messes), a significant subset viewed their work as "patient care."
- 2) *The "Small" becoming "Big"*: These job crafters took on tasks not in their job descriptions. One cleaner rearranged pictures on the walls of comatose patients, hoping the change in scenery would stimulate brain activity. Another danced for elderly patients to make them smile. Another avoided vacuuming near a grieving family, understanding that "quiet" was more important than "clean" at that moment. [1]
- 3) *The Insight*: These workers did not wait for a title change to do "big" work. They realised that their "small" assignment placed them at the critical intersection of life, death, and healing. They dignified their own labour by infusing it with purpose, proving that the "size" of the work is determined by the size of the worker's heart.

2.4. The NASA Janitor: A Parable of Purpose

A widely cited anecdote, often used in organisational behaviour literature, involves President John F. Kennedy's visit to NASA in 1962. Upon seeing a janitor sweeping the floor, JFK asked what he was doing. The janitor replied, "Mr President, I'm helping put a man on the moon."

Line of Sight: This anecdote illustrates the critical concept of *line of sight*—the ability of a worker to perceive how their specific task contributes to a larger, meaningful objective. The janitor did not interpret his role narrowly as merely "sweeping dust," which society might label as small or insignificant work.

Instead, he understood his task as a necessary condition for the Apollo mission's success. In an environment as technically sensitive as NASA, even minor contamination could compromise experiments, damage equipment, or lead to mission failure. Clean laboratories were therefore not ancillary but essential to space exploration. So, the Janitor's work was equal in necessity to that of Wernher von Braun, the chief architect of NASA's rocket program.

3. The Imperative of Excellence: "No Work Is Easy"

In my experiences, "No work is easy if it has to be done properly." This refutes the notion that menial labour is mindless. It suggests that *excellence* is a spiritual imperative and that mediocrity is a form of blasphemy ("insulting God").

3.1. The Japanese Spirit of *Shokunin*

The Japanese concept of *Shokunin* offers the most sophisticated cultural elaboration of this idea. A *Shokunin* is not merely a craftsman but a practitioner of a spiritual discipline.

- 1) *Social Obligation*: The *Shokunin* has a social and spiritual obligation to do their best for the general welfare. This is not for profit, but because the work itself demands respect.
- 2) *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*: Jiro Ono, the world-renowned sushi master, exemplifies this. Making sushi could be considered "simple" or "small" work (cooking rice, slicing fish). Yet, Jiro finds it infinitely difficult. He massages the octopus for 45 minutes instead of 30 to improve the texture. He adjusts the rice's temperature to match the customer's body temperature. He states, "I'll continue to climb, trying to reach the top, but no one knows where the top is." [4]
- 3) *The Lesson*: If a task seems "easy," it is only because the worker is engaging with it superficially. To do it "properly"—to extract the maximum potential from the materials and the moment—requires a lifetime of dedication.

3.2. The Psychology of Deliberate Practice

The assertion that "no work is easy if it is done properly" finds strong empirical support in the research of K. Anders Ericsson on "Deliberate Practice," a framework originally developed to explain excellence in fields such as music, sports, medicine, and chess, but equally applicable to all forms of labour.

- 1) *The Mechanism*: Ericsson's research demonstrates that excellence does not arise from mere experience or time spent on a task. Simply repeating the same activity for decades—what he terms *rote repetition*—leads to automaticity, not mastery. Deliberate practice, by contrast,

requires the worker to remain consciously engaged. It involves continuously identifying inefficiencies, errors, or suboptimal outcomes, deliberately experimenting with improved methods, and refining performance through focused correction. This process demands sustained attention, self-monitoring, and problem-solving, making it inherently cognitively strenuous. Work only appears “easy” once it has been reduced to a habit; the moment one seeks excellence rather than adequacy, mental effort becomes unavoidable.

- 2) *Application to So-Called Menial Tasks*: When this framework is applied to tasks commonly labelled as “menial,” the illusion of ease collapses. Consider the example of a cleaner committed to deliberate practice. Such a worker is not merely performing repetitive physical motions. Instead, they are constantly evaluating the efficiency of their movements to reduce fatigue and time wastage; understanding the chemical properties, dilution ratios, and surface compatibility of cleaning agents; and adjusting their behaviour based on the social and emotional context of the environment—such as maintaining silence near patients, minimising disruption, or anticipating human traffic patterns. Each of these micro-decisions requires attention, judgment, and adaptation. When performed with the intent of continuous improvement, cleaning ceases to be mindless labour and becomes a cognitively demanding discipline aimed at optimisation and precision. In this way, deliberate practice transforms even the simplest task into a sustained pursuit of excellence, validating the claim that no work is truly easy when done properly.

3.3. Dorothy Sayers: The Integrity of the Object

The theologian and philosopher Dorothy L. Sayers, in her influential essay *Why Work?*, offers a rigorous correction to what she identifies as a persistent error in religious thinking about labour. She argues that the church has often adopted a sentimental, inward-looking view of work, in which moral value is assigned primarily to the worker’s intentions, emotions, or religious feelings, while the quality of the work produced is treated as secondary or even irrelevant. Sayers insists that this approach fundamentally misunderstands both work and worship.

- 1) *The Carpenter’s Duty*: Sayers famously states that “the only Christian work is good work, well done.” By this, she means that the moral and spiritual value of labour is inseparable from the integrity of the object produced. A carpenter does not serve God by cultivating pious emotions while working; nor does he honour God by attaching religious language to mediocre craftsmanship. He serves God by making a table that is structurally sound, proportionate, stable, and fit for its intended use. The act of worship lies not in the carpenter’s inner sentiment but in the disciplined obedience to the objective standards of

carpentry itself. To pray fervently while producing a flawed table is not devotion; it is negligence disguised as spirituality.

