

## **Mahabharata as a resource of Management Science**

### **Mahabharata – a Philosophy or Science?**

Mahabharata is a treatise by Shri Krishna Dwaipayana also known as Vedavyasa. It's not just an epic which contains information on various historical and philosophical incidents. It's an insight into all the Vedas, Vedanta sahithya and the puranas put together. It's a classic work on war sciences, diplomacy. More than anything else it is a name of text book of management from where greatest books of management have taken cues to be formed.

The scholars opined that what was contained elsewhere can all be found in the Mahabharata but what was found in Mahabharata cannot be found elsewhere. Such is the content of this vast epic. Also it contains in itself 3 different episodes which are management books by themselves viz., the Bhagavad Gita, Shanti Parva and Vidura Neeti.

The Vidura Neeti is a treatise on understanding how to manage the enterprises in a novel way of flawless communication, ethical interpretation of opportunities, customer satisfaction and very importantly managing the various resources, these things though are taught now in modern B-schools. They are not 100 % success oriented and hence their applications also are a big question mark given their low success rate. But the modern day Chanakya Neeti is a sequel to Vidura Neeti that was given as a valuable piece of advice to the blind king Dhritarashtra by his minister Vidura. Hence, Mahabharata is a source of management science for day today and strategic management of an organization.

## **What is Neeti?**

Neeti as per the dictionary is defined as ethics, morality and tactical policy that have to be followed and implemented by one. That one could be a common man or a king could be an entrepreneur or a businessman, an employee or an employer.

## **The real source for Management Science**

The Mahabharata consists of more than one lakh verses; Vidura Neeti is the 3rd Chapter of Udyoga Parva and consists of 609 verses which give us an insight into various sciences. On careful observation and study of various texts it is apparently visible that the resources of modern management thinkers can be traced to Vedic scriptures. To be an ideal administrator and a rational manager a few principles have been identified and can be applicable even in modern days' business. The paper aims at integrating the meaning of some management principles of great thinkers such as Henry Fayol, Peter Drucker. It also shows some other essential elements required for survival, sustainability and achieving success by any organization that are missing among the principles quoted by them.

**1. Division of Labor:** Henry Fayol <sup>1</sup> has stressed on the specialization of jobs, He recommended that work of all kinds must be divided & subdivided and allotted to various persons according to their expertise in a particular area, Subdivision of work makes it simpler and results in efficiency, It also helps the individual in acquiring speed, accuracy in his performance, Specialization leads to efficiency & economy in spheres of business. But Vidura states that

अत्येवाणिज्यचारं च पुत्रैः सेवेत चा द्विजान् ।

अदभ्योरग्निर्ब्रह्मतः कश्चमश्मनो लोहमुत्थितम् ॥ 38/13 ॥

This says that the manager should assign the jobs or work based on his judgement and analysis of their potential to do that job. But overall supervision and decision making

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<sup>1</sup> Koontz Harold, O'Donnell Cyril, Principles of management: an analysis of managerial functions, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, Tata McGraw-Hill Education, 1990.

#### References:

1. Vedavyasa “JAYA” hand written manuscript preserved at Sri Palimaru Math Udupi, undated.
2. Tirtha Ananda Sri “Mahabharata Tatparya Nirnaya” hand written script of Tirtha Hrishikesha Sri at Sri Palimaru Math Udupi, undated.

are two vital things that he should keep with himself as they are crucial for the organizations sustaining the business. He supplements by saying

**त्रयोन्यायामनुष्याणां श्रूयन्ते भरतर्षभ ।**

**कनियान् मध्यमः श्रेष्ठ इति वेदविदो विदुः ॥ 33/69 ॥**

The above verse says that a person should be appointed and assigned tasks based on his/her specialization. This is done only after the person is put through a test of his ability and intelligence and then judging his potential. A person who has more physical strength and skills than the intellect skills would be put for physically strenuous work whereas a person with more intellect skills would be put for planning & strategising work rather than physical work. This is akin to blue collar and white collar workers.

