

***'Behind every great win, there is a great quit':
Lessons from Corporate Buddhas and Vedantist
Managers in India***

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Abstract:

This paper explores the possibilities and practices which modern day organizations can adopt to ensure their sustainability and perpetuity. Drawing from Sri Aurobindo's traditions the paper is of the view that 'the age of adventure is over' and the last adventure, the ultimate adventure, left to us will provide model for designing immortal organizations: the adventure within. The paper draws from various Indian traditions and philosophies, including Buddhism. It delineates a corporate's journey towards Buddhahood (or Supercorporatehood) by devising adherence to the Cosmic Truths as understood by Buddha. Though explicitly not going to the details of the work of Blake & Moutan, the present paper adds the third dimension to their 'Management Grid': the concern for personhood. The paper takes Vedantic Science of Soul beyond the confines of some ancient Sanskrit texts, and applies them to fashion out an organization that begins in everlast and will end in everlast.

Key words: Buddhahood, Corporatehood, Indian, Organizations, Personhood, Supercorporatehood, Vedantist, Work Culture

The Vedas are said to be the oldest scripture of mankind. They are the inexhaustible mines of eternal wisdoms which can be used for the fulfillment of human race in all its entirety in all ages. The ideas which Vedantic Way of Life propounds can prove an important remedy for a range of modern day maladies: be they social, economic, political or personal. Vedantists were the physicians of soul and talked extensively about materiality and immateriality. However, it will be worthwhile to mention at the outset that Vedantists never devoted themselves to this primitive dualism: they never hated matter ...they only loved whatever there was True in the matter (*"I am not the matter but whatever is True in the matter is Me"*). What Science of Vedanta preaches from its every page strength, Unity and eternity. Theirs is a book about oceans not waves. They were the clock builders not time tellers. Theirs was a venture from life to life, from creation to creation, from everlast to everlast, which is a bit difficult for the Western mind to comprehend which either believes in circularity or linearity.

The ancient Vedantists were no time-servers rather they were the providers of timeless ideas and services. They specialized in plenary services (beyond primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary etc.), experimented in high-touch human soul laboratories, planned for the eternal products to be produced in immortal organizations, at the time when savagery was the buzzword and cannibalism was the civilization in most part of the world.

The civilization of savagery and cannibalism has not ended even today, only its form and method has changed. Profit consumes people (in the name of smart sizing), superiors consume subordinate (in the name of work culture), corporations consume corporations (in the name of value addition and economies of scale), though keeping the flag of self-actualization and crucible-culture aloft at the altar of organizational effectiveness. The whole scenario looks like a mad rush of rats packed in a sack, knowing not that even if one

of them emerges victorious it will remain a rat! So, which rat is gold medallist and which bagged the silver medal is not the concern of this paper. The main concern of this paper is to open the mouth of the sack throwing everybody in the world of self-created opportunities and realize ones true identity and purpose surpassing the inadequacies of mortal life.

The Trap is Closing

'Few large corporations live even half as long as a person', says Peter M Senge in his book *The Fifth Discipline*. In 1983, a Royal Dutch/Shell Survey found that one third of firms in the Fortune 500 in 1970n has vanished. But there are companies who survived more than a 100 years. They are visionary companies who are consciously aware of their purpose of being and they know what they stand for...values and virtues make an organization timeless and deathless. (Quoted from *Corporate Soul: The Monk within the Manager*, Moid Siddiqui, 2005).

There has been an increasing recognition of such facts in the corporate world hence, no wonder works of Kahil Gibran and wisdoms inherent in Wu Wei are finding mention in various B-School syllabi and courses. But in most of the cases this is a case of double speak and (self) deception.

The biggest lie that corporates are telling today is that 'human resource is our biggest resource'...because even at the slightest sign of downturn the first measure that corporates resort to is downsizing in the name of smartsizing. (Siddiqui 2005).

Likewise, yoga has become a fashion and talks on yoga a status symbol. Many find breathing exercise (Pranayam) asphyxiating because their main concern is greater amount of oxygen rather than the heightened level of concentration and self-realization. This will not work. It is bound to fail. There is no technique for being hungry and thirsty. It comes from within. It comes from within.