- 2) *“Insulting God”*: Sayers further grounds this argument in theology. She reminds us that God is not only the recipient of work but also the Creator of the laws that govern reality—geometry, physics, material strength, balance, and proportion. When a worker ignores or violates these laws through carelessness, laziness, or indifference, the failure is not merely technical; it is theological. Producing a crooked table when one knows how to make a straight one is, in Sayers’ words, an insult to God, because it demonstrates contempt for the order God has built into creation. To offer God’s work that is half-hearted, poorly executed, or deliberately substandard is not humility or detachment; it is a form of irreverence. True reverence is shown by respecting the task’s intrinsic demands and striving to meet them fully.

Sayers’ argument reinforces the central claim of this paper: excellence is not optional, and intention cannot substitute for quality. Work becomes sanctified not by emotional piety or verbal devotion, but by faithful submission to the objective standards embedded in the work itself. In this sense, every task—however small—carries a moral and spiritual demand: to be done as well as it can possibly be done.

3.4. The Metaphysics of Quality

The principle I often express to my daughters—“do any work with your heart, in the best possible manner”—is not merely moral advice or parental encouragement. It reflects a deeper philosophical position that resonates strongly with Robert M. Pirsig’s *Metaphysics of Quality* and with classical Indian and Japanese traditions of disciplined work. At its core, this view rejects the separation between the worker’s inner state and the objective quality of the work produced. Quality, in this framework, is not an accidental outcome; it is the visible manifestation of an internal order.

Pirsig argues that Quality precedes both subject and object—it is experienced before it is analysed. When a task is approached with care, attentiveness, and integrity, the resulting work naturally exhibits coherence, balance, and excellence. Conversely, when a task is approached with distraction, impatience, or indifference, defects inevitably appear. Thus, quality is not imposed from the outside through supervision or incentives; it emerges from the worker’s internal discipline. This insight is echoed in the Japanese *Shokunin* tradition, where craftsmanship is understood as a lifelong moral practice rather than a mere technical skill.

Chitta Śuddhi - Inner Purification as the Source of External Excellence: S. K. Chakraborty explicitly connects this philosophy of quality to the Indian concept of Chitta Śuddhi, or purification of the mind. According to this view, the quality of any external product—whether a physical artefact, a service, or a decision—is a direct reflection of the clarity, discipline,

and steadiness of the worker's inner state. A restless, careless, or ego-driven mind cannot consistently produce work of high quality, just as a turbulent lake cannot yield a clear reflection. Consequently, excellence in work is not merely a technical achievement but a moral and spiritual one.

From this perspective, the pursuit of quality becomes an inward struggle. The real obstacles to excellence are not external constraints, but internal forces such as laziness (*Tamas*), distraction, complacency, and the desire to "finish quickly" rather than "do rightly." Chakraborty, therefore, frames the demand for quality as a form of inner battle—a spiritual struggle analogous to *Jihad* in its non-violent, inward sense, or to the *Kurukshetra* of the Bhagavad Gita, where the true battlefield lies within the individual. Every act of careful workmanship represents a victory over inertia and indifference; every compromise in quality represents a surrender to them.

In this light, striving for excellence is not about perfectionism or external validation. It is a discipline of self-purification. To do work "with the heart" does not mean working emotionally; it means working with presence, sincerity, and restraint. Quality, then, is not simply what the work *looks like* when it is finished—it is evidence of what the worker *has become* in the process of doing it.

4. The Theology of Assignment: "Assigned by God"

The third pillar is the doctrine of Providence: "God assigns all works that come your way." This view eliminates the concept of "randomness" in career paths and frames every job as a divine appointment.

4.1. The Concept of Divine Vocation

Within the monotheistic traditions, work is not understood as a morally neutral or accidental activity arising merely from economic necessity or personal ambition. Rather, one's *station* in life—one's occupation, social role, and sphere of responsibility—is frequently interpreted as a direct ordination of Divine Providence. This view reframes work from a matter of self-selection to one of *summons*: the individual does not merely choose a job; they respond to a calling. The spiritual significance of labour, therefore, lies not in its external prestige but in the faithfulness with which one inhabits the role entrusted to them.

- 1) *Calvinism and the Doctrine of the "Station"*: Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant Ethic highlights how early Calvinist theology radically transformed the meaning of everyday work. Calvinists believed that God had sovereignly appointed each individual to a specific station (*Beruf*), and that faithful perseverance within that station was itself an act of obedience. Work became the primary arena in which faith was lived out, disciplined, and tested. Importantly, moral worth did not arise from mobility or ambition but from steadfastness. To abandon

one's assigned station in pursuit of a socially "higher" or more prestigious role—especially out of pride or restlessness—was interpreted not as self-improvement but as resistance to God's ordering of the world. Advancement was permissible only if it arose organically through Providence, not through contempt for one's present calling. In this framework, dignity is conferred by divine appointment, not by social rank.

- 2) *Catholic Social Teaching: Work as Participation in Divine Action*: Catholic theology develops this idea further through the concept of participation. In *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II teaches that human work is not merely an economic activity but a mode of participation in God's ongoing creative action. God is understood as continuously sustaining and shaping creation, and human beings, through their labour, are invited to share in this process. When a person accepts their work—whether intellectual, manual, or service-oriented—they are not submitting to punishment or limitation; they are accepting a delegation of responsibility. This is the theological basis for the notion of the human being as a "co-creator." The work assigned to an individual represents a specific portion of reality entrusted to their care, competence, and conscience. Even the smallest task, when faithfully executed, becomes a site of collaboration between the human and the Divine.