Also, he says

**चक्षुषा मनसा वाचा कर्मणा च चतुर्विधम् ।**

**प्रसादयति यो लोकं तं लोको अनु प्रसीदति ॥ 26 ॥**

There are different types of people in this world. The manager needs to take different stances or positions with different people. Some can be satisfied by the gaze, some by mindset or attitude, and some by words and some by action. One needs to understand, analyze and evaluate each one's capability. Then based on this analysis, extract the right work from them.

**2. Parity of Authority & Responsibility:** Authority & responsibility should co-exist, if authority is given to a person, he should also be made responsible. In a same way, if anyone is made responsible for any job, he should also have concerned authority. Authority refers to the right of superiors to get exactness from their sub-ordinates whereas responsibility means obligation for the performance of the job assigned, Authority without responsibility leads to irresponsible behavior whereas responsibility without authority makes the person ineffective. Vidura goes a step further and says

सप्तदोषाः सदा राजा हातव्या व्यसनोदयाः I

प्रायतो ययर् विनश्यन्ति क्रतमूला अपिश्वराः II98II

He means that a manager might have the authority and the capability to rule but there could be reasons that can still bring about his downfall. Therefore, an intelligent manager needs to check his conscience as to whether he is treading the right path and has to take prudent steps in the right direction. Then success will be his slave.

**3. Unity of Control and Command:** For an organization to tread in the right direction the control has to be exercised and it has to come from a single person to lead it into the right direction. In the armed forces during the battle the commands come from a single source avoiding confusion, misunderstanding and chaos. This would result in leading the team into the right direction in the right spirit with clearly spelt out goals.

रथः शरीरं पुरुषस्य राजन् आत्मा नियन्तेन्द्रियान्यस्य चाश्वः I

तैरप्रमतः कुशली सदश्वेयः दान्तयः सुखं याति रथीव धीरः II 60 II

Vidura speaks on a chariot (the body), the charioteer (intellect) and the horses that drive the chariot (the senses). He says that the charioteer needs to control the horses to move the chariot at the right pace and in the right direction. This will steer the charioteer towards happiness and success.

#### 4. Who is an ideal policy maker?

One who says the truth and one who examines the pros and cons of the solution thoroughly and then acts is the real leader. This quality makes him an undisputed leader everywhere. Also he should have amongst his team people who are able and qualify rather than any person who is just willing to be in the team. Wealth, items, knowledge and kingdom these would multiply many fold if it is in the hands of an honest and able person. Hence the first attribute required is HONESTY coupled with balanced judgment and foresight.

राजा लक्षणसम्पन्नस्त्रैलोक्यस्यधिपो भवेत् I

प्रेष्यस्ते प्रेषीत्सचैव धृतराष्ट्र युधिष्ठिरः II 33/17 II

5. **Power of judgment:** One who understands things in the right sense and never dependent on others for anything is the real leader. Amongst senses the most prominent is the eye and hence a person blinded with emotions loses the wisdom of judging things whether they are right or wrong. He would start reasoning or rationalizing the wrongs done and hence unfit to be a leader. A person who decides only by emotions will lose the ability to judge things as right or wrong and will be

biased. Hence the second attribute required is Right judgment that is never guided by emotions.

विपरीततरशच त्वम बाग्धेये न सम्मत्तः I

अर्चिषाम प्रक्षयाच्चैव धर्मात्मा धर्म कोवीदः II 33/18 II

**6. Lead by Example:** The manager who sheds the biggest obstacles of unwanted desire and anger, he who donates to the needy and deserving only, one who has the knowledge and capability of prudent decision making, has sound knowledge of varied subjects, one who can do efficient and effective work is an ideal manager and respected by his subordinates. He leads by example.

