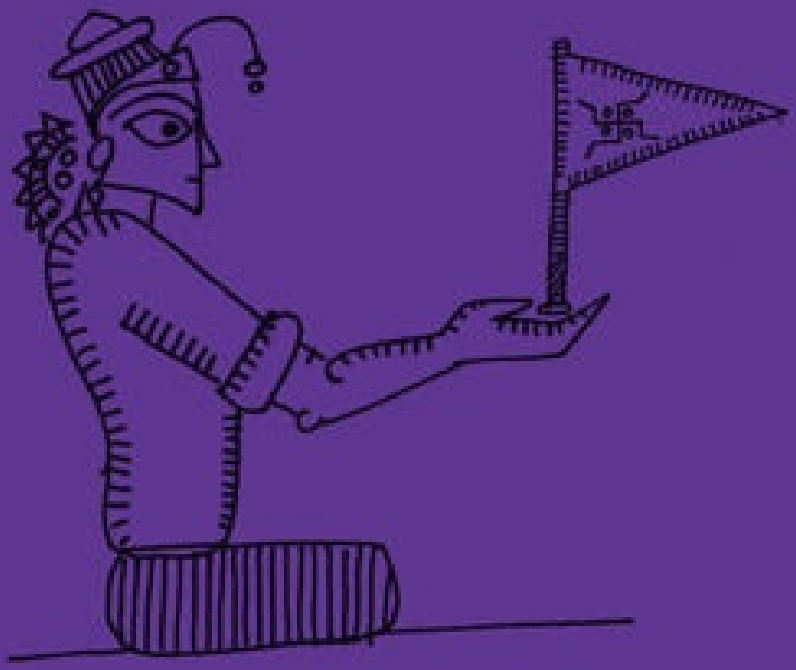

AN INDIAN APPROACH TO POWER

THE LEADERSHIP SUTRA

DEVDUTT PATTANAIK

Also by Devdutt Pattanaik

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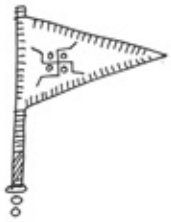

THE LEADERSHIP SUTRA

AN INDIAN APPROACH TO POWER

DEVDUTT PATTANAIK

Illustrated by the author

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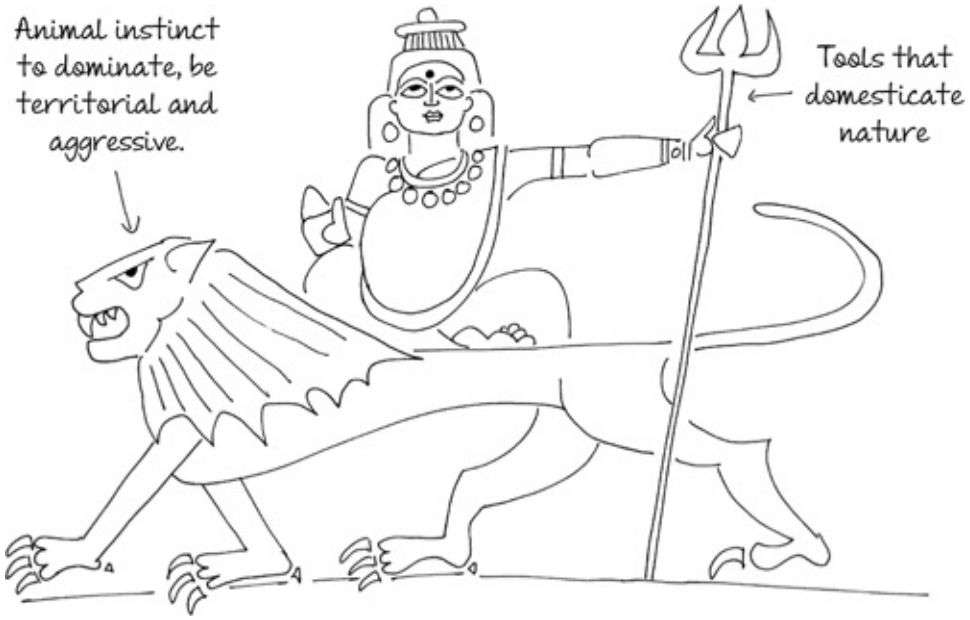
Introduction

Durga is the goddess of power in Hinduism, as well as in Buddhism and Jainism. Her name is derived from the word ‘fortress’ (durg). She was the goddess of kings. She rode a lion, the king of the jungle and symbol of royalty everywhere from China to England. We tend to tiptoe around the role of power in management, and fail to openly acknowledge how the animal desire to dominate often destroys the best of organizations. Critics tend to see power as a negative thing. But power is a critical tool that affects the implementation of any idea. Any attempt to restrain it with rules results in domestication and resentment, and fails to energize the organization. Leaders often equate themselves with lions, and indulge their desire to dominate, when in fact the point of leadership is to be secure enough to outgrow the lion within us, and enable and empower those around us. But this is not easy, as anxiety overpowers the best of leaders.



The Leadership Sutra, a work derived from my book on the Indian approach to business and management, *Business Sutra*, focuses on sutras related to the human quest for significance, the importance of property to prop up self-worth,

the power of rules to strip people of self-esteem, and the need for stability even at the cost of freedom.

Ideas in this book are provided in the form of ‘sutras’. Sutra (the word or concept) has two meanings:

- It means a string that joins dots to create a pattern. The book strings together a myriad ideas from Jain, Hindu and Buddhist traditions to create a synthesized whole, that helps us understand the Indian way. Likewise it strings together Greek and biblical ideas to understand the Western way and Confucian and Taoist ideas to understand the Chinese way. Each one of these garlands is man-made and reveals my truth, not the truth.
- Sutra also means an aphorism, a terse statement. The book is full of these. They are like seeds which, when planted in the mind, germinate into plants. The nature of the plant will depend on the quality of the mind. Indian sages avoided the written word as they realized ideas were never definitive; they were transformed depending on the intellectual and emotional abilities of the giver as well as the receiver. Thus an idea is organic. Many sages chose symbols rather than sutras to communicate the idea. What appears like a naked man to one person, will reveal the nature of the mind to another. Both are right from their point of view. There is no standard answer. There is no correct answer. The point is to keep expanding the mind to accommodate more views and string them into a single whole.

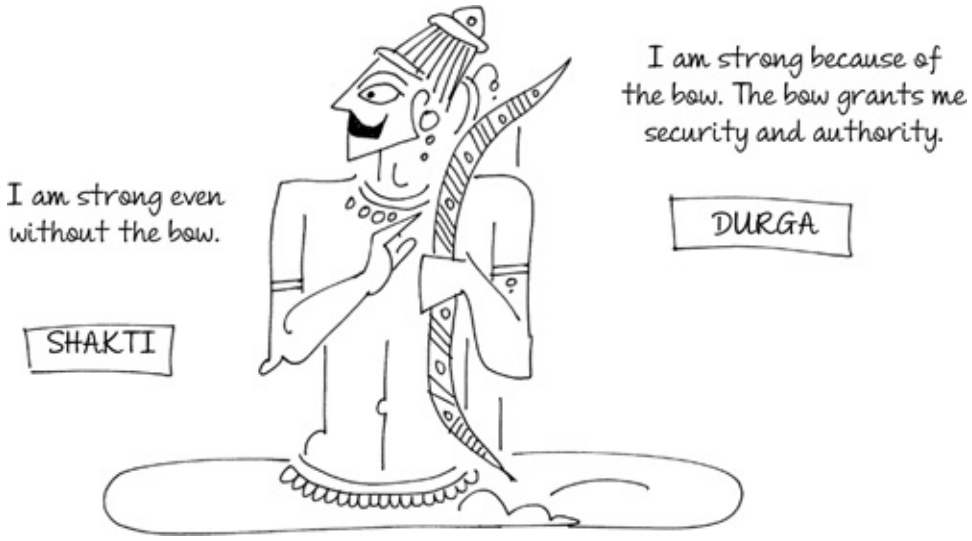
These sutras are ‘made in India’ but are ‘for the world’, for they complement modern management by drawing attention back from profit, through hunger, to humanity.

THE LEADERSHIP SUTRA

Significance *Property* *Rules* *Stability*

The human ability to see the quest for power is called divya-drishti. Plants cannot run from animals that feed on them, but animals can run from animals that prey on them. The prey lives in fear of the predator, never knowing when it will be ambushed. But it never thinks about asking for external help. Humans, on the other hand, constantly seek external help with a sense of entitlement. Fearful of exploitation, humans seek protection: a fence, a fort, or ‘durg’. From durg comes Durga, the goddess of power.

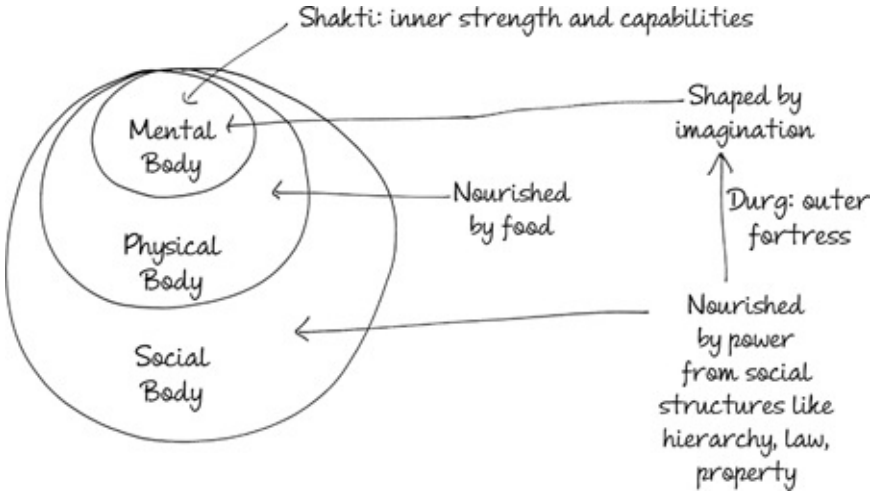
Durga needs to be distinguished from Shakti, who is the inner power—physical and mental prowess—every living creature is born with. Durga represents external power, embedded in tools, technology, laws, titles and property that grants humans their social status, a location in the organizational hierarchy where they feel secure, physical and mental prowess notwithstanding.