These traditions converge on a shared insight: work is not accidental, and dignity does not arise from choice alone. The moral and spiritual task of the worker is first to recognise their labour as a vocation, and then to inhabit it with seriousness, humility, and excellence. Seen in this light, dissatisfaction rooted solely in status comparison is not merely psychological unrest; it is a failure to perceive the deeper meaning of one's assignment. Divine vocation thus transforms work from a burden to be escaped into a responsibility to be honoured.

4.2. The Vedantic View: *Swadharma* and *Prarabdha*

In Vedantic philosophy, an individual's life situation is not regarded as random or accidental, but rather as the result of social forces. One's birth, bodily constitution, psychological tendencies, social location, and range of opportunities are understood to arise from *Prārabdha Karma*—the portion of accumulated past action that has ripened and must be experienced in the present lifetime. *Prārabdha* sets the *conditions* of life, not as punishment or reward in a crude sense, but as the precise context required for the soul's continued moral and spiritual evolution. Within these given conditions, the work that naturally "comes one's way" constitutes one's *Kṣetra*, the concrete field of action in which growth, discipline, and liberation are to be pursued. [9]

Closely linked to this is the concept of *Swadharma*, one's own duty or rightful mode of action. *Swadharma* does not merely denote a profession; it refers to an action that is aligned

with one's nature, capacities, and karmic situation. Work, from this perspective, is not chosen arbitrarily on the basis of preference or prestige. It is *discovered* through honest engagement with one's given circumstances. Spiritual progress lies not in escaping this field, but in fully inhabiting it.

- 1) *Rejection of Envy - The Logic of Non-Comparison*: If one's work and circumstances are the direct outcome of Prārabdha, then envy becomes not only psychologically corrosive but philosophically incoherent. To resent another person's work is to implicitly deny the intelligence of cosmic order. The Bhagavad Gita states this principle unambiguously: "It is better to engage in one's own occupation, even if performed imperfectly, than to accept another's occupation and perform it perfectly" (3.35). The verse does not glorify incompetence; rather, it asserts that spiritual alignment matters more than technical brilliance applied in the wrong domain. Excellence pursued outside one's Swadharma strengthens ego and restlessness, whereas sincere effort within one's own domain—even when flawed—purifies the mind and advances liberation. Envy, therefore, is not ambition but ignorance of one's karmic field.
- 2) *Sant Ravidas - Acceptance as the Gateway to Transcendence*: The life of Sant Ravidas offers a concrete and powerful illustration of this doctrine. Born into a community of leather workers (*chamārs*), a profession regarded as impure and socially degrading by the orthodoxy of his time, Ravidas neither rejected nor escaped his trade. Instead, he accepted it fully as his Swadharma. He attained spiritual realisation while continuing to mend shoes, demonstrating that liberation is not contingent on social elevation. His declaration that the sacred waters of the Ganges resided in his leather-soaking pot (*kathoti*) was not merely symbolic defiance; it was a metaphysical assertion that sanctity arises from consciousness, not location. Ravidas showed that the "assignment" of being a cobbler was not an obstacle to holiness but the very medium through which it was realised.
- 3) *Kabir - The Loom as a Site of Revelation*: Similarly, Kabir, a weaver by profession, did not abandon his loom in search of spiritual truth elsewhere. Instead, he used the imagery and rhythm of weaving to articulate the highest metaphysical insights. He described the universe itself as fabric woven by the Divine Weaver, with warp and weft symbolising the interpenetration of the material and the eternal. Kabir's refusal to separate work from worship reinforces the Vedantic claim that one does not need to escape one's assigned field to find God. The loom was not a distraction from spiritual life; it was the classroom in which the ultimate truth was revealed. His life validates the principle that the path to God runs *through* one's work, not around it.

These teachings establish a rigorous Vedantic ethic of work: what matters is not the external status of labour, but its fidelity to Swadharma within the limits of Prārabdha. Liberation is not

achieved by changing one's assignment, but by exhausting it through disciplined, detached, and wholehearted action. In this view, work is neither an accident nor a burden—it is the precise instrument through which the soul completes its unfinished work across lifetimes.

4.3. Brother Lawrence: The Practice of the Presence

The seventeenth-century Carmelite monk Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection provides one of the clearest and most practical demonstrations of how the theology of divine assignment is lived in everyday work. Unlike abstract theological formulations, his contribution lies in *method*: he shows precisely how ordinary labour, when accepted and rightly oriented, becomes a continuous act of worship.

Brother Lawrence was not assigned to preaching, scholarship, or public ministry. Instead, he was placed in the monastery kitchen, performing repetitive and physically demanding tasks such as cooking, washing utensils, and cleaning. He openly admitted that this work did not suit his temperament and that he initially found it unpleasant. Crucially, he did not seek reassignment, nor did he treat the task as a necessary evil to be endured while awaiting "spiritual" moments elsewhere. Instead, he made a decisive interior shift: he resolved to perform every action for the love of God, accepting the assignment itself as God's will.