यः काममन्यू प्रजहाति राजा पात्रे प्रतिष्ठापयते धनं च I

विशेषवितः श्रुतवान क्षिप्रकारी तं सर्वलोकः कुरुते प्रमाणम् II 111 II

#### **7. Proper communication through right channel at the right time.**

It is a known fact in modern management that communication is the most important tool in the hands of the manager for success to be attained. Major problems have occurred in companies because of improper communication, improper channel of communication or improper timing of communication. Major mishaps have occurred due to misunderstanding of words, views and opinions of individuals. Hence Vidura says,

समये च प्रियलपः स्वयूथ्येशु समुन्नतिः I

अभिप्रेतस्य लाभश्च पूजा च जनसम्सदि II33/105 II

A successful manager should speak likable, comfortable words at the right time to the right audience. If he does that he commands respect from people around. He can get things done in a jiffy. This will bring harmony among people in the organization, thus paving the way for everlasting success.

### **8. Never underestimate anyone**

Some of the biggest problems in an organization are caused due to underestimation of the opponents or competition. Many a time we see David vs. Goliath fight in the market which results in the victory of David. For example in India we have seen that a small ice cream manufacturing company MTR challenged the world wide market leader Baskin Robbins 31 and made it bite dust. Therefore Vidura opines

**सुदुर्बलम नावजानाति कंचिद्युक्तो रिपुम सेवते बुधिपूर्वम् ।**

**न विग्रहम रोचयते बलस्थेयः काले च यो विक्रमते स धीरः ॥ ३३/११३ ॥**

A good leader will not undermine the capability or underestimate the ability of anyone. There is every chance that even a small competitor can bring down the market leader or big business houses. Also he would be considered a smart manager if he does not fight or challenge those who are bigger than him in every sense. The one who challenges and succeeds during the challenge at the right time is called valiant.



**9. Foresight for every action is essential:** Foresight on pros and cons that could result from a particular action is extremely essential. Many a time it is observed the organization fails to encash a golden opportunity due to lack of proper foresight of its own activity. Vidura stresses on this fact by saying

**अनुबन्धान अवेक्शेत सानुभंदेशु कर्मसु I**

**सम्प्रधार्ये चा कुर्वीथ सहसा ना समाचरेत् II 34 /8 II**

It means every manager has to have a proper foresight before doing any task/ action. He has to understand the pros and cons, the repercussions that may arise out of the current action. Once he is convinced that the action is beneficial to his organization, he need to work till the objective i.e., the benefit that was supposed to arise has been achieved. The person should have the right focus on the benefit that was to be derived and work towards the attainment of the same. Any action done with mere feelings, emotions and without any reasoning will bring about a downfall within no time. Vidura adds that the manager needs to find out that with whose support/help this intended action could be achieved in a successful way, else the task will be either incomplete or spoilt. There is no position for actions driven purely by emotions as they lack the reasoning. This is further strengthened by the following verse

**किं नु मे स्यदिदम क्रत्वा किं नु मेस्यादकुर्वतः I**

**इति कर्माणि सन्धित्य कुर्याद्वा पुरुषो न वा II 34/19 II**

It means that the manager should judge the pros and cons and then decide whether to do that task or not. It is better not to pursue a task that will not lead to any benefit. At the same time one should not let go of an opportunity, if that opportunity leads to some benefit. The following verse reiterates the same.

**अनुबंधं च संप्रेक्ष्य विपकं चैव कर्मणम् ।**

**उथान्मात्मनश्चैव धिरः कुर्वीत वा न वा ॥ 34/10 ॥**

But it adds saying that one shouldn't fret about an action that deprived him of the desired result. He should forget it and concentrate on better things.

**10. Even wealth distribution:** Wealth and resources if scarce and is in the hands of a privileged few are sure to create a more corruption, encouraging problems such as cheating, theft and scandals. The same wealth should be distributed uniformly but in a more balanced way based on one's efforts. This will lead to a corruption free society paving way for a harmonious life.

**नाममात्रेण तुष्येत छत्रेण च महीपतिः ।**

**अत्येभ्यो विरुजेद् अर्थन्येकः सर्वहरो भवेत् ॥ 38/26॥**

There should be equitable distribution of wealth based on performance and then the remainder is taken by the manager rather than keeping a huge chunk to the manager and distributing the rest to the employees.