This is made explicit in the following story: the gods one day sought protection from the asura, Mahisha. They were advised to release their inner Shaktis. These goddesses, embodying inner strength, emerged and merged into a blazing light that created a new, external goddess, Durga, who held in her many arms various weapons and rode a lion. Durga killed Mahisha and became the goddess of kings. Her weapons represent technological innovations and social structures that grant power to man. The lion represents the animal instinct within us, our desire to dominate, be aggressive and territorial.

Shakti cannot be given or taken; it can only be invoked by tapasya. Durga

can be given or taken during a yagna: using social structures a person can be empowered or disempowered. A craving for Durga is indicative of a lack of Shakti. Durga compensates for a lack of Shakti. When Shakti is invoked, the hunger for Durga wanes. What is being protected here is not the physical body, but rather the mental body via the social body or karana-sharira.



In Jain mythology, besides vasudev there is another shalaka-purush: the king or chakravarti. Chakra in the title means wheel or circle and refers to the horizon, which is circular in shape. The chakravarti is master of all that he surveys.

- The chakravarti knows that all subjects in his kingdom want to feel significant and seek status, a role and responsibility.
- He knows that the value of people comes from what they possess (property, talent, skills) which is tangible and measurable.
- He values rules as without rules the world is no different from the jungle where might is right.
- He seeks stability, a world where there is certainty and predictability.

In this chapter, we shall explore significance, property, rules and stability, and by doing so, appreciate a chakravarti's gaze. A yajaman who possesses divya-drishti and values Durga walks the path of a chakravarti. A chakravarti's gaze is that of a leader determined to stabilize an already established organization and shape the destiny of his people.

Ramesh did not want to hire Shaila because she was a girl and she belonged to a lower caste. But the

head of human resources, Mr. Sengupta, pointed out that company policy was very clear about not discriminating on the grounds of gender or caste. Whether Ramesh liked it or not, Shaila had to be hired because she had all the qualifications for the job. In time, Shaila gained a reputation for being a very good manager. She was promoted to the position of junior manager in less than three years. Shaila's gender and her intelligence constitute her Shakti. Her educational qualification constitutes her Durga, something she has obtained from the outside. The rules of the company that ensure she is treated with respect also grant her Durga. Over time, her social being that was being disempowered by her caste came to be empowered by her promotion at the workplace. Mr. Sengupta behaved like a chakravarti using rules to ensure she got the power she was due.

Significance

Every human being wants to feel they matter. Social structures grant this value through rules and property. This value allows us to indulge our animal instinct to dominate, hence feel powerful and secure. Unfortunately, social structures are not permanent. Any change can render us powerless; that is why we seek stability.

Every devata imagines himself differently from natural reality

Shiva, with ash-smeared face, was deep in thought. When he opened his eyes he saw a mirror in front of him held by Gauri who had anointed herself with turmeric in order to look radiant. “What do you see?” she asked.

“I see mortal flesh,” he said.

“But I see a beautiful body,” she said.

“That is your imagination,” he argued.

“What is humanity without imagination?” she replied.

Shiva smiled. For this was true.

When animals look into a mirror they do not recognize themselves. They wonder if the reflected beast is a threat or an opportunity. If it is neither, they move away and continue with their lives. A few apes and dolphins seem to show curiosity about reflected images but they do not actively seek reflections as humans do, so scientists are not entirely sure if they recognize themselves. We, on the other hand, are able to see ourselves in mirrors. Or do we?

Is it ourselves we see, or what we imagine of ourselves? This imagination of ourselves is our mental image of ourselves. The strong can imagine themselves as weak, the beautiful can imagine themselves as strong, a villain can imagine himself as a hero. No one stops a Brahma from imagining himself in any way.

Nature does not care for this mental image. In the Ramayan, when Hanuman is flying over the sea on his mission to find Sita, the monster Surasa blocks his path, intent on eating him. Hanuman says, “I am on a mission for Ram. Let me complete it and then I promise I will return so you can eat me.” Surasa retorts, “I do not understand the meaning of mission or Ram or promise. All I know is that I am hungry and you are potential food.”

Nature only recognizes predators and prey, alpha on top of the pecking order and omega at the bottom. These are functional roles that facilitate survival; they are not permanent roles. They cannot be inherited.

Human structures make no sense to animals or plants. That is why all animals and plants treat all humans equally. Water will quench the thirst of both saint and sinner; the tree will give shade to the rich as well as the poor; the dog will adore its master, even if the world considers the master to be a criminal.

As the eldest son in his family, Virendra has always been the recipient of much love and respect. His siblings and cousins look up to him. He manages family funds and is sought out when major decisions need to be taken. However, when Virendra goes to office, he feels miserable. For everything he does, he has to ask permission: fill forms, get approvals, and seek clearances. He does not feel he is trusted or respected. The workplace does not endorse the mental image of him that his family has helped create.

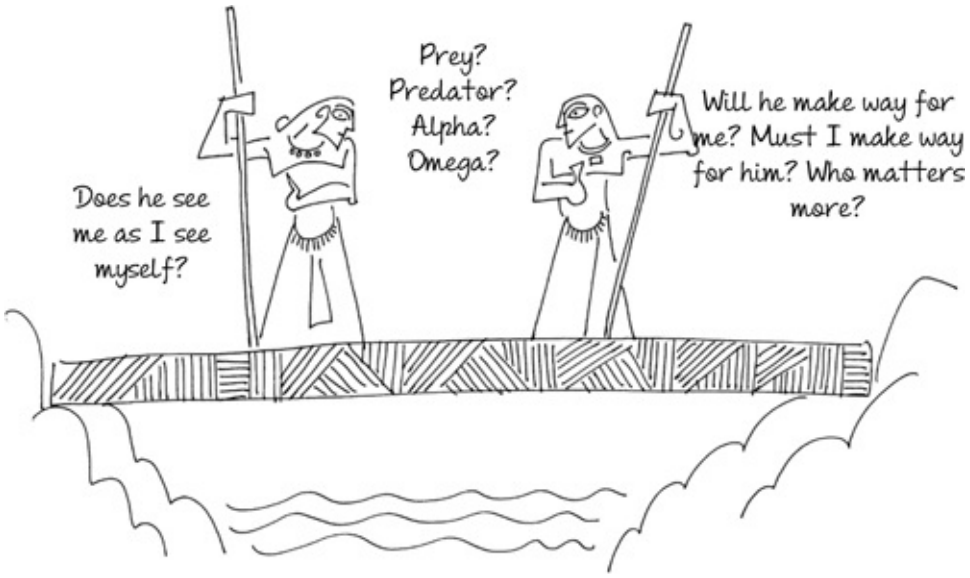
Only another human being can endorse the mental image

Two men approach each other on a bridge. Each expects the other to make way for him, but neither does. One identifies himself as a learned sage. The other identifies himself as a powerful king. The sage proves his learnedness by spewing chants and hymns. The king proves his power by flexing his muscles, but still neither of them yields to the other. The learned sage thinks learning is superior to power. The powerful king thinks power is superior to learning. Finally, the angry sage puts a curse on the king and turns him into a demon. The first act of this newly transformed demon is to eat the sage in front of him. Two lives are thus ruined by mutual stubbornness.

All human beings want to be identified by those around them. With identification comes evaluation. The sage is not happy simply being identified as a sage; he wants to be valued for it and this value is demonstrated by receiving the right to first passage. Likewise, the king seeks right of first passage as a sign that he, too, has been identified and valued.

When we are recognized we feel powerful. When we are not recognized we feel powerless. When we are valued we receive Durga. When we are not valued we do not receive Durga. We want to feel significant. We want to be located in a social hierarchy. In other words, we seek aukaat, which means status and prestige. The purpose of social structures is to grant us a social position and power, which makes us feel powerful and secure. We seek izzat or respect, and acknowledgement of what we believe is our aukaat.

Only humans can endorse the mental image of other humans. This is why we feel nervous around strangers. We feel insecure until the other is able to identify us. So we exchange visiting cards and introduce ourselves. But identification alone is not enough, we want to feel seen and valued. And so following introductions we speak of our achievements and refer to mutual friends and contacts, especially those who are socially significant, so as to feel increasingly powerful when others are able to recognize us and locate us in a cultural hierarchy.



When Siddhu saw Abhay's visiting card, he was startled to find it detailing the latter's degrees, affiliations, titles, numerous charitable activities and business roles. Siddhu realized that Abhay wanted to be recognized for all his achievements. He wanted to feel he mattered for all that he had done. Abhay's promotion of his social roles through his visiting card drew attention to his mental image, his yearning for validation. When people looked at the card and showed amazement and admiration, Abhay got his Durga.

We defend our mental image at any cost

Kahoda suddenly hears a voice correcting him. It is his unborn child, speaking from within his wife's womb! "Perhaps," the child says, "the same hymn can be interpreted another way, father."

Rather than appreciate his son, Kahoda is annoyed. "May this over-smart child of mine be born deformed with eight twists in his body," he snarls. That is how the child gets his name—Ashtavakra, he who is bent in eight places.

While Ashtavakra is still an infant, his father goes to the court of King Janak to participate in a public debate. The condition of the debate is that the loser has to become the slave of the winner. Kahoda, who thinks highly of his wisdom, participates, but loses the debate to a sage called Bandi. He is stripped of his freedom, not allowed to go home and forced to serve his new master.

When Ashtavakra grows up and learns about the fate of his father, he decides to participate in the same public debate in Janak's court. Though barely eight years old, he manages to defeat Bandi. By the rules of the competition, Bandi now has to serve as Ashtavakra's slave. "Free my father instead," says the young genius.

When Kahoda enters Janaka's court he recognizes his saviour as his son by his deformity and breaks down. Ashtavakra's deformity springs from Kahoda's own insecurity.

Kahoda's aukaat is threatened by Ashtavakra's brilliance, which is why Kahoda curses his own son, behaving like a cornered beast. Later, his social body takes a beating anyway at the hand of Bandi who reduces him to a slave. Had Kahoda allowed his son's brilliance to nourish his mental body, enhance his Shakti, this would have perhaps not happened. In insecurity, we often keep away things that can benefit us in the long run, contribute to our sustainability. We choose comforting Durga over discomforting Shakti. We banish Ashtavakras from our own life and makes ourselves vulnerable to Bandis.