- 1) *The Kitchen as Sanctuary - Eliminating the Sacred-Secular Divide*: Brother Lawrence rejected the conventional distinction between sacred activities (such as prayer) and secular ones (such as manual labour). He wrote that "the time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer," and that even amid the noise and disorder of the kitchen, he experienced the same inner stillness and closeness to God as when kneeling before the Eucharist. By this, he did not mean that the kitchen became symbolically holy, but that holiness was no longer tied to location or activity. The kitchen became a sanctuary because the worker's attention was fixed on God, not because the task itself changed. In this way, Brother Lawrence demonstrated that divine presence is accessed not by escaping work, but by fully inhabiting it with awareness and consent. [2]
- 2) *The Meaning of "Heart" - Work as Relationship, Not Routine*: When Brother Lawrence emphasised doing work "with the heart," he was not advocating emotional intensity or sentimental devotion. Rather, he meant relational attentiveness—the continual, quiet turning of the mind toward God while the hands remained engaged in their task. He spoke inwardly to God while peeling potatoes, stirring soup, or washing dishes, treating each action as a moment of companionship rather than mechanical obligation. The work itself remained simple, repetitive, and externally unremarkable; what changed was the worker's orientation. Through this practice, the "small"

work of cooking was transformed into an act of sustained communion. The task did not become spiritually significant because it was difficult or prestigious, but because it was performed consciously, lovingly, and without resistance.

Brother Lawrence's example confirms a central claim of this paper: the dignity of work does not arise from its complexity, visibility, or status, but from the quality of presence brought to it. When work is accepted as an assignment and performed with the whole self—mind, attention, and intention—it ceases to fragment the worker. Instead of competing with prayer, work becomes prayer enacted through the body. In this way, Brother Lawrence offers a concrete and repeatable method by which any form of labour, however humble, can become a site of spiritual integration.

4.4. Viktor Frankl: Meaning in the Lowest Depths

Viktor Frankl's experiences in Nazi concentration camps provide one of the most severe and uncompromising validations of the principle of meaningful assignment. Unlike philosophical or theological examples drawn from voluntary religious life, Frankl's case unfolds under conditions of extreme coercion, dehumanisation, and suffering—conditions in which work was stripped of dignity, choice, and external purpose.

As a prisoner, Frankl was forced into brutal forms of slave labour, including digging ditches and laying railway tracks under starvation, cold, and constant threat of death. These tasks had no intrinsic meaning, offered no prospect of advancement, and were often deliberately designed to exhaust and humiliate. Yet Frankl observed a striking psychological pattern: prisoners who lost all sense of *meaning*—who could no longer interpret their suffering as connected to any task, responsibility, or inner purpose—tended to deteriorate rapidly, both mentally and physically, and often died soon after. By contrast, those who were able to *reframe* their situation retained a surprising degree of inner resilience.

- 1) *Assignment Without Choice - Meaning as an Inner Decision*: Frankl noted that meaning did not arise from the nature of the work itself, which was objectively degrading, nor from any belief that the suffering was just or deserved. Instead, meaning emerged when individuals interpreted their suffering as a task to be endured rather than as meaningless torment. For some, this task was as minimal as surviving one more day with dignity; for others, it involved helping a weaker prisoner, offering encouragement, or preserving an inner moral code despite external collapse. In these cases, the "assignment" was no longer imposed from outside but consciously accepted from within. Even when all external freedom was removed, Frankl argued, the final human freedom remained: the freedom to choose one's attitude toward unavoidable suffering.

- 2) *The Preservation of Dignity Through Purpose*: Frankl famously encapsulates this insight by quoting Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." The "why" did not eliminate suffering, nor did it make the labour easier. Instead, it prevented the total collapse of the self. By framing their suffering as meaningful—however narrowly defined—prisoners preserved a sense of personal identity and moral agency. Frankl emphasised that dignity does not depend on the external conditions of work, but on whether the individual continues to see themselves as responsible for something beyond immediate pain. Even in the camps, where work was intended to annihilate the human spirit, meaning functioned as a form of inner resistance.

Frankl's testimony reinforces a crucial extension of this paper's thesis: even when work is involuntary, degrading, and apparently meaningless, the concept of assignment does not disappear—it moves inward. When no external vocation is available, the assignment becomes the preservation of one's spiritual integrity. In this extreme context, the dignity of work no longer lies in productivity, excellence, or social contribution, but in the refusal to surrender one's inner freedom. Frankl thus demonstrates that the sanctity of labour is not contingent on favourable conditions; it is rooted in the human capacity to transform suffering into purpose through conscious meaning-making. [15]

5. The Economics of Destiny: "The Fixed Paisa"

The most radical aspect is the economic determinism: "How much you have to get, God will definitely give you... not one paisa less, not one paisa more." This contradicts the modern capitalist ethos of limitless accumulation through effort, proposing a model of *Detached Diligence instead*.

5.1. The Doctrine of Prarabdha Karma and Wealth

Within Vedantic theology, the overall contour of an individual's worldly life is understood to be governed by Prārabdha Karma—the specific portion of accumulated past action that has matured and must be experienced in the present lifetime. Prārabdha determines not only broad life circumstances such as birth, health, and environment, but also the *range and limits of material experience* available to an individual. This doctrine does not deny human effort; rather, it defines the boundary conditions within which effort operates. [17]

- 1) *Wealth as Destiny - Resources as Instruments of Experience*: Classical Vedantic texts and their later commentarial traditions consistently maintain that Bhoga—the experience of pleasure and pain—requires corresponding material instruments, chief among them wealth and re-

sources. Accordingly, the quantity and type of wealth accessible to a person are not primarily the result of present effort alone, but are largely shaped by Prārabdha. Wealth, in this framework, is not a moral reward for virtue nor a proof of merit; it is a functional provision calibrated to the experiences the individual is destined to undergo. One receives resources sufficient to exhaust one's karmic ledger, not to satisfy limitless desire. Thus, disparities in wealth are not interpreted as indicators of spiritual worth but as differences in karmic requirement. [13]