**11. Principle of live and let live:** It is very essential for corporate houses to survive, achieve and sustain the top position in their respective industry. But we see most of the time that this is done more with a strategy of bringing down the competition through unhealthy or unethical means. One's superiority does not come just by decimating competition but by prospering and let others also prosper and live along. Vidura talks about a very ideal situation in which every market player has his or her share in it and sustains it with very little threat from the market biggies also. The following verse is tailor made for today's self centric organizations to apply this principle into their strategy.

न जीयते च नुजिगीषते अन्यान्न वैरक्रच्चप्रतिघतकस्य I

निंदाप्रशम्भासु समस्वभावो न शोचते हृश्यति नैव चायम II 36/15 II

It means I do not fear of getting annihilated by the competition nor do I think of decimating or suppressing competition. I do not want to damage anyone's mind or activity by words or by deed. I will not get flattered by praise and will not lose my mental balance. This is the meaning derived from this verse. How different is this Vidura's idea which will help us to achieve a market condition of perfect competition rather than monopoly, duopoly. The principle is **LIVE AND LET LIVE**.

**12. Carrot and Stick policy:** Most of the time we see that there are different type of people who need to be treated differently due to their response to different treatment. There are some people in the organization who require to be honored, promoted or rewarded for their activity. But that doesn't mean that the manager is under their control or will act as per their wishes. Then at times when there is low performance,

the manager needs to wield the whip to improve the performance. Even though they aren't harsh they need to portray the toughness to extract better work from some employees whose under performance needs to be seriously reviewed. The following verse highlights it.

सुपुशितः स्यादफलःफलितः स्याददुरारुहः I

अपक्वःपक्वसँकाशो न तु शीर्येत कर्हिचित II 34/25II

Then there is a great verse which has more of a philosophical angle rather than a management angle. But if properly understood and analyzed can work perfectly well here too. This is the sutra for happy and contented life

एकया द्वे विनिश्चित्य त्रीँस्चतुर्भिवशे कुरु I

पँच जित्वा विदित्वा षट् सप्त हित्वा सुखी भवा II 33/51 II

It says use

1. Your decisive intellect to do.
2. Right or wrong deed.
3. To deal with 3 types of enemies strong, weak and indifferent.
4. Using conciliation, bribing, division and punishment
5. Control of the 5 sensory organs which if goes beyond the control can be the reason for every problem that one may face.

## 6. Use of 6 techniques to deal

### Sandhi (treaty and alliance)

This is intended to avert confrontation and establish friendly relation between two or more organizations. When an organization is afflicted by a stronger one, he should make peace even with enemy. It says that self-preservation is the highest law and abnormal times have ethics of their own, Apaddharma and end justifies means. He, who, keeping in view his interests, makes a treaty with an enemy and opposes a friend, attain good results. But, after having entered into a treaty with a superior, he should exercise eternal care and vigilance to protect his interest without being cheated by the superior.

“Vigraha” has two meanings, viz., (1) the threat of war 2) the actual waging of war. It says that war should be declared and waged against an inferior ruler when he is facing difficulties, but never against one, are who has self-respect and whose employees are happy and satisfied.

Yana: (march for war, i.e., invading the territory of a weaker company)

Asana: (Maintaining a stance against an enemy or skilful withdrawal in face of danger) Here, Asana stands for the stance, after showing one's readiness for marching against the enemy. It is half-way to war by exhibiting some military movements.

Samasraya: (seeking protection of a superior)

Samsraya can be defined as the act of seeking protection of a powerful by a weak to gain more strength. When an organization is attacked by two powerful organizations,

he should have recourse to Samsraya with the nearer one, telling each of them that unless he is shown mercy he will be ruined by the other.

Dvaidhibhava, it means (i) double standards or duplicity, apparently maintaining friendly relations with the enemy (ii) dividing the competition among him by attacking the smaller units in isolation.

7. Shed and avoid 7 negative attributes.