

INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION – THE NEED OF THE HOUR FOR INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The standard of living in general is improving and material prosperity is increasing. But there is a perceptible decline in Ethical Values in the society. The changes in the laws are not able to prevent the deterioration. Where does the solution lie? The Epics and religion throw some light. Though it is said that “ Yatha raja thatha praja”, the article tries to suggest that changes should start at the individual level. Karma theory is well known which says that one cannot escape from the results of one’s actions, not even by Gods. The results may be borne in the present life itself, else will have to borne in subsequent lives. Not only Hinduism and Jainism support this view, even Christianity too lend support to the view and says that one has to bear the results at the end of the life(after judgment day). Let us not absolve our responsibility by telling that it is the duty of law makers to set things right, but the transformation should start at the individual level. The paper suggests that we should not wait for a leader or Mahaan to come and start the movement but should start immediately, as every long journey starts with a small first step forward.

Keywords: Dharma, Ethical values, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavatgita, Jainism, Corruption, Individual Transformation

INTRODUCTION

Industrial revolution and the modern management techniques have enabled men to acquire material prosperity but there had been a marked decline in ethical value across the globe. There is a feeling of lack of trust and confidence among people both in personal and official relationships. In today's rat-race, greed and speed with which one can acquire wealth are becoming the measure of success. Thus, selfish interests, instead of social benefits, are dominating decision making at all levels. People are becoming wexed with the politicians who are bent upon amassing wealth by all means at their disposal. No wonder there are so many supporters to Anna Hazare’s movement against corruption.

But then what is the solution? Will mere changes in laws bring in the desired change? Or is there a need for fundamental change in the values of the individual? At this juncture, it will be appropriate to see what our epics have to say.

Ramayan and Mahabharat are the most popular epics of India, that span two different periods, the Treta yuga and the Dwapara yuga. Ramayan, belongs to ealier period when Dharma was supposed to be on its three legs, ie. only about 25% people were bad. Rama was the heir apparent, who was deprived of his throne by his aunt, and was asked to go to forests for fourteen years. Without seeking confirmation from the king, he had set out to the forests, with the two who wanted to be with him, his wife and his brother. Such was the level of obedience to the elders then. Compare it to the behavior of youth today!

When Bharata approached him and offered to give back the kingdom, Rama refused and continued with life in forests. He meets Sugriva, and promises him support, in the process kills Vali, and keeps his promise, and anoints him the king of monkeys. Later, when Vibhishana surrenders , Rama accepts him as friend, and makes him the king of Lanka, after the bitterly fought war.

Thus we see, that Rama never aspired for anything that was not his, although he could have become king of monkeys or of Lanka by way of his victories.

Let us look at Mahabharat, by which time ethical levels have fallen to 50%. Duryodhana wins over the kingdom of Yudhistira and his brothers in a game, where the dice were loaded, sends them to forests for 12 years and agnathavasa (living incognito) for one year. He keeps up his efforts to trouble the Pandavas, even during their vanavasa (stay in forest), and makes all efforts to ferret them out during their agnathaavasa, all in vain.

Later, when Pandavas and Kauravas decide to fight it out, both Duryodhana and Arjuna approach Krishna for support. Krishna offers to choose between all his army and himself, with a condition that he will not fight, Arjuna chooses Krishna, and Duryodhana gladly accepts the army. The choice offered symbolizes a choice between God(Divinity) and materialism.

The fight was called a dhrama yuddha, an ethical battle (the battle to be fought strictly as per the rules like fighting will be between sunrise and sunset only). But there had been several violations. Rakshasas, (who fight in the night) were deployed and fight continued after sunset. Kaurava army chiefs, Bhishma was killed using an eunch, Drona was killed using a lie and Karna was killed when he was unarmed, though was in the battle field(which was following the letter of the rules but not the spirit). Aswathama kills all the progeny of Pandavas in the middle of night, when they were sleeping. Bhima kills Duryodhana by hitting him on his thighs, which was against the rules. (The agreed rules of the war can be seen at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurukshetra_War)

The Hindu scriptures talk of Theory of Karma, which imposes responsibility for each of one's actions, says,

1. You reap what you sow, so always be righteous while dealing with others.

2. Every action has an equal reaction, whether an action is good or bad. The effect of the action may have to be borne in the present life itself or in any one of the later lives. (So always do good to others.)