- 2) *The "Fixed Quantity" - Prārabdha as an Irreversible Trajectory*: Vedantic teachers frequently describe Prārabdha using the metaphor of a released arrow—once shot, it must complete its course. Swami Krishnananda and other traditional commentators emphasise that anxiety, striving, or manipulation cannot alter the quantum of material outcome determined by Prārabdha. A person may worry excessively about money, work relentlessly out of fear, or engage in unethical accumulation, yet they will still receive neither more nor less than what their Prārabdha permits. This does not imply that effort is irrelevant, but that effort functions as the *means* through which destiny unfolds, not as the creator of destiny itself. The belief that one can secure extra wealth through anxiety is therefore viewed as an illusion rooted in ignorance of karmic law. [13]
- 3) *Liberation Through Fearlessness - From Outcome Anxiety to Process Excellence*: Crucially, this doctrine is not intended to encourage passivity or irresponsibility. On the contrary, its psychological and spiritual purpose is to liberate the worker from fear. If the material outcome—the "paisa"—is already fixed, then anxiety about results becomes both futile and corrosive. The worker is freed from compulsive comparison, hoarding, and insecurity, and can redirect their energy toward the *quality of action itself*. Work is no longer performed as a desperate attempt to extract more from the future, but as a disciplined offering in the present. This shift enables what the Bhagavad Gita calls Nishkāma Karma—action without attachment to results—where effort is intense, sincere, and skilful, yet inwardly detached. In this sense, belief in Prārabdha does not weaken motivation; it purifies it. The worker moves from working *for* money to working *through* duty, excellence, and inner freedom.

The doctrine of Prārabdha Karma reframes wealth from an object of obsession into a neutral instrument of experience. By accepting material destiny while remaining fully engaged in action, the individual achieves a rare synthesis: maximum effort without anxiety, and acceptance without resignation. This synthesis forms the ethical and psychological foundation of the "fixed paisa" principle articulated in this paper.

5.2. Islamic Theology of Rizq (Provision)

The expression "not one paisa less, not one paisa more"

closely parallels the Islamic doctrine of Rizq, which refers to all forms of provision—material, physical, and existential—granted by Allah to His creation. In Islamic theology, Rizq is not limited to income or wealth alone; it encompasses livelihood, sustenance, opportunities, and even the capacity to benefit from what one possesses. Central to this doctrine is the conviction that provision is governed not by human anxiety or manipulation, but by divine decree.

- 1) *Predestined Provision - Rizq as Divine Allocation*: Islamic tradition holds that a person's Rizq is determined by Allah prior to birth. Numerous prophetic narrations affirm that while a human being is still in the womb, their lifespan, deeds, and provision are written. The theological implication is clear: the quantity and nature of one's provision are fixed by divine wisdom and are not subject to expansion or contraction through fear-driven striving. As classical scholars emphasise, "Rizq is in the hands of Allah," and internalising this truth is considered foundational to faith. Material outcomes, therefore, are not random, nor are they proof of moral superiority; they unfold according to a preordained measure aligned with divine justice and purpose.
- 2) *The Role of Effort (Kasb) - Work as Obedience, Not Creation of Wealth*: A common misunderstanding of predestined provision is that it negates the need for effort. Islamic theology explicitly rejects this conclusion. While Rizq is fixed, human effort (Kasb) is still obligatory because work itself is a command of Allah. The believer does not work in order to *create* provision—since only Allah creates—but to access what has already been allocated, and to do so through lawful (*halal*) means. Effort is thus a form of worship and submission, not a mechanism for altering destiny. One works because obedience is required, not because anxiety demands it. In this way, Islam preserves a delicate balance: complete trust in divine decree alongside full commitment to responsible action.
- 3) *Freedom from Greed - Ethical Consequences of Fixed Provision*: An immediate ethical consequence of the doctrine of Rizq is the futility of greed. If one cannot receive more than what is written, then hoarding, dishonesty, exploitation, and unethical competition are not merely immoral—they are irrational. Greed becomes a symptom of weak faith, implying a belief that Allah might fail to provide what He has promised. By contrast, trust in Rizq cultivates honesty, patience, and ethical restraint. As succinctly expressed in practice, "You just do your work; the result is God's department." This attitude does not reduce diligence; it purifies it by removing fear and desperation. The believer works hard, but without panic; competently, but without deceit; ambitiously, but without obsession.

The Islamic theology of Rizq reinforces the central claim of this paper: destiny governs outcomes, while responsibility

governs action. By separating effort from outcome, Islam liberates the worker from the psychological tyranny of results while preserving the moral imperative to act. Work becomes neither a gamble for survival nor a contest of accumulation, but a disciplined expression of trust in divine provision.

5.3. Nishkama Karma: The Psychology of Detachment

The Bhagavad Gita prescribes Nishkāma Karma, literally “action without attachment to the fruits,” as a central discipline for human action. This principle does not advocate indifference, passivity, or reduced effort. Rather, it establishes a precise psychological separation between action and outcome, assigning responsibility for each to different domains. The individual is responsible for the quality of effort; the outcome is entrusted to a higher order—whether understood as God, cosmic law, or destiny.