As soon as it was announced that the new CEO wanted a matrix organization, Vandana smiled. This was the CEO's way of ensuring no one threatened his position. There would be business unit verticals and functional horizontals. For every job, each team member would have to report to two bosses. The

official reason for this was to create push and pull—tension to maximum output. The underlying motive, however, was to ensure there was tension between business heads and functional heads. They would be too busy fighting each other to threaten the new CEO. Moreover, by getting a management firm to propose the matrix structure, the CEO had ensured that the board of directors did not suspect he was playing politics to ensure the survival of his social image.

We are terrified of how strangers will evaluate us

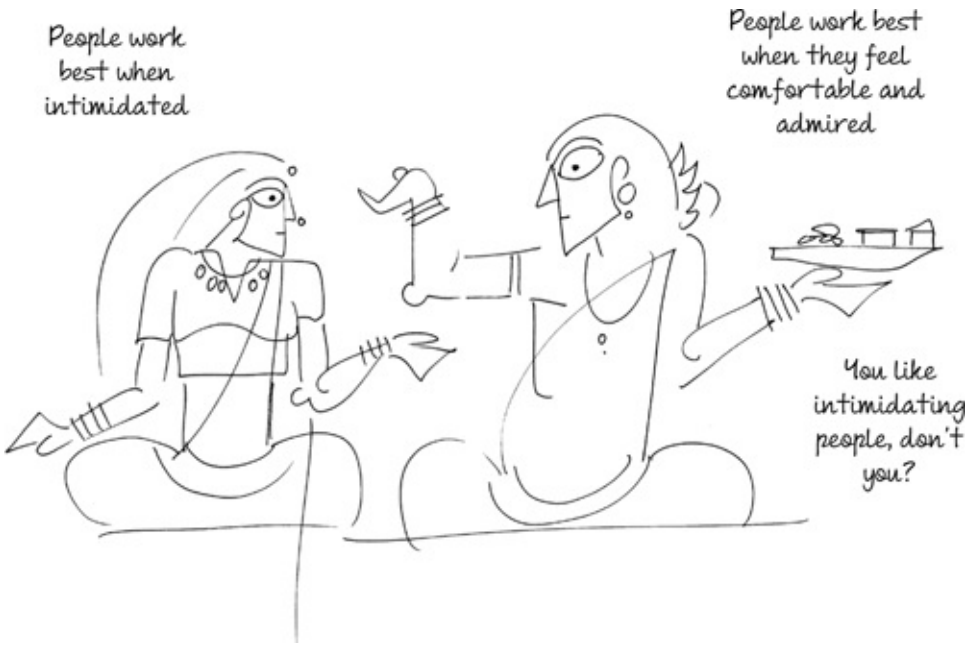
We imagine those around us to be predators and ourselves as the prey. We fear we will be reduced to an omega in a group when we would rather be the alpha, the centre of attention. Every devata has the desire to, at the very least, feel secure, recognized and valued, not sidelined and forgotten. The offering of haldi (turmeric), kumkum (red powder) and chaval (grains of rice) to deities, in that order, is a ritual acknowledgement of this human anxiety.

- The yellow of turmeric is a virile colour, the colour of the sun, spreading across the sky and reaching out to the earth. The intent behind sprinkling it over the deity is to evoke the deity's grace and power. Turmeric is antiseptic, destroying germs as the gods destroy demons. It is meant to remove negative energy, the feeling of prevailing threat.
- Red is the colour of potential energy; virgin-goddesses are draped in a red sari. Red evokes a sense of the fertile red earth before the rains, holding the promise of crops. It is meant to usher in positive energy, a highlighting of our strengths.
- Rice is food, sustaining life, the final output that rises out of the earth and is warmed by the sun. It is meant to draw attention to the opportunity created by the relationship that can follow.

Often in meetings, for want of time, people get straight down to business, focusing on tasks and targets. Quick introductions are followed by a clarification of the agenda and the meeting is begun immediately. Meetings then, become a process and not a meeting of hearts and minds. There is no Durga exchanged in such a meeting and so it lacks energy, engagement and joy.

Whenever Herbert goes for a meeting, he always smiles and admits he is nervous, enough to want to visit the restroom several times. This relieves the tension in the meeting room and even makes people chuckle. This is his haldi. He then compliments the person he is meeting: sometimes about the company they work for, or the shirt they are wearing. Sometimes he starts a conversation about the country they're from, or the mobile phone they are using. There is always something nice to say about a person if one looks for it. This is kumkum. Only after easing the tension with a casual conversation,

does Herbert get to the main body of the meeting—the chaval—drawing attention to the agenda. Over the years he has learned that when people feel relaxed and positive, the meeting gives better results. He also knows that haldi and kumkum offered mechanically and not genuinely yield nothing.



Praise empowers us

Aarti is the ritual of beholding the deity. Lamps are waved around the deity so that light falls on the image of the god or goddess. This is often accompanied by the singing of bhajans, the lyrics of which draw attention to the deity's great accomplishments: the killing of demons, the rescue of devotees, the admiration of all beings. It is an exercise that acknowledges the deity's deeds and achievements.

The ritual draws attention to the value of praise. Everyone likes to hear good things about themselves and their work. Our self-image thrives on it. Praise reaffirms our faith in ourselves. It makes us feel validated. It makes us feel acknowledged. It makes us feel alive.

The aarti ritual is conducted daily, for every day we need validation of who we are. And to ensure it does not become monotonous or thoughtless, festivals are organized where the same offering is made rather lavishly to the sound of music and the smell of incense. At the end of the ritual, the devotee asks the deity for a favour.

In temples, the aarti is not restricted to the presiding deity. Aartis are done to all the subsidiary and satellite shrines, even the doorkeepers of the shrine, the consorts and the vehicle or vahana. Everyone is acknowledged and praised, no one is invalidated. This increases the chance of divine intervention.

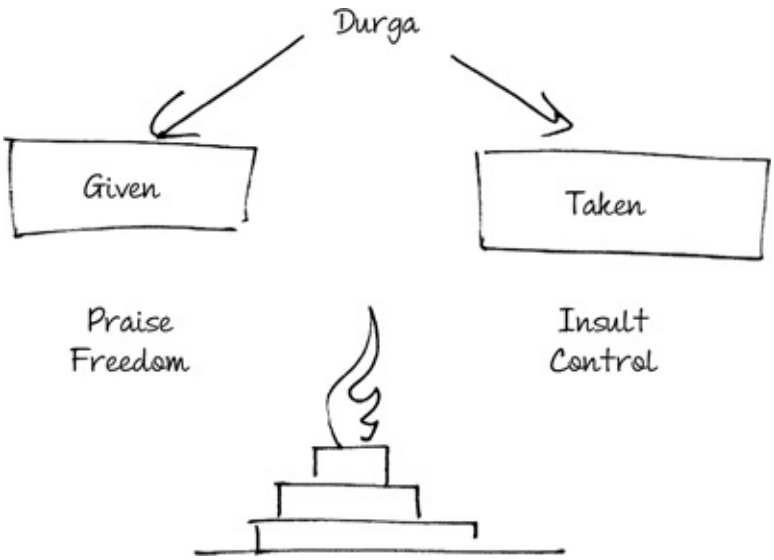
Is an aarti and bhajan strategic or sincere? Is praise by bosses strategic or sincere? We will never know. What matters is that it makes a difference to the subject being admired. No one ever complained when occasionally they found themselves being praised.

Farokh, the team leader of a media company, knows the value of praise. He introduces each member of his team as ‘an expert’, ‘stalwart’ or ‘key member’. He remembers every little achievement of theirs. When Sanjay walks into a meeting, he beams when Farokh says, “Here comes the guy who stayed back late last week to get the files downloaded for the client presentation.” Shaila, the trainee, is thrilled to hear Farokh declare, “The way Shaila maintains records of client meetings is laudable.” Through these words, Farokh empowers his team, makes them feel valued and important. It reveals they are not invisible performers of tasks. They are people who matter. His praise fuels them and they go that extra mile at work. But just as bhajans do not work without bhakti, praise does not work unless it is genuine. Whatever Farokh says is true. None of it is a charade. He constantly looks at what to admire in every person he meets. No person is perfect, but everyone has something of value to offer. It may seem insignificant to others but it becomes significant when noticed. That Ali always calls his wife at lunchtime has no corporate significance. But Farokh turns it into office fuel when he remarks in front of everyone, “I wish my daughter gets a husband as caring as Ali.” It makes Ali blush. He feels happy. And in happiness, he delivers more.

Insults disempower us

In many Hindu temples, at least once annually, the devotee does ninda-stuti and ritually abuses the deity for failing him. This is a cathartic exercise, a safety valve. It is a reminder that the deity has no mental image; it needs no Durga to sustain it. It is also a reminder that the devotee has a mental image that feels deprived or denied when the deity does not satisfy a desire.

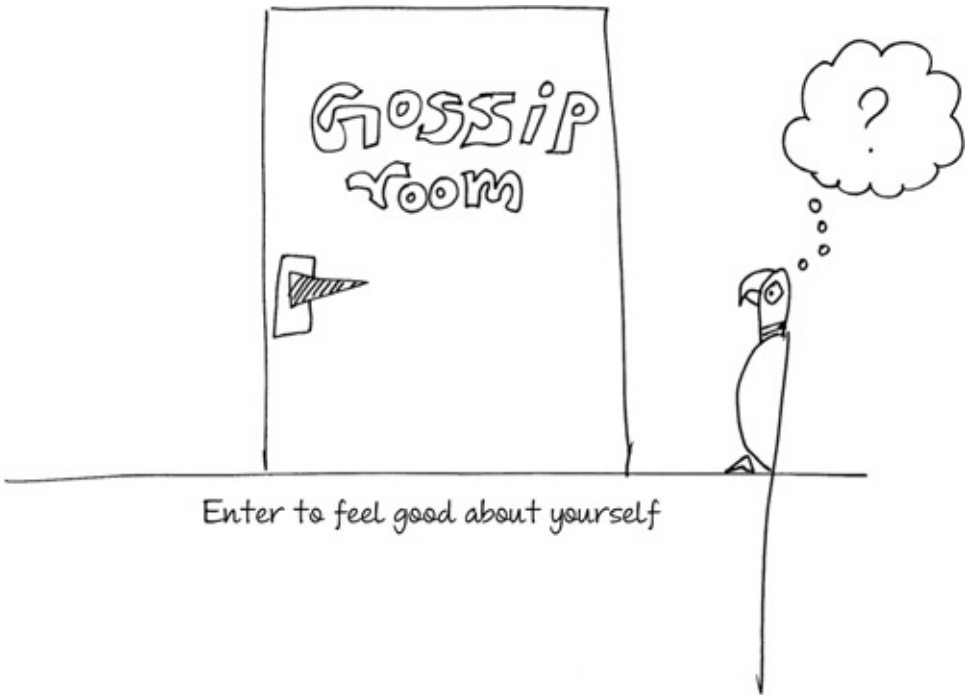
An animal in the forest does not resent or begrudge anyone. The predator does not complain when it fails to catch its prey, or when the rival drives it out of its territory. The prey does not jeer at the predator after outrunning it. Animals simply move on with life. Humans often consider their desire to be their due and expect life to provide them with whatever they yearn for.