This is very similar to Christian ideology. These scriptures were written thousands of years ago. And the ideas of Jesus too echo the same.

The Karma theory is amply illustrated in the epics. Rama kills Vali, the king of monkeys from behind a tree. Ram had to face similar death, later when he took birth as Krishna, being shot by Jara, in a forest. In the Mahabharat war, Pandavas kill all the Kauravas (their cousins) as well as all their uncles, relatives including grand father and their own teacher and win the war, but lose all their progeny, except the unborn Parikshit. Even most of the Krishna's progeny die later in a drunken brawl. The lesson being if you kill others relatives, your own relatives too will not be spared.

Gurcharan Das, former CEO of Procter & Gamble India, writes in his book, '*The Difficulty of Being Good — On the Subtle Art of Dharma*': (In the Mahabharata) "There may have been good reasons why Krishna had to do what he did to win — good had to defeat evil — but the epic does not believe that the ends justify the means."

The question remains – for society to be righteous, where should righteousness begin?

There is a proverb in Hinduism, " Yatha raja, thatha praja" , which means people try to emulate the ruler and hence it is important that the ruler should be righteous for the society to be righteous.

But in the democratic world of today, it is the collective psyche of people that reflects in the behavior of the leaders. The leaders probably are not to be blamed, but the people who allow their leaders to be corrupt and negligent of their duties towards the public , need to take the blame. Unless the individuals of the society change and rein in their materialism, the leaders cannot be expected to change.

That is why, all the spiritual texts, all religions speak of change of individual, and upliftment of self beyond worldly desires and possessions.

Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita (Several celebrated management gurus accept it as a guide to manage business ethically.) says , when managers and workers perform their duties without attachment to the result, beneficial results will follow. One need not hanker for profits, profits will flow from good karma. Bhagavad Gita also prescribes that the profits should be shared by all those who shared in the efforts.

Bhagavat Gita mentions that negative emotions or vices like " Ager, desire, greed, delusion, possessiveness, discontent, pride, grief, lust, jealousy, and abhorrence" stand in the way of self control of an individual, and hence should be avoided. At another place, Gita says that Kama (desire), Krodha (anger), Lobha (possessiveness), Moha (attachment), Madaa(pride), and Maatsarya (jealousy) are the six enemies for a man. Learned people say that the

order also implies the difficulty in overcoming them. Gita suggests people to redirect the energy of desire to other passion such as love or Bhakthi.

The transformation of an individual is proposed to be brought about in three stages :

The first is practice of yoga, holding thoughts in check, and achieving equanimity, and developing indifference towards all pairs of opposites like- pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, etc.

The second is performing nishkama karma, ie doing ones duty without any attachment to the results. This integrates equanimity achieved earlier, with resolute action with detachment towards results.” It does not mean severance with effect but a degree of aloofness. Desire is not suppressed, object is not obliterated, but the relationship between the subject and the other is freed from mundane expectations.”

The third emerges as a consequence of the above two, that is the Bhaktibhava. Such person does not take credit for the good that flows to himself, but gives it to God. All actions performed with such sentiment result in universal good. The doer thereby surpasses individual ego.

Chandra Mohan and Prasad wrote in their article that “Bhagavat Gita too tells us how a person with a balanced mind can be very effective in taking decisions. Gita calls such a person “Sthitha Pragna”, and enumerates his qualities. ‘Such a person, Gita says , is not elated when there is happiness, nor would feel miserable when faced with sorrow. Such a person is free from any kind of attachments. He knows no fear, and has conquered anger’. Thus, a balanced mind gives a manager the right attitude and right direction when faced with a problem or crisis. Such a person would be putting in his best efforts to perform any job assigned to him in a most effective manner.”