- 1) *Scientific Validation - Detachment as Psychological Strength*: Contemporary research on Karma Yoga within organisational and management psychology provides empirical support for this ancient prescription. Studies indicate that individuals who adopt a Nishkāma orientation—focusing on duty, process, and intrinsic excellence rather than external rewards—demonstrate higher levels of Psychological Capital (PsyCap), including resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, and hope. At the same time, they exhibit significantly lower levels of stress and burnout. This suggests that detachment from outcomes does not weaken motivation; instead, it stabilises the psyche by anchoring effort in controllable variables. When workers are no longer emotionally dependent on results, they are better able to sustain long-term performance without exhaustion or cynicism.
- 2) *The Mechanism of Anxiety - Closing the Expectation-Reality Gap*: At a psychological level, anxiety arises from the gap between expectation (“what I think should happen”) and reality (“what actually happens”). The wider this gap, the greater the distress. Nishkāma Karma addresses anxiety at its root by dissolving this gap. When the worker accepts that the outcome—wealth, recognition, success, or failure—is ultimately governed by divine will or destiny, expectation loses its grip. The individual no longer expends mental energy attempting to control what lies beyond their authority. Attention shifts entirely to the process of work itself—precision, care, effort, and integrity—elements that are fully within one’s control. The division is clear: *excellence and heart* are the worker’s department; *money and results* are God’s department. This cognitive realignment transforms effort from a source of tension into a source of absorption and calm.
- 3) *Tulsidas: Contentment as Applied Psychology*: The poet-saint Tulsidas expresses this doctrine in practical, lived

terms through the phrase “*Jathā lābha santo*”—be content with whatever gain comes naturally. His argument is not moralistic but psychological: destiny will deliver the required measure of wealth and experience in due course, while human worry contributes nothing except suffering. Anxiety does not accelerate destiny, nor does contentment diminish rightful provision. By accepting what arrives without resentment or craving, the individual conserves emotional energy and remains inwardly free. Tulsidas thus frames detachment not as withdrawal from life, but as the intelligent refusal to fight what cannot be altered.

Nishkāma Karma emerges as a sophisticated psychology of action. It preserves maximum effort without emotional entanglement, ambition without obsession, and discipline without fear. By relinquishing attachment to outcomes, the worker does not become indifferent; rather, they become precisely focused on what truly matters—the integrity of the act itself. In this sense, detachment is not a retreat from responsibility, but its highest refinement.

5.4. The "Insult" of Anxiety

Within the theistic frameworks examined in this study, persistent anxiety about wealth and livelihood is not interpreted as prudence or responsibility, but as a theological contradiction. When provision is understood to be governed by divine agency, worry about outcomes ceases to be a neutral psychological state and takes on moral and spiritual significance. Anxiety is not merely an emotional response to uncertainty; it reflects an implicit judgment about the Provider’s reliability.

- 1) *Theological Logic - Anxiety as Practical Unbelief*: If God is acknowledged as the ultimate Provider—*Al-Razzaq* in Islamic theology or *Vishvambhara* in Vedantic thought—then the responsibility for material provision lies fundamentally with the Divine. In this framework, persistent anxiety implies one of two unstated assumptions: either that God lacks the competence to fulfil what has been ordained, or that God will fail to honour what has been promised. Both assumptions undermine the very meaning of divine providence. Trust in the doctrine of a “fixed paisa”—the belief that material recompense is precisely apportioned according to divine or cosmic law—thus becomes an act of worship, because it affirms confidence in the integrity of the cosmic order. Conversely, frantic accumulation, unethical competition, or deceptive practices undertaken out of fear amount to a form of *practical atheism*: outward acknowledgement of God paired with inward disbelief in divine governance.
- 2) *Martin Luther - Anxiety as a Denial of Divine Fatherhood*: Martin Luther articulates the same principle within a Christian theological framework. He argues that anxiety over livelihood represents a failure to grasp the nature of God as Father. Drawing on the biblical image

of the birds—who neither sow nor reap yet are sustained—Luther does not advocate idleness, but freedom from fear. Birds are active, diligent, and purposeful, yet unburdened by anxiety about tomorrow. Human labour, in Luther's view, should mirror this posture: energetic and responsible, but light and unencumbered by dread. Anxiety, therefore, is not evidence of diligence but of mistrust. To labour while trusting divine provision is an act of faith; to labour while consumed by fear is to deny, in practice, the very providence one claims to believe in.

These perspectives converge on a demanding conclusion: faith in divine provision must express itself psychologically as freedom from anxiety. Concern for excellence, effort, and ethical conduct remains obligatory; anxiety about outcomes does

not. When fear replaces trust, work becomes distorted—driven not by duty or devotion, but by insecurity. The rejection of anxiety is thus not spiritual escapism; it is the logical consequence of taking providence seriously.

6. Synthesis: The Sanctified Work Ethic in Modern Practice

How does this ancient, theistic philosophy translate into the modern, secular workplace? The synthesis of these ideas offers a robust model for "Sanctified Integralism."

Table 1. Comparative Framework of Work Ethics.

Dimension	Secular/Capitalist View	The "Sanctified Vocation"	Supporting Authority
Value of Work	Hierarchical (Based on salary/status)	Equal (Based on Divine Assignment)	Durkheim [14], Rancière [6]
Source of Job	Market forces / Luck / Merit	Assigned by God / <i>Prarabdha</i>	Luther [7], The Bhagavat Gita [9]
Effort Required	Minimum for maximum return (Efficiency)	"Best possible manner" / Heart (Excellence)	<i>Shokunin</i> [4], Sayers [10]
View of Menial Tasks	"Dirty Work" / Undignified	Sacred Duty / "Patient Care"	Wrzesniewski [1], Brother Lawrence [2]
Financial Outcome	Unlimited potential (Meritocratic)	Fixed / Destined ("Not one paisa more")	<i>Rizq</i> [16], <i>Karma Phala</i> [11]
Motivation	Extrinsic (Money, Promotion)	Intrinsic + Transcendent (Worship)	<i>Karma Yoga</i> [12], Frankl [15]