Ninda-stuti is the equivalent of office mockery or ‘backbiting’ or complaining (colloquially called bitching) about the boss. A yajaman understands its source and allows it to thrive as it relieves tension, helps the employee experience the delusion of power. Gossip serves the same purpose. By pulling down or mocking someone else, by imagining the Other to be inferior, we empower our mental image. Jokes come from the same place—a narrative

that grants superiority to the person hearing the joke over the person who is the subject of the joke.

During her coffee break, Reshma goes to the cafeteria and sits with the other office girls. After initial pleasantries, the topic shifts to the team supervisor: how she dresses, how she speaks, how she curries favours with the bosses, how she got promoted, how she travels. No one has a kind word for her. They see her as a monster. Sometimes, the girls talk about their experiences with callers: the accents, the demands, the time spent on inane matters. At the end of these short but spicy conversations, Reshma feels fresh and invigorated, full of Durga, strong enough to handle the monotony of her daily job. She looks forward to these meetings with the girls.



Comparison grants us value

The Mahabharat tells the story of Kadru and Vinata, the two wives of Kashyapa. Kashyapa was one of the many sons of Brahma. Kadru asks to be the mother of many sons. Vinata asks for mighty sons. Kashyapa blesses them both. Kadru lays a thousand eggs while Vinata lays only two. Why does Kadru seek many sons? Why does Vinata seek mighty offspring?

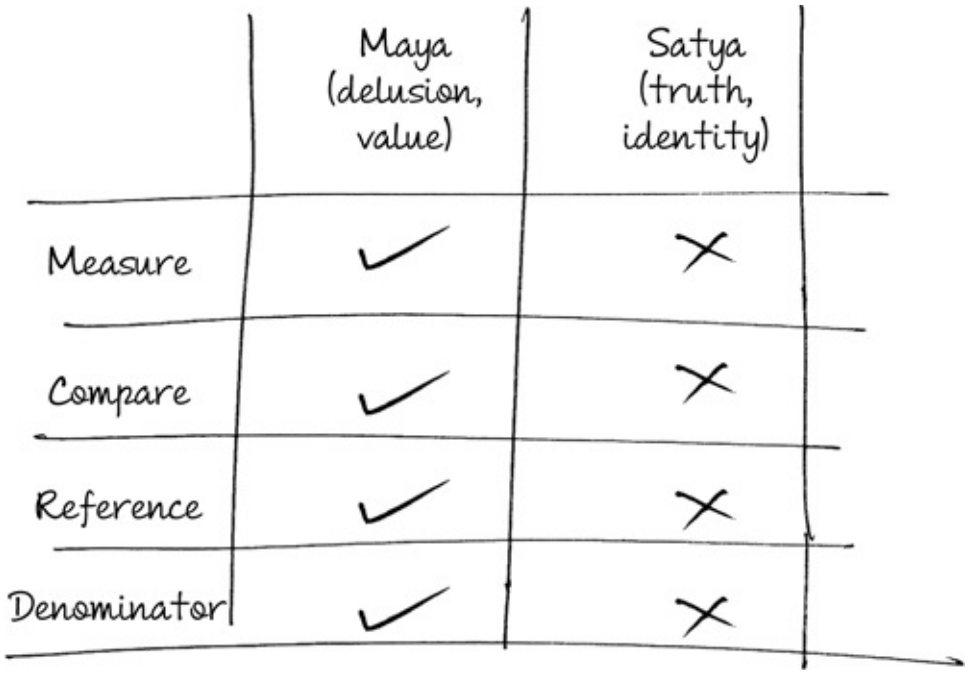
The answer lies in mental image. It is not enough being the wife of Kashyapa. What matters more is knowing who is the preferred wife. Kadru feels many sons will get her more attention. Vinata feels mightier sons will get her more attention. Each wife wants to be envied by the other, and thus be in a dominant position. We yearn to be mental alphas of an imaginary pack. When we are envied we feel superior and powerful.

Kadru becomes the mother of serpents. Vinata becomes the mother of eagles. Serpents eat the eggs of eagles and the eagles feed on serpents. This eternal enmity is traced to the desire of the mothers to measure, hence evaluate, ergo dominate.

Venu was happy he went to the business school that was ranked fifth while Raghav went to a business school that ranked seventh. He was happy that he got a placement before Raghav. He was happy that his first salary was more than Raghav's. He was happy that he got a promotion earlier than Raghav, but then Raghav started his own business and it was a success. Suddenly, Raghav is his own boss; he may not make as much money but he is answerable to no one. Venu now hates his life. He has fallen in the measuring scale. He is unable to see himself without comparing himself to Raghav. He lives in the world of measurement: the matrix called maya.

Comparison is a powerful tool to identify ourselves and locate ourselves in a hierarchy. Comparison means measurement. In Sanskrit, the word maya or delusion is rooted in the sound 'ma' meaning 'to measure'. For a world seen through measurement is delusion.

Maya and satya are opposites of each other. Both are truths, but maya is truth based on comparison while satya is truth not based on comparison. Maya allows for judgement, as there is a reference scale; satya does not.



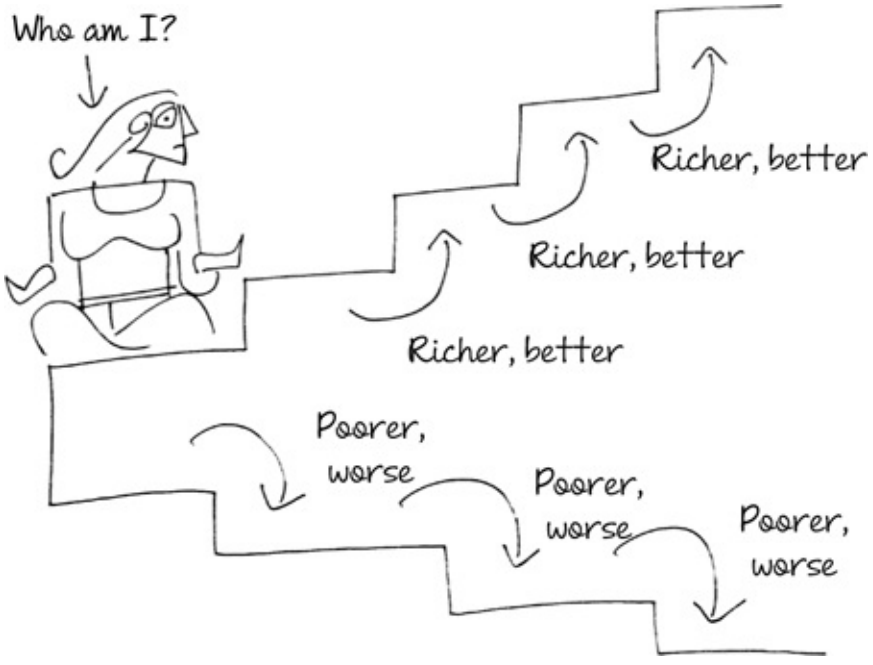
In nature, everything is perfect at every moment. Everything has a place and purpose. Nothing is better or worse. A bigger animal is not better; it simply has a higher chance of survival. But in culture, measuring scales are geared not towards survival of the species but towards the validation of our mental image. Measuring scales are designed to include and exclude, create a hierarchy. Measuring scales can grant us Durga if they favour us, and strip us of power when they do not. In nature, nothing is good or bad, right or wrong, higher or lower. Everything matters. Everything is satya.

On the other hand, marketing and business is all about maya. In interviews we rank candidates using measuring scales. In markets, we rank products using measuring scales. We give compensation and bonuses and perks based on measuring scales. The world of sanskriti is all about maya. The social body feeds on maya. Maya has the power to make us feel powerful and powerless. In culture, some things always matter more than others.

We seek hierarchies that favour us

When he is made chakravarti of the world, Bharat, the eldest son of Rishabh, expects all his brothers to bow before him. Rather than bow, most renounce the world and become Jain monks. One brother, however, refuses to bow or to renounce. His name is Bahubali, the second son of Rishabh. Bharat declares war on Bahubali. To avoid unnecessary bloodshed, the elders recommend that the brothers engage in a series of duels to prove who is stronger. Bahubali turns out to be stronger than Bharat, but a point comes when Bahubali has to raise his hand and strike Bharat on the head. The idea of striking his elder brother disgusts Bahubali. Instead, he uses his raised hand to pluck hair from his own head, thus declaring his intention to be a Jain monk like his younger brothers.

Since Bahubali has renounced the world after his younger brothers, he is a junior monk and is now expected to bow to the senior monks, his younger brothers included. Bahubali finds this unacceptable. Surely it is the other way around, and younger brothers should bow to their elder brothers? However, in the monastic order the rules of seniority are different.



Every organization has a structure; every structure has a hierarchy. In some organizations this is determined by the duration of employment, or merit, or closeness to the owners, and in yet others, it is determined on the basis of the community, gender or institution one belongs to. The conflict comes when the hierarchy of the organization does not match the hierarchy of the mind.

Bahubali struggles. He became a monk to avoid bowing to his elder brother and ended up having to bow to his younger brothers. And yet, being a monk is not only about renouncing the social body but also renouncing the mental body. It is easier to give up material things and one's status in society, far harder to give up the thought of domination.