Jainism

In his article “Jainism and the art of Management”, the author Hemali Sanghavi, brings out the essence of teachings of Jainism and their relevance to management. He says that the Jaina texts written thousands of years ago are relevant even today. According to the author, Jainism talks of two levels of management- one self development and second relationship with others.

Self Management : Jainism teaches overcoming the vices like Krodha, Mada, and Lobha. It advocates practice of five virtues – Ahimsa(non-violence and love of humanity), Satya or speaking truth – (one’s speech should be pleasant, beneficial, true and unhurting to others) Acaurya or non-stealing, Brahmacharya or celibacy, and Aparigraha (negation of material desires to root out corruption).Jainism also advocates that one should have pure thoughts(manogupti),be conservative in speech(vag-gupti), and control over body(senses)(kaayaa gupti).

Relationship is a two way process and hence its management needs mutual trust and reciprocation. Display of anger is rooted in the perceived sense of authority, and more often than not, results in deepening misunderstandings. Jain Sūtras say that one who neither loses

temper nor becomes arrogant, commands respect. Jainism stresses the need for tolerance. Moving away from Darwinism which says 'survival of fittest', goes beyond 'live and let live', and recommends 'Living with others'. Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance. Jainism too talks of Karma Theory and says that we are the architects of our destiny.

To Be a Dev or a Danav

In his article "To be Dev or Danav – a choice" the author Sri Anil Chawla, draws exhaustively from Indian Epics and its history, gives a different facet to the epics. According to him, 'Conflict between being dev or danav is a perpetual war that goes on in the mind and heart of each one of us. To be a dev or to be a danav - that is a choice, which one faces at every step of one's life.'

"A dev tends to always **give away** selflessly and a danav tends to **grab or acquire** by hook or by crook. So, it would appear that the dev would become weaker and weaker, while the danav would gain strength at each step. Apparently and in the short term, it does happen to be so. But, in the long-term, exactly the opposite happens. Dev receives unexpected cosmic help and Danav's apparent strength is of no use. This is paradoxical, but true."

"Ram's war with Ravan was not a fight for a woman. At stake were two opposing models of society. Ravan had built a city (Lanka) of gold. This could not have been possible without a massive flow of resources from a large territory. During the war with Ravan, Ram was not even a king. He was a barefooted leader of the downtrodden masses. Killing of Kans, an oppressing despot, by a teenaged boy named Krishna was another such example. Mahabharat has innumerable such instances. The final fight, between the rulers of all-powerful Hastinapur on one side with five poor brothers on the other side, is also a dev-danav fight."

He further adds that "Shahjehan built majestic Taj Mahal. It cannot be a mere coincidence that the reign of Shahjehan marks the beginning of the end of Mughal Empire. Jewels of Nizam of Hyderabad are supposed to be the world's most expensive treasure. Sure enough, while Nizams became rich, their people became poor. Of course, the Nizams too did not last long. The Nizams or Moghuls had no interest in the people that they ruled over. Maximization of revenue and personal aggrandizement were their only objectives. They were building mausoleums and collecting jewels while their own people were dying of hunger."

According to Anil Chawla, the modern-day politicians and bureaucrats of India behave no different from Kans or Ravana. "They believe that a victor takes all. No institutions, no traditions, no norms, no values are too sacred for these danavs. The seeds of daivik attitudes have to be sown in minds and hearts of every individual. It is at this point that one needs faith in the paradox of ultimate victory of dev over danav". Unless people change their attitude towards wealth and its value in life, and realize wealth's subservience to higher order goals like self realization, there will not be any salvation to this country.

To conclude, we should not wait for a leader or Mahaan to come and start the movement but should start immediatly. One should not forget that every long journey starts with a small first step forward.

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