6.1. Management by Values

Contemporary scholars such as S. K. Chakraborty have demonstrated that the philosophical principles discussed in this paper are not merely metaphysical ideals but can be systematically integrated into modern management theory and organisational practice. Through his framework of Management by Values (MBV), Chakraborty argues that effective and ethical management must be grounded in the cultural and spiritual assumptions of the society in which organisations operate, rather than relying uncritically on imported motivational models. [3]

1) Cultural Congruence - Duty Orientation versus Achievement Obsession: Chakraborty identifies a fundamental tension between Western models of management—largely built on achievement motivation, individual competition, and result maximisation—and cultures with long-standing traditions of duty orientation, such as India. Western achievement-based frameworks emphasise outcomes, rewards, and external validation as primary

motivators. When transplanted into duty-oriented cultures without adaptation, these frameworks often produce stress, ethical compromise, and alienation rather than sustained excellence. Chakraborty argues that such dissonance arises because these systems reward results while neglecting the moral and psychological significance of the process itself. In contrast, the model of "Sanctified Vocation" aligns naturally with the indigenous ethos of Nishkāma Karma, where action is mandatory, excellence is expected, but attachment to results is discouraged. Under this model, motivation is stabilised by meaning and responsibility rather than inflated by incentives and fear.

2) The Spiritual Leader - Dignity, Excellence, and Responsibility: Within a Management by Values framework, leadership is not defined primarily by authority or performance metrics, but by moral orientation. A leader operating on these principles regards every employee—regardless of role, rank, or compensation—as inherently worthy of respect because each is entrusted with a specific responsibility within the organisational whole. Dignity is not conferred by productivity alone, nor protected

merely by labour regulations; it is grounded in the recognition that every role represents a necessary contribution to a shared purpose. Consequently, such a leader demands excellence not as a means to maximise profit at any cost, but because work itself carries intrinsic value and moral weight. When labour is viewed as an offering rather than a transaction, mediocrity becomes unacceptable—not because it reduces output, but because it violates the integrity of the task and the dignity of the worker performing it.

In this way, Management by Values translates spiritual principles into concrete organisational norms. It fosters workplaces where discipline is maintained without fear, motivation is sustained without manipulation, and performance is pursued without sacrificing ethics. By anchoring management practice in duty, dignity, and excellence, this approach offers a viable alternative to purely utilitarian models of organisational success.

6.2. The Antidote to "Bullshit Jobs"

Anthropologist David Graeber introduced the concept of "bullshit jobs" to describe forms of employment that are widely experienced by those who perform them as pointless, socially unnecessary, or internally incoherent. These roles often persist not because they create genuine value, but because of bureaucratic inertia, managerial symbolism, or economic structures that reward appearance over substance. The psychological consequences of such work are not merely boredom but moral injury: individuals sense that their time and capacities are being wasted, leading to cynicism, disengagement, and a loss of self-respect. [14]

- 1) The Theological Cure - Reclaiming Meaning Through Assignment: The perspective developed in this paper offers a radical response to this condition. From a theistic standpoint, no job is inherently meaningless if it is understood as an *assignment* rather than merely a market transaction. When work is interpreted as being permitted or allotted by divine or cosmic order, its value is no longer exhausted by its immediate economic utility. Even roles with limited or ambiguous market impact can possess high spiritual utility: they cultivate obedience to duty, discipline in routine, patience in constraint, humility in anonymity, and ethical conduct in unglamorous conditions. These qualities are not secondary by-products; they are central to moral and spiritual formation. In this framework, meaning is not derived from how impressive a job appears externally, but from how faithfully it is inhabited internally.
- 2) Reframing Bureaucratic Work - From Pointlessness to Service: This reorientation becomes particularly powerful in bureaucratic environments, which Graeber identified as fertile ground for perceived meaninglessness. Administrative work often involves repetitive procedures,

documentation, and compliance with impersonal systems, leading workers to feel detached from any tangible human outcome. However, when such roles are consciously reframed, their underlying purpose becomes visible. Processing forms can be understood as *bringing order to chaos*; enforcing procedures can be seen as *protecting fairness and consistency*; routine interactions with the public can become opportunities to express patience, clarity, and kindness. In this reframing, the worker ceases to be a passive cog and becomes an active moral agent. The job itself may not change, but its meaning does.

This approach addresses the core pathology Graeber identified: the collapse of meaning. Rather than attempting to eliminate all structurally inefficient or redundant roles—a task often beyond individual control—this model restores dignity by relocating meaning from external validation to internal orientation. Work ceases to be "bullshit" not because it suddenly becomes prestigious or lucrative, but because it becomes a site of responsibility, service, and personal formation. In this sense, the antidote to meaningless work is not job redesign alone, but a deeper re-conception of why work is done at all.

6.3. "Respecting God's Will"

To "respect God's will" is not a passive slogan or a call to resignation. Within the framework developed in this paper, it denotes a deliberate moral stance toward one's present circumstances, particularly one's work and social role. It requires the recognition that the current assignment—however modest, repetitive, or unglamorous—is not accidental, but forms part of a larger order that is not fully visible to the individual. Respecting God's will, therefore, begins with the refusal to treat one's present work as a mistake to be endured or a placeholder to be resented.