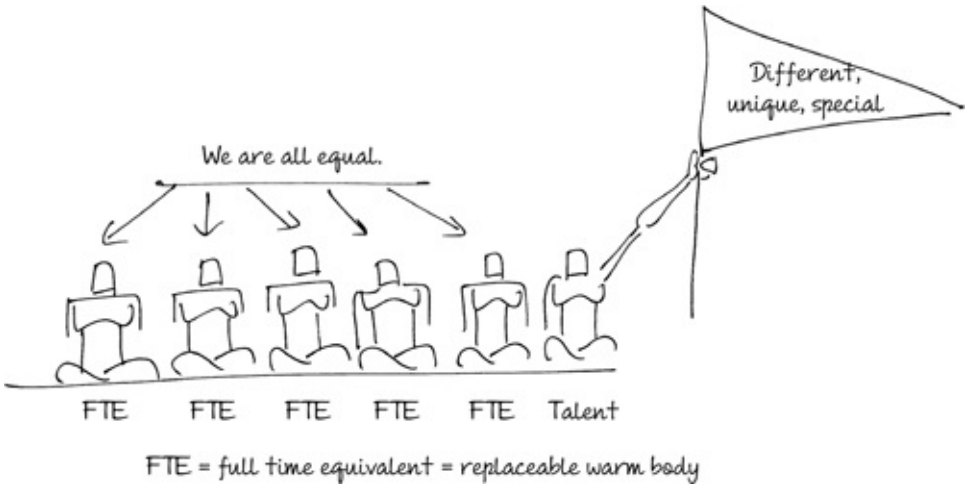
When Rahul joined as the assistant manager of a shipping firm, he was told that two people, Jaydev and Cyrus, would report to him. Jaydev and Cyrus were senior by many years and they found the idea of Rahul signing their appraisal forms unacceptable. Rahul did not see what the problem was, surely the system had to be respected. Like Bahubali, he realized the problem when he was asked to report to the owner's son, Pinaki, who, though senior in years, was neither as qualified nor as smart as him. Jaydev and Cyrus could not handle reporting to a younger man. Rahul could not handle reporting to a man he thought to be less smart than him. Both had to struggle between the desire to dominate and the rules of domestication.

We would rather be unique than equal

There was a kingdom called Andher Nagari, literally meaning the dark land, where everything cost just one rupee. A measure of vegetables cost a rupee, the same measure of sweets also cost a rupee. A young man thought this place was paradise. “No, it is not,” said his teacher, “A country where there is no differentiation between vegetables and sweets is a dangerous place. Just run from here.” But the young man insisted on staying back, enjoying the delights of the market.

It so happened that in this kingdom a murderer had to be hanged for his crime. Unfortunately, the rope was too short and the noose too wide to hang the short, thin criminal. So Chaupat Raja, the insane king of Andher Nagari, said, “Find a tall and fat man who can be hanged instead. Someone has to be hanged for the crime.” The soldiers caught the young man in the market. He protested that he was no murderer. “But you are tall and fat enough to be hanged,” said the king. It was then the young man realized what his teacher had been trying to tell him: that the people who could not differentiate between vegetables and sweets, where everything was valued equally and cost the same, in their eyes there was no difference between a criminal and an innocent man.

This folk story speaks of a land where everyone is treated equally. No value is placed on differences. Only humans can imagine such a world. In nature, physical differences matter. This difference results in food chains and pecking orders. Humans can, if they so will, create a world where no differences are seen. Such a utopia is frightening as it means in this world nothing is special, no one matters, no one is significant.



The head office prepared a design and insisted that every office of the company around the world be designed accordingly. They were essentially open offices, with no cabins for individuals, but with rooms for meetings and teleconferences. The point was to express the organizational value of transparency and equality. Instead of energizing the workplace, the new design demotivated many. Shridhar suddenly found himself without a cabin. All his life he had worked to become worthy of a cabin and now the policy had changed. He felt angry and humiliated. He felt he had been denied his Durga. He did not matter. He was a nobody like everyone else. As soon as he got a job in a rival firm, with the assurance of a cabin, he left. At the exit interview, the human resource manager felt that he was being immature: how did a cabin matter? Clearly what mattered to the manager was very different from what mattered to Shridhar, who did not want to be part of Andher Nagari.

Culture provides only a temporary framework for our social body

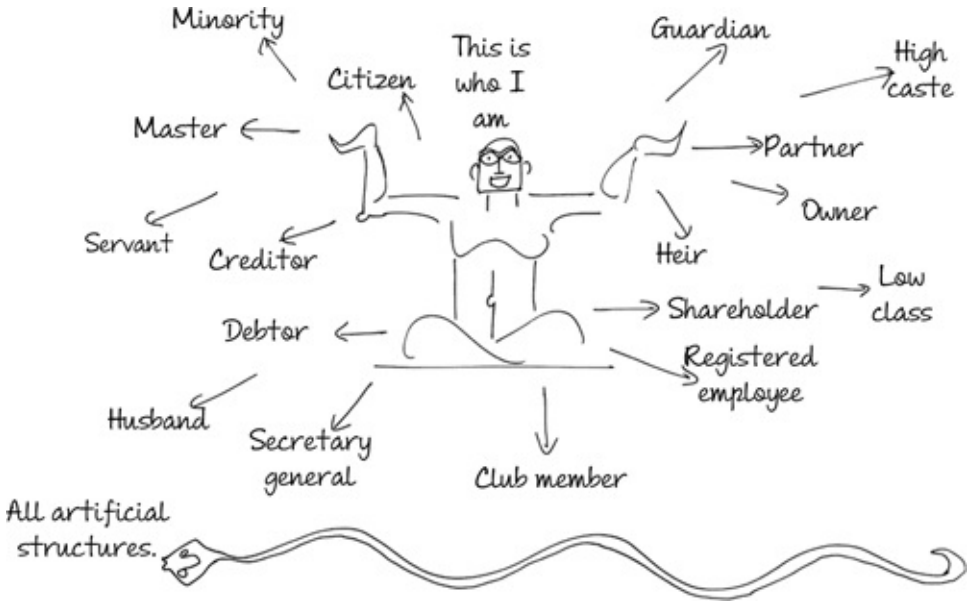
In the Ramayan, as Dasharath, king of Ayodhya, is dying, he panics and calls his wife and says, “I am dying. My eldest son, Ram, has been exiled to the forest. My other son, Bharat, has not yet returned from his uncle’s house. I cannot afford to die. What will happen to Ayodhya if I am not there?” To this, his wife says, “Nothing will happen. The sun will rise, and set. The moon will wax and wane. People will go about their business. Ayodhya will survive, perhaps not even noticing the absence of its king.”

It is Ayodhya that makes Dasharath feel he matters. If there were no Ayodhya, he would not be king and his death would have no grave significance. Organizations grant us value. They position us both within the organization as well as outside. What we fail to realize is that while we need the organization, the organization does not need us. Brahma needs sanskriti to escape the indifference of prakriti but sanskriti does not need Brahma.

Every day, organizations hire new people and old people leave the company —either angrily, or happily, or because they have no choice. This is the ‘birth’ of a new employee and the ‘death’ of an old one. Both events are filled with insecurity. The arrival of a new employee threatens the old discourse, and so there is need to induct the new into the old ways of the company. The departure of the old employee also threatens the old discourse hence the desperate need for a talent pool and pipeline. Very rarely does an individual become indispensable to a degree that determines the fate of an institution. There is always someone who can take his place. The denial of this truism leads to panic. Acceptance leads to peace.

Pathakji had served the company as an accountant for over thirty-eight years. He was so good at managing the accounts that the owner felt he was indispensable. So did Pathakji, until one day the owner died and his nephew took over. The nephew did not think much of Pathakji. He was given a nice salary and a nice cabin but no real work. Pathakji was furious and soon after submitted his resignation in a huff; this was accepted without even the pretence of resistance. “Let me see how they solve the accounts,” he said, as he left the building for the last time. Five years have since passed.

Pathakji is still waiting for the new management to call him back. They are managing without him. It's a feeling he does not like. The management did suffer for a while without Pathakji, but his absence created a vacuum and new talent emerged. That was a good thing. But now that apparently indispensable Pathakji has been replaced, those left behind in the company feel they, too, are dispensable. It is a feeling no one likes. Suddenly, they all feel like 'full time equivalents' or FTEs, numbers on an excel sheet that can be deleted at any moment. Insecurity seeps into the organization. And, in insecurity, everybody clings to their respective roles and responsibilities with tenacity. New talent is not allowed to come in and if they do come in they are not allowed to thrive. Everyone wants to make themselves indispensable. They will all die trying.



Property

Property is an idea of man, by man, and for man. Property gives a man value, for most people assume we are what we have because what we have is tangible, not who we are. We may die, but what we have can outlive us. Thus property gives us the delusion of immortality.

We see things not thoughts

When they decided to go to war, both the Kauravs and the Pandavs approached Krishna for help. “I love you both equally so will divide myself into two halves. Take whichever half you want.”

Krishna offered one side the Narayani Sena, his fully-armed army. To the other, he offered Narayan, that is, himself unarmed. The Kauravs chose Narayani Sena. The Pandavs chose Narayan. The Kauravs chose Krishna’s resources that are saguna: visible, tangible and measurable while the Pandavs chose Krishna’s potential or nirguna: invisible, intangible and not measurable.

Narayan is who-we-are. Narayani is what-we-have. Narayan is expressed through Narayani. Most people rely on measuring Narayani to determine what is Narayan.

That is how the value of a person is determined by his possessions: his university degrees, income, bank balance, clothes, car, and so on.

Possessions are resources. They are tangible and measurable. Potential is not tangible and measurable. In the world of management where measurement matters, Narayan is ignored and Narayani preferred. We check what a person brings to the table during interviews. We value a customer’s wallet, more than the customer. A employee is valued for his skills only. His vision, his fears, his feelings do not matter. The latter cannot be measured. Their value cannot be determined. Nobody knows how to leverage who we are. But we have many ways of leveraging what-we-have. In other words, we welcome Kauravs into the organization, not Pandavs, which does not bode well for anyone.

Every leader wonders if the person speaking to him speaks to his person or the authority he wields by virtue of his position. The king wonders if he matters or his sword: this is the curse of kingship.