There are plenty of manuals on how to do yoga but there is no manual for being thirsty...And if you are thirsty the river comes to you; if you are not thirsty, the river does not exist. It does not exist. (Satprem 1985)

The Great Unknown

“The age of adventure is over. Even if go to the Seventh Galaxy, we will go there helmeted and mechanized, and we will find ourselves exactly as we are: Children in the face of death, living beings who are not too sure how they live or why, are where they are going...But as always it turns out that our darkest adversities are our best opportunities, and the obscure transition is only a transition leading to a greater light. That is why we are pushed to the wall and faced to the last exploration left us: ourselves. (Satprem 1984).

This new exploration will contribute to the human development and well being in a novel fashion. It will make people and organizations *'lamp unto themselves'*. This adventure coupled by the understanding of the Unity of Beings will chisel out the new, uncontested, deeper and wider markets and consumer base for the organizations with an invincible tool known as 'the Yoga of Compassion'. This is very well expressed by Stride Rite's moralization about the company's obligation to society-

You cannot run a healthy company in an unhealthy society for long. The millions of Americans who live below the poverty line deprive us of a market equal to the combined population of Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. By failing to liberate the children who are imprisoned by poverty and inadequate education, we further compromise our future as well as theirs. (Stone, 103).

(Cited from Hatch, Koster, and Kozminski A.K. 2005. "The Three Faces of Leadership: Manager, Artist, Priest")

The Corporate Buddha

Visionary companies are aware of both: the corporatehood as well as the Supercorporatehood. Corporatehood rests on the two dimensions of the profithood and the peoplehood (as in Blake and Moutan's Management Grid). These two dimensions defined the functioning of industrial organizations from the time immemorial till the recent past, though with varying degree of importance over the period of time. However they painted the inadequate picture of reality. Organizations work in a three-dimensional space with multidimensional people. People as a dimension were taken but People's Dimension was not taken into account. This dimension is the dimension of personhood. But this is not a unitary dimension, it is an umbrella that covers the unlimited and fathoms the unfathomable. Working with this dimension, corporates attain Supercorporatehood or Buddhahood.

How it is possible let us understand by the example of an imaginary company which wants to attain Buddhahood by following the footsteps of Buddha.

In spite of being a prince (a profit making organization) Buddha one day left his palace (the mode of functioning) "for abating this accursed flood of woes" (rat race, misery and the fear of extinction i.e. death). The main problem comes at this stage as the corporates find it difficult to adopt a long term vision, necessary for Supercorporatehood. Adopting a short term perspective, they take a hostile attitude to either its people (downsizing) or its competitors (Murdochism). They fight for the limited market and in the mad rush kill their much publicized concepts like 'organizational citizenship', 'industrial symbiosis' etc. No company can become great killing the competitor...they can become great only by killing the competition by achieving levels of harmony and excellence which are unscalable and insurmountable. In this situation they can create new and uncontested markets for them and

deepen the faith of their existing customers. The Yoga of Compassion will be very helpful tool for this purpose as it will create an entirely new breed of 'follower and devotee customers'. But this is not possible unless the companies see the Unity of Beings and are "ready to pour blood for the tears of others". Buddha was able to win large number of adherents because he saw himself diseased, old and sick in spite of being a healthy and handsome prince. Only this sense of unity can create a cult-like customer base, and this sense of unity comes imbibing the following-

I am as all these men
Who cry upon their gods and are not heard,
Or are not heeded-yet their must be aid!
For them and me and all there must be help!
It may be that some of the gods are good
And evil some, but all in action weak,
Being so feeble that when sad lips cry
They cannot save!
Perchance the gods have need of help themselves
How can it be that Brahma
Would make a world and keep it miserable,
Since, if all powerful, he leaves it so,
He is not good, and if not powerful,
He is not God! – Channa! Lead home again!
It is enough! Mine eyes have seen enough!

(Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia*, Book III, 61-62)

Once this important realization has occurred the most important step of the journey to supercorporatehood is taken. The rest of the process can be accomplished by adhering to the Eight Fold Paths and the doctrine of renunciation. Renunciation is the first prerequisite for a great striving. Humanity wouldn't have got Buddha without The Great Escape.