- 1) Acceptance - Fidelity to the Present Assignment: Acceptance, in this context, means wholehearted engagement with one's current role without inward resistance. If an individual is employed as a janitor, clerk, factory worker, or junior employee, that role constitutes the immediate field of moral responsibility. To perform such work carelessly, resentfully, or with deliberate mediocrity on the grounds that one "deserves better" is not neutrality; it is a rejection of the assignment itself. Such an attitude undermines both the work and the worker, because it introduces a split between what is being done and what the individual wishes were being done instead. Respecting God's will demands that work be executed with sincerity and excellence *now*, not deferred to some imagined future role of greater status.
- 2) Evolution Through Completion - Growth as a Consequence of Mastery: Paradoxically, traditions as diverse as Karma Yoga and the Japanese ethic of Shokunin converge on the same principle: genuine advancement does not occur through dissatisfaction with one's current level,

but through its complete fulfilment. Growth is not achieved by despising “small” work and aspiring prematurely to “big” work; it emerges when a task is performed so thoroughly, skilfully, and responsibly that it no longer constrains the individual. In these traditions, one transcends a role only after fully honouring it. Mastery creates the conditions for movement, whereas contempt for the present task creates stagnation. What appears externally as promotion or transition is, in fact, the natural outcome of internal readiness formed through disciplined completion.

Respecting God’s will entails a demanding ethical synthesis: full acceptance without complacency, and aspiration without rebellion. It calls for excellence in the present without fixation on the future. In this posture, work ceases to be a battleground between ambition and resentment and becomes a coherent path of growth instead. The individual does not escape their assignment by rejecting it, but by inhabiting it so completely that it has nothing more to teach them.

7. Conclusion: The Peace of the Sanctified Labourer

This study has argued that the modern crisis of work is not primarily economic or technological, but metaphysical. The widespread experience of alienation, burnout, and meaninglessness arises from a fragmented understanding of labour—one that divorces work from vocation, excellence from spirituality, and effort from providence. By contrast, the comparative theological and psychological framework developed here restores coherence by re-situating work within a larger moral and cosmic order. Across traditions as diverse as Vedantic Karma Yoga, Protestant vocation, Islamic Rizq, Catholic social teaching, Japanese Shokunin ethics, and modern organisational psychology, a striking convergence emerges: all legitimate work is equal in dignity, divinely permitted or assigned, morally demanding in its execution, and materially bounded by providence.

The dismantling of the “big” versus “small” work hierarchy is not merely a sentimental gesture toward inclusion; it is a rigorous conclusion supported by sociology, theology, and lived experience. Functional necessity collapses prestige-based distinctions, while theological traditions insist that divine agency operates through every honest task. Whether articulated through Luther’s milkmaid, the Vedantic concept of Yajna, the lives of Ravidas and Kabir, or the empirical findings of job crafting research, the same insight recurs: the worth of work is not determined by visibility or compensation, but by fidelity to the task entrusted. When labour is recognised as participation in a larger order—social, cosmic, or divine—it ceases to be a transaction and becomes a form of service.

Equally central to this framework is the uncompromising demand for excellence. The notion that certain forms of work are “easy” or “mindless” dissolves under serious scrutiny.

From the discipline of Shokunin craftsmanship to Ericsson’s theory of deliberate practice and Dorothy Sayers’ insistence on the integrity of the object, excellence emerges as a moral obligation rather than an optional embellishment. To do work “with the heart” is not to indulge emotion, but to submit oneself fully to the intrinsic standards of the task. Mediocrity, in this view, is not a neutral failure but a violation of both the work and the worker. Excellence becomes the means by which labour purifies the individual, integrating inner discipline with outer form.

Perhaps the most countercultural claim advanced in this paper concerns material outcomes. The doctrines of Prārabdha Karma and Rizq, echoed in Christian teachings on providence, collectively assert that material recompense is bounded and apportioned by an order beyond individual anxiety. This does not negate effort; it redefines its purpose. When outcomes are understood as fixed within a divinely governed framework, the worker is liberated from fear-driven striving and redirected toward process excellence. Nishkāma Karma thus emerges not as ascetic withdrawal, but as a psychologically sophisticated strategy that preserves high effort while dissolving burnout, envy, and ethical compromise. The rejection of anxiety becomes a logical consequence of faith in providence, not a denial of responsibility.

The practical implications of this synthesis are far-reaching. In organisational life, it offers a corrective to purely incentive-driven models that exhaust human motivation and corrode ethical culture. Management by Values demonstrates that duty-oriented, meaning-centred frameworks can sustain performance without manipulation or fear. In response to the phenomenon of so-called “bullshit jobs,” the doctrine of assignment restores dignity by relocating meaning from external validation to internal orientation. Even in the most extreme conditions, as Viktor Frankl’s testimony shows, meaning can be preserved when work—or suffering itself—is accepted as a task that demands moral response. In all cases, the locus of dignity shifts from circumstance to consciousness.

To respect God’s will, as articulated here, is therefore neither fatalism nor passivity. It is a demanding ethic of presence: full acceptance of the current assignment combined with uncompromising excellence in its execution. Growth and transcendence do not arise from contempt for one’s present role, but from its complete fulfilment. Across traditions, the paradox holds: one outgrows a task only after honouring it fully. In this sense, work becomes a coherent path of formation rather than a battleground of resentment and ambition.

In conclusion, the “Sanctified Vocation” proposed in this article is not merely a theory of work but a philosophy of life. It invites the modern worker to stand wherever they are placed—factory, office, hospital, kitchen, or field—and recognise that space as an altar, the task as an assignment, and the effort as an offering. Excellence becomes an act of reverence; detachment becomes an act of trust. When work is performed with mastery and devotion, and outcomes are surrendered to providence, labour ceases to fragment the human person. It

becomes, instead, a disciplined path to peace, dignity, and inner freedom—a path validated by theology, psychology, and the deepest currents of human wisdom.

Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
MBV	Management by Values
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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Partha Majumdar is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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