To motivate his team, Bipin asked his guru to give them a speech. The guru quoted verses from the Bhagavad Gita about staying calm in success and in failure. While it felt good to hear the discourse, one of Bipin’s sales managers was heard commenting, “I may be calm but my failure will certainly get Bipin agitated. He does not care for us. He only cares for our performance. We are a performance-driven organization after all.” The sales manager knew that if his sales numbers dipped, he could bid his bonus goodbye. The company only cared for the Narayani, not the Narayan.


Does he bow to me or my sword?
Curse of a king!

Things help us position ourselves

When Hanuman, a monkey, entered Lanka and identified himself as Ram's messenger and asked for a seat as protocol demanded, he was spurned by the rakshasa-king, Ravan, who insulted him by denying him one. Hanuman retaliated by announcing that he would create a seat for himself: he extended his tail, coiled it around and created a seat higher than Ravan's throne. Instead of being amused or impressed, Ravan was infuriated. His power was threatened. In a rage, he ordered that Hanuman's tail be set aflame.

The story reveals how a thing (a seat) is used to communicate a thought (pecking order). Hanuman does not care for power or for thrones but he realizes things mean a lot to Ravan. By the dramatic use of his tail, he breaches the fortress of Ravan's mind and shatters his mental image in an instant.

What is interesting is that Hanuman does not need an external thing to position himself; he expands what he already has—his tail. In other words, he finds strength within and does not need the help of an object or a salutation. He has enough Shakti to compensate for the Durga that Ravan refuses to give him.

We constantly use material things to position ourselves: our cabins, our houses, our cars, our mobile phones, and so on. When these are taken away from us, or damaged, we feel hurt. When our possessions are damaged, when our car gets scratched, or our watch gets stolen, or our seat is given to someone else, our social body gets damaged and this causes pain to the mental body; even though the physical body is perfectly fine.

When it was time to buy a new mobile phone, Pervez had a simple rule. He checked what models his clients and his bosses were using. He then bought an inferior model. He did not want to intimidate any of them or make them feel insecure. In fact, he wanted them to criticize his choice and mock him for buying a poor-quality phone. “I want them to put me down. I want them to feel superior. It helps me in my relationship with them.” Pervez has understood the power of using things to generate Durga.

Things are surrogate markers of our value

Indra calls Vishwakarma, his architect, and orders him to build a palace worthy of his stature. Vishwakarma builds a palace of gold but Indra feels it is not good enough. So Vishwakarma builds him a palace of diamonds; Indra is not satisfied with that either. So Vishwakarma builds him a palace using that most elusive of elements, ether; even this does not please Indra.

Why does Indra want to build a larger palace? Is not being king of the devas enough? Clearly not; he needs his mental status to have a tangible manifestation in the form of a palace. But no palace matches his mental expectation, as his mental body is much greater than all the things he can possess. That leaves him dissatisfied.

In the world Indra lives in, people are measured by the amount of things they have. Since he wants to be bigger and better than everyone else, he wants his palace to be bigger and better than others'.

Property is a physical manifestation of our mental body. It contributes to our social body. What we have determines who we are. We cannot see the mental body, but we do see the social body. Our possessions become an extension of

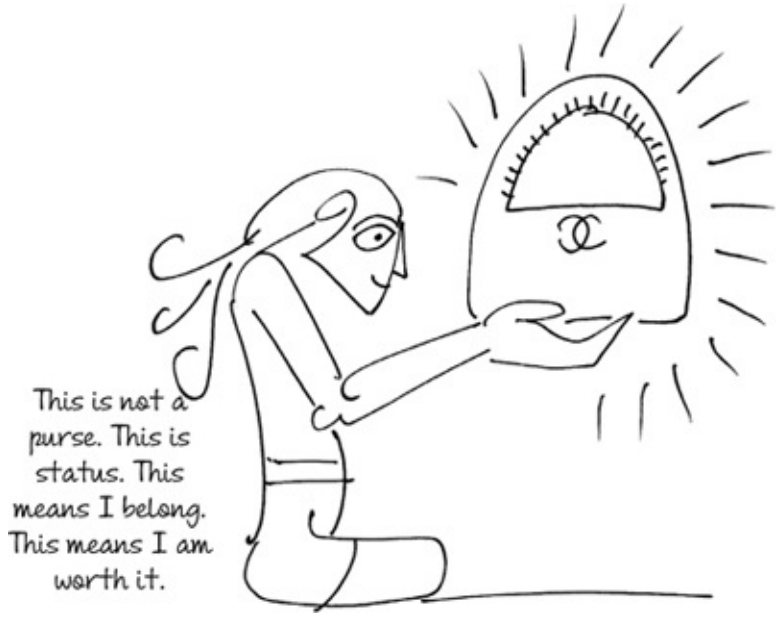
who we are. We equate ourselves with what we have. When we die, what we have outlives us, thus possessions have the power to grant us immortality. That is why property is so dear to humans.

Raju hated driving. Since he could not afford a driver, he did not buy a car. He travelled every day to office by auto. This annoyed his boss. “Your team members will not respect you unless you have a car.” Raju did not understand this: surely they respected him for his work and managerial skills. Nevertheless, he finally succumbed to the pressure and bought a car. His son was very annoyed, “But daddy, all my friends have bigger cars.” Raju realized the car was not only a mode of conveyance; it was about grabbing a place in the social hierarchy.

Thoughts can be coded into things

Narad asked the wives of Krishna to give him something that they felt was equal in value to their husband. He gets a weighing scale into the courtyard and makes Krishna sit on one of the pans. On the other, each of the wives puts what she feels equals Krishna's worth. Satyabhama puts all her gold, utensils and jewels, but the scale still weighs less than Krishna. Rukmini, on the other hand, places a sprig of tulsi on the pan and declares it to be a symbol of her love for Krishna. Instantly, the scales shift.

Both Satyabhama and Rukmini value Krishna for the impact he has had on them. How does one quantify this transformation? How do they give form to their mental image of him? Satyabhama expresses her thoughts through things while Rukmini uses a symbol, a metaphor. When people recognize this code, the tulsi becomes more valuable than gold. Everyone values gold. Only those who appreciate the language of symbols will appreciate tulsi.



The same principle applies to brands. Brands are thoughts embodied by things. When people buy a brand, they are buying a thought or a philosophy that

makes them feel powerful, which raises their stature in the eyes of those who matter to them. Naturally, people are willing to pay a lot of money for such codes. The cost of making a product is much less than the cost at which brands are sold. In order to charge a premium, great effort has to be made through advertising and marketing to establish the brand's philosophy in a cultural landscape. Unless people are able to decode what the brand stands for, it will have no value.

Zafar has a small shop that sells fake brands at about a quarter of the real price. He has never understood why people pay so much for brand names. The actual cost of production is much lower. His uncle explained, "The customer is not buying a tool that tells the time. He is buying aukaat: status, dignity, respect, admiration and envy. For that the customer is ready to pay anything." Zafar thus understood the difference between the literal and symbolic value of Rukmini's tulsi.

We assume we are what we have

Paundraka, king of Karusha, wears a crown with a peacock feather. He holds a lotus flower in one hand and a conch-shell in the other. Around his neck he wears a garland of forest flowers, the Vanamali. From his ears hang earrings that are shaped like dolphins, the Makara-kundala. He is draped in a bright yellow silk dhoti or the Pitambara. He even has hairdressers curl his hair. He insists on eating rich creamy butter with every meal. He plays the flute in flowery meadows on moonlit nights surrounded by his queens and concubines who dance around him. "I look like Krishna. I do everything Krishna does. I must be Krishna," he says to himself. His subjects, some gullible, some confused and others frightened, worship him with flowers, incense, sweets and lamps. Everyone wonders who the true Krishna is since both look so similar.

Then a few courtiers point out that Krishna of Dwaraka has a wheel-shaped weapon that no other man has called the Sudarshan Chakra. "Oh that," Paundraka explains, "He borrowed it from me. I must get it back from the impostor." So a messenger is sent to inform Krishna to return the Sudarshan Chakra or face stern consequences. To this, Krishna replies, "Sure, let him come and get it."

Irritated that Krishna does not come to return the Sudarshan Chakra, Paundraka sets out for Dwaraka on his chariot, decorated with a banner that has the image of Garud on it, reinforcing his identity. When he reaches the gates of Dwaraka, he shouts, "False Krishna, return the Sudarshan Chakra to the true Krishna." Krishna says, "Here it is." The Sudarshan Chakra that whirrs around Krishna's index finger flies towards Paundraka. Paundraka stretches out his hand to receive it. As the wheel alights on his finger, he realizes it is heavier than it looks. So heavy, in fact, that before he can call for help he is crushed to pulp under the great whirring wheel. That is the end of the man who pretended to be Krishna.

The corporate world is teeming with pretenders and mimics. They think they know how to walk the walk and talk the talk but they simply don't know what the talk is all about. They know how to dress, how to carry their laptops and smart phones, what car to drive, where to be seen, with whom, how to use words

like ‘value enhancement’ and ‘on the same page’ and ‘synergy’ and ‘win-win’. In other words, they know the behaviour that projects them as corporate leaders, but are nowhere close to knowing what true leadership actually means.

At a fast-growing firm, Vijaychandra selects a young man who shows all the signs of having the talent and drive of a leader. The young man’s name is Jaipal. His CV indicates he’s from the right universities, has the right credentials and impressive testimonies. Besides which, he’s nattily dressed and articulate. He even plays golf! He is fit to head the new e-business division. Two years down the line, however, despite all the magnificent PowerPoint presentations and Excel sheets, which impressed quite a few investors, the e-division’s revenue is way below the mark. The market has just not responded. Jaipal knows how to talk business, but evidently he does not know how to do business. Vijaychandra decides to investigate what Jaipal has done in the past two years. It emerges that while Jaipal has stayed in the right hotels and driven the right cars, he has never gone to personally meet the vendors or customers. He has not made the effort to immerse himself in market research; on the contrary, he has hired people to do it for him. He focuses on ‘strategy’ but not on ‘tactics’. He loves boardroom brainstorming but not shop-floor sweat. His organization structure is designed such that it keeps him isolated from the frontline. He simply assumes that his team will know what to do in the marketplace. He has never picked up the phone and addressed client grievances—he prefers the summary of conclusions provided by reputed analysts. He does not get to hear his sales people whine and groan and prefers the echoes of the market presented by strategy consultants. Vijaychandra realizes he has a Paundraka on his hands—all imitation, no inspiration.

We expect things to transform us

One day, as King Bhoj and his soldiers approach a field, a farmer is heard screaming, “Stay away, stay away, you and your horses will destroy the crops. Have some pity on us poor people!” Bhoj immediately moves away. As soon as he turns his back, the farmer begins to sing a different tune altogether and says, “Where are you going, my king? Please come to my field, let me water your horses and feed your soldiers. Surely you will not refuse the hospitality of a humble farmer?” Not wanting to hurt the farmer, though amused by his turnaround, Bhoj once again moves towards the field. Again, the farmer shouts, “Hey, go away. Your horses and your soldiers are damaging what is left of my crop. You wicked king, go away.” No sooner has Bhoj begun to turn away than the farmer cries, “Hey, why are you turning away? Come back. You are my guests. Let me have the honour of serving you.”

The king is now exceedingly confused and wonders what is conspiring. This happens a few more times before Bhoj observes the farmer carefully. He notices that whenever the farmer is rude, he is standing on the ground, but whenever he is hospitable, he is standing atop a mound in the middle of the field. Bhoj realizes that the farmer’s split personality has something to do with the mound. He immediately orders his soldiers to dig up the mound in the centre of the field. The farmer protests but Bhoj is determined to solve the mystery.

Beneath the mound, the soldiers find a wonderful golden throne. As Bhoj is about to sit on it, the throne speaks up, “This is the throne of Vikramaditya, the great. Sit on it only if you are as generous and wise as he. If not, you will meet your death on the throne.” The throne then proceeds to tell Bhoj thirty-two stories of Vikramaditya, each extolling a virtue of kingship, the most important being generosity. It is through these stories that Bhoj learns what it takes to be a good king.

The story is peculiar. In the first part of the story, the throne transforms the stingy farmer into a generous host. In the latter half, the throne demands the king be generous before he takes a seat.

In organizations, we expect a man in a particular position to behave in a particular manner. We assume that he has gained this position because he has

those qualities. But what comes first: gaining the qualities or acquiring the position. Can a king be royal before he has a kingdom, or does the possession of a kingdom make him royal?

Can a person who seeks Durga from the outside world give out Durga? Or should a king have enough Shakti within him to be an unending supply of Durga to others?

Sunder was great friends with his team before he became the boss. The moment he was promoted, he started behaving differently, became arrogant, obnoxious and extremely demanding. Was it the role that had changed him or had it allowed him to reveal his true colours? Sunder blames the burden of new responsibilities and the over-familiarity of his colleagues as the cause of friction. That is when, Kalyansingh, the owner of the company, decides to have a chat with him. “Do you know why you have been given a higher salary, a car, a secretary, a cabin?” Sunder retorts that these are the perks of his job. Kalyansingh then asks, “And what is your job?” Sunder rattles off his job description and his key result areas. “And how do you plan to get promoted to the next level?” Sunder replies that it will happen if he does his work diligently and reaches his targets. “No,” says Kalyansingh, “Absolutely not.” Sunder does not understand. Kalyansingh explains, “If you do your job well, why would I move you? I will keep you exactly where you are.” Looking at the bewildered expression on Sunder’s face, Kalyansingh continues, “If you nurture someone to take your place, then yes, I may consider promoting you, but you seem to be nurturing no one. You are too busy trying to be boss, trying to dominate people, being rude and obnoxious. That is because you are insecure. So long as you are insecure, you will not let others grow. And as long as those under you do not grow, you will not grow yourself. Or at least, I will not give you another responsibility. You will end up doing the same job forever. Is that what you really want?” That is the moment Sunder understands the meaning of Vikramaditya’s throne. After all, it is not about behaving royally, but rather about nurturing one’s kingdom. He must not take Durga, he has to give Durga.

The loss of possessions reveals who we really are

Do kingdoms make us kings? Or can we be kings even without kingdoms? Is our value dependent on what we possess? These are questions raised in the Ramayan and Mahabharat. In both epics the protagonists have to deal with the loss of fortune and exile. It is the manner in which Ram deals with it and the Pandavs deal with it that reveals everything.

The loss of his kingdom does not affect Ram. He is king with or without the kingdom. Aranya-Ram (Ram of the forest) and Ayodhya-Ram (Ram of the city) have the same mental image. His mental body is powered by Shakti from within and does not need an external Durga to validate his social body. Contrarily, the loss of their kingdom shatters the Pandavs. They panic. They feel like victims. Their mental image takes a beating as their social body is battered. They feel deprived, denied and cheated because their mental image depends on the kingdom.

In Ram, Narayan is completely awake and so he does not need Ayodhya to make him feel secure. When his wife, Sita, is abducted he is determined to rescue her, finding resources along the way. He has no army with him, yet he creates an army in the jungle, transforming a troop of monkeys into fierce

warriors who do the unimaginable: build a bridge across the sea, tear down the citadel of Lanka, and defeat an army of fierce rakshasas.

The same is not the case with the Pandavs. They need Indraprastha to make them feel validated. Krishna helps them outgrow their dependence on Narayani and start discovering the Narayan within.

Often, a job has more to do with securing our social body, hence our mental image, than about the task at hand. And so, the loss of a job leads to the loss of self-worth and self-esteem. It is through things we get Durga, but like Ram we have to invoke the Shakti within us so that the vicissitudes of fortune and misfortune do not shake our faith in ourselves, and the world around us.

As the vice president (VP) of marketing, Birendra is highly regarded by his boss. He is a very good teacher, spending time explaining the principles of marketing to his team. Everyone sees him as generous and a gentleman. Until the merger takes place and the company is bought by a much larger firm. In the new organizational design, Birendra is no longer VP of marketing but made VP of market research and analytics instead. Birendra feels this is a step down. He sulks and becomes miserable. He refuses to talk to his former colleagues. He is angry and bitter unlike his former generous and gentle self. The loss of Narayani reveals the true Narayan within him. Birendra is no Vishnu; he is Indra, happy as long as things go his way, unable to take adversity in his stride.

Like things, talent and loyalty can also make us feel secure

A dog is very good for our self-image. As a pet, it adores us unconditionally, wagging its tail when it gets attention, whining when it does not, possessively barking when someone threatens us or lays claim over us. The dog upholds our mental image of ourselves at all costs. The world may or may not appreciate us, but the dog always will. It is the symbol of loyalty, nourishing our mental image.

By contrast, the cow gives us milk. It does nothing for our self-image, giving milk to whosoever milks it. The cow does not wag its tail when we appreciate it or whine when we do not. If one feeds a cow well, takes care of it, the cow produces milk generously. The cow provides for our physical body.

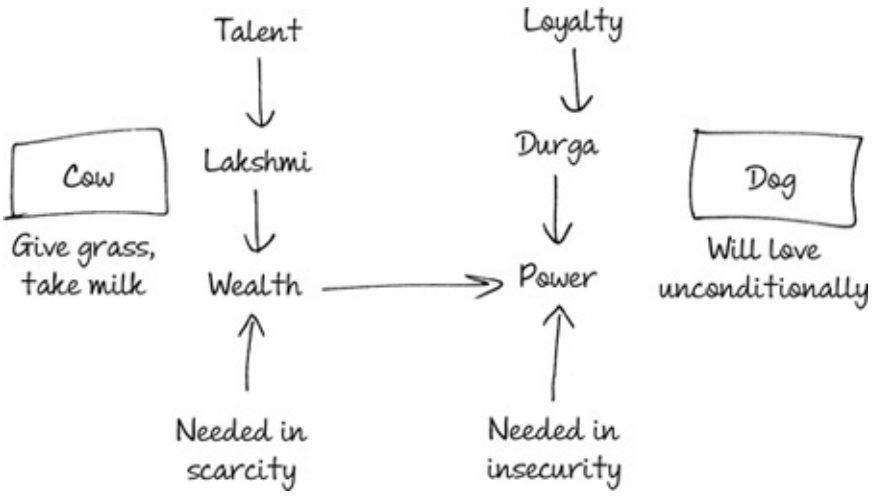
A cow gives us Lakshmi while a dog gives us Durga. The tathastu of talent makes the yajaman rich. The tathastu of loyalty makes the yajaman feel secure. At work what do we seek: cows or dogs? Do we seek talent that will help us achieve our goals or loyalty that will make us feel secure? What if the goal is to be secure?

Often, wealth exists not to nourish us but to make us feel secure. The idea of having more money makes us feel powerful. In fact, money is used to mark our position in society. The car it buys, the house it affords enables us to rise higher in the social hierarchy. Wealth, thus, is also a source of allaying insecurities. Lakshmi can be a functional Durga.

However, while people can be loyal to us, money and talent can never owe allegiance to anyone. That is why we need to surround ourselves with loyal people who stand by us in tough times, providing us emotional support more than anything else. Only the extremely independent or impersonal can survive in a world without loyalty.

When Santosh retired from his post as commissioner, even the peon stopped standing up to salute him. All his ‘friends’ stopped calling him to their parties. He suddenly realized he was a nobody. He realized that everyone had a relationship with his position and power, not with him. They cared not for him but for what he could do for them. He suddenly became aware of his hunger for loyalty and

friendship. Life is, after all, not just about money and power.



A transaction is about things, not thoughts

In the Mahabharat, Karna is a talented archer who is raised in a family of charioteers. He is identified as a charioteer's son and not as an archer. In the social hierarchy, the archer has a higher status than a charioteer. In other words, he has Shakti but not Durga.

Karna longs for social status and gets it from Duryodhan, the eldest of the Kauravs, who makes him king of Anga. In exchange, Duryodhan seeks Karna's talent as an archer. He hopes to use Karna's archery skills against his arch enemies, the Pandavs some day. Duryodhan is insecure about the Pandavs. Karna makes him feel secure. But is it Karna's talent that makes him secure or his loyalty?

Later in the epic, Karna learns that the Pandavs are actually his younger brothers. He is the first child of their mother, Kunti, born before marriage hence abandoned at birth. He is encouraged to join the Pandavs in their fight against the Kauravs. He refuses to change sides out of loyalty to Duryodhan, but promises his mother that he will spare all her children, except Arjun, who is also an ace archer and his greatest rival.

Duryodhan gives Karna social status as svaha, and in exchange expects his talent as an archer to kill the Pandavs. In return, Karna gives him his loyalty. In trying to be loyal to both Duryodhan and his mother, Karna ends up sparing the Pandavs and failing his benefactor.

In the friendship of Karna and Duryodhan, Narayani is being exchanged but Narayan is not invoked. Both remain insecure and needy. Neither grows in wisdom.

Rudraprakash was unhappy. He had two managers handling two of his health clubs. Mehul had worked with him for years and was loyal. Amitabh was a brilliant manager, who did what he was told, but was clearly transactional. Mehul did not deliver results but could be relied on to stay on through bad times. Amitabh delivered results but would leave when things got rough. Each one is insecure in his own way. Mehul's insecurity makes him cling to Rudraprakash. Amitabh's insecurity makes him strive to be emotionally detached from Rudraprakash. Neither is trying to change, or outgrow his fear. They rely more on Narayani that comes from the outside than Narayan that comes from inside.

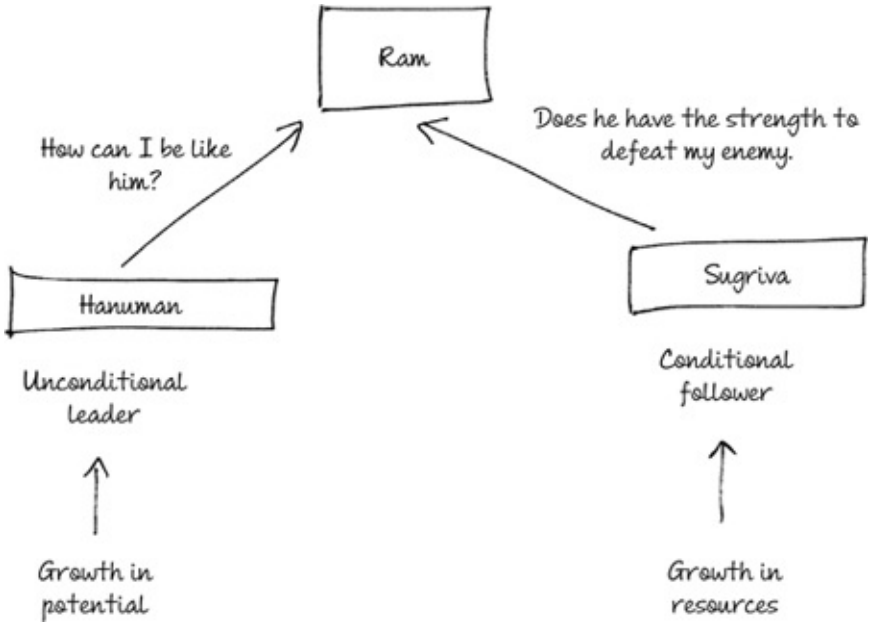

I will give him loyalty
I want his talent

A relationship is about thoughts, not things

In the Ramayan, when Ram and Lakshman encounter Hanuman for the first time, Lakshman suspects he is a demon, until Hanuman speaks in Sanskrit, the language of the educated elite.

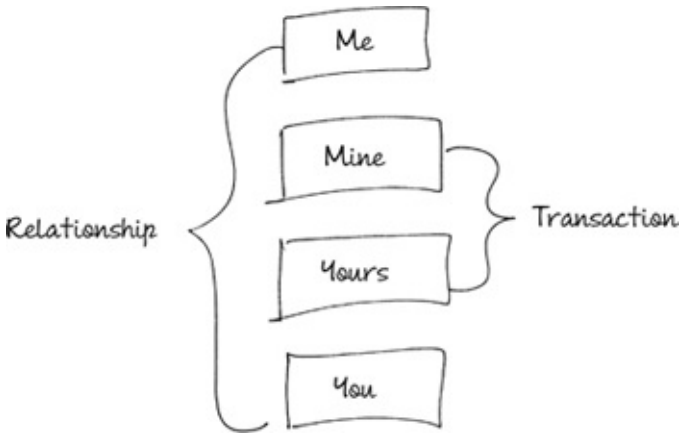
Later, when Ram learns how Hanuman serves Sugriv who has been kicked out of his kingdom by his elder brother Vali, Ram offers to help. But Sugriv is not sure if Ram is capable. Ram demonstrates his skill by shooting an arrow through seven palm trees and his strength by kicking the carcass of a dead buffalo so hard that it flies and lands in the court of Vali.

Lakshman and Sugriv need tangible proof of extraordinariness. They focus on the resources that the other possesses. Ram and Hanuman recognize each other's worth even before proof is provided. They focus on the Narayan potential within each of them.



When two people meet, there are four things on the table: you and yours, me and mine. When yours is exchanged for mine, it is a transaction. When who-I-am impacts who-you-are, it is a relationship. Sugriv and Ram have a transaction:

Ram helps Sugriv become king while Sugriv helps Ram find his wife. Hanuman and Ram have a relationship: neither expects anything from the other yet both help each other. Hanuman helps Ram find Sita and, in doing so, discovers his full potential. He transforms from being a vanar, a mere monkey, to a deity in his own right.



Manish tells his wife, Gitika, to wear a new diamond necklace to the wedding and not the one she has worn earlier. “People will notice and I do not want people to think that my business is not doing well.” Gitika feels like a billboard. In the circles she and her husband move in, what matters is what clothes you wear, what car you drive and where you go on holiday. Everything is constantly measured and keeping up appearances creates huge stress. But she enjoys spending time with Rafiq and Reshma who are her friends from college. They still met in the same canteen where they hung out, never bothering with each one’s professional successes or failures. As Rafiq often tells Manish, “I want to spend time with you, not your car or your cash.”

Rules

Any organization is essentially a set of rules. Rules help humanity overpower the law of the jungle that might is right. Rules domesticate the human-animal. But the human-animal can use rules to dominate and reinforce his position as the alpha. The human-animal can also pretend to follow rules, be subversive, or revolt when opportunity strikes. There is much more happening with rules. For life becomes work when we have to live by another's rules.

There are no thieves in the jungle

Once Uttanka was travelling through the forest carrying a pair of jewelled earrings secured from a king called Saudasa. These earrings were the tuition fees he had promised his guru's wife. On the way, serpents stole the earrings. Uttanka was so angry that he invoked Agni, the fire-god, and filled Bhogavati, the land of serpents with so much smoke that it blinded them all. The torture continued until Vasuki, the king of serpents, returned the earrings to Uttanka.

Uttanka saw the serpents as criminals; the earrings 'belonged' to him. The serpents saw Uttanka as the dominant beast who had defeated all rivals and claimed its prey. The human gaze is different from the animal gaze, as it assumes the existence of cultural structures like rights, rules and responsibilities. In nature, there is no concept of possession or property hence there is no thief, police, or court of law.

In the jungle there is territory not property. You cannot steal territory. You cannot bequeath it to children and loved ones. You have to fight for it. Winner takes it all.

In the jungle there is no law, no criminal, no rights, no duties, no judge, no jury. Everyone is on their own.

Brahma rejects this world. He wants a place where his possessions are protected and respected. This is the world of rules; this is sanskriti. In the world of rules there are rule-breakers, the criminal, the corrupt. There is need for a police force, an auditor, and a regulator. They ensure that the rights of the weak are respected by the strong.

Shabbir smiled. One day, a man seated in a bus spat on the car he was driving and his boss got very angry. He rolled down the window and abused the man, calling him ill-mannered and low-class. The very same day a bird flying over the car relieved itself on the window screen. The boss was upset but he could not shout at the bird. The bird would not understand what manners or class meant.


Nature is the ultimate meritocracy.
It is not fair that the sunlight that was supposed to come to me has been ambushed by this big tree. But fairness is a human value!
In nature, nothing belongs to anybody. You have to fight for everything.

Without rules there is territory, not property

Apsaras, the nymphs who live in Indra's land, do not follow any rules. They subscribe to no law. They live in absolute freedom. In the Mahabharat, when Urvashi, an apsara, tries to seduce Arjun, he withdraws from her stating that she is like a mother to him for she had seduced and stayed with his ancestor, Pururava. She argues that she is ancestor to no one; she belongs to all. The rules of man do not apply to her, a nymph, she says. "But they apply to me," says Arjun.

Urvashi represents prakriti to whom rules do not apply. Arjun, on the other hand, belongs to sanskriti—the world of rules. With rules comes the notion of ownership and property. In nature, the strongest or the smartest gets the prize whereas in culture, thanks to rules, even the weak get something.

In the Ramayan, when Gautam finds his wife Ahalya in the arms of the more attractive and more powerful Indra, he curses Indra's body to be covered with sores and he curses Ahalya, turning her into stone. Gautam may not be the strongest, smartest or richest man; he may not even be a worthy groom, but by law he is the husband, none but he has the right to be with his wife, and the same is expected of her. By law, Indra is a thief who has violated the rules of sanskriti. By law, Ahalya has committed the crime of adultery for failing to respect the rules of marriage. These accusations would make no sense to an apsara like Urvashi.

Rules establish sanskriti. They are put in place in the hope of creating a world where even the weak can thrive and the helpless have rights. Unfortunately, rules end up creating a new form of hierarchy, one that is not based on force, or cunning, but rather based on the whims of man.

Thus, in some organizations one gender is favoured over another, or a certain community or nationality is favoured over another. All these decisions are rationalized using complex arguments. We strive for meritocracy until we realize that it comes at a price that humans are unwilling to pay.

Initially, the parking lot outside the temple was free for all. Dozens of cars could be seen parked outside as hordes of families visited, especially on the auspicious Fridays and Saturdays. Soon, the

number of cars increased so much there were fights in the parking lot between people vying for the same space. Finally, to keep the peace, rules had to be introduced: it was first come first served. Those who came late had to park outside on the road and risk having their cars towed away. This inconvenienced many powerful and rich people in the area who complained to the temple committee and even subtly threatened to withdraw their financial support. The temple authorities decided to reserve a portion of the parking lot for VIPs. This only created more trouble: who was a VIP and who wasn't? The founding family of the temple, who were of modest means, demanded more rights than the rich donors