Buddha's Eight Fold Path are the technologies of immense help in transforming a corporate into a

Supercorporate. The first two paths of Right Vision and Right Aim can determine whether the corporate is 'Built to Last' or 'Built to Flip'. The common denominator of all the successful corporates is that 'they know what they stand for'. Once Aim and Vision become clear Right Effort and Right Action should follow. Commenting on what is Right Effort Buddha says "May muscle, skin and sinew, may bone, flesh and blood shrivel and dry up rather than I should abandon my effort as yet I have not attained to all that is attainable by human perseverance, energy and effort. This brothers, is Right Effort."

However, Right Effort is not possible unless and until there is Right Awareness standing firm on Right Livelihood. The life style professed and practiced by organizations create a definite kind of image about those organizations to general public (especially its consumers) as well its employees. An organization which spends a lot of money in unsavory advertisements and in- and ex-officio pomps and shows to woo its customers without caring for its values and professional dignity will inculcate self-deception and a wrong work ethic in its employees. The era of compulsory profit and optional ethics is gone. In the era that has dawned only the organizations with compulsory excellence and ethic will able to survive.

Buddha realized the importance of proper communication as early as around two thousand and six hundred years ago, and most important, considered it one of the roads leading to salvation. For modern day organizations it is lifeblood and sine qua none but they will take lot of time to assign it such a higher place. Buddha himself was a great speaker.

His voice was singularly vibrant and eloquent; his very tone convinced the hearer, his looks inspired awe. From the tradition it appears that he must have been one of those whose personality alone suffice to make a man not only a leader but a god to the heart of his fellows. When such one speaks he obtains hearers. It matters little what he says, for he influences the emotions, and bends whosoever listens to his

will. But if added to this personality, if encompasses it, there be the feeling in the minds of the others that what this man teaches is not only a verity, but the very hope for their salvation; if for the first time they recognize in his words the truth that makes of slaves free men, of classes a brotherhood, then it is not difficult to see wherein lies the lightening-like speed with which the electric current passes from heart to heart. (Kenneth J. Saunders, *The Secret of Gotama*, Cited from *Buddha-The Light of Asia*, Sharma and Sharma, 19).

So, if the managers are able to offer something to workers which is not just a mean to survival then their organizations will become irresistible to the goddess of fortune end the eternity.

The last of Eight Fold Path is Right Concentration (or Meditation), which is key to self- possession and the path of Righteousness. These duo are the tools for “hearing the un heard, seeing the unseen and exploring the Great Unknown” for which deaf, blind and lame modern day management Gurus are holding out dharnas and rallies around the globe. Buddha was a creative person. He added the fifth Yoga to the Indian tradition- The Yoga of Compassion (other four being the Yoga of Action, the Yoga of Devotion, The Yoga of Knowledge and the Yoga of Meditation-Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Gyanyoga and Rajyoga respectively). It is difficult to find a person ever born on this earth who practiced all these five yogas to such an absolute scale in one life, other than Buddha. His life vindicates the practicality of Vedanta. Probably, this is the reason why Swami Vivekananda called him “the greatest Hindu ever born”. The tool with which modern day organizations can realize the Unity of Beings and create the new and the uncontested markets is the Buddha’s Yoga of Compassion. Tomorrows business organizations will be The Enlightened (One) Organizations. This is very clear.

Uniting the Mountain and the Valley

Have mercy on me my soul.
You showed me fortunes beyond
My grasp. You and fortune abide on
The mountain top. Misery and I are
Abandoned together in the pit of
The valley. Will e'er the mountain and the valley unite?
(*Complete Works of Khalil Gibran, Book III*)

Prior attempting to unite the mountain and the valley the first thing that is to be understood is what is the mountain and what is the valley (i . e. what is the Life and what is the Death?). The organizations which are shriveling under the fear of extinction and death should first ask a question to them: Is it Life that is dying or is it Death that is living? Gone are the days of 'compulsory profit and optional ethics'. Buddhahood is not a matter of choice...it is a matter of survival-either for the men or the societies and organizations created by them. If life suffers with life while in life then it is no life. It is Death. Death. It is Death that is living and which one day naturally reaches to its culmination leaving us delusionally moaning and wailing that we have lost a valuable life or organization.

But there shall be no more deaths. This is very clear. It is high time that we show our survival instinct. Harmony ensures a bigger market than competition. Let there be harmony. Let there be Tao. Things that are against Tao will not last. The second phase of Evolution has started. In phase one those survived who adopted to some alien environment. In phase two only those will survive who will adopt to their own true nature: the Buddha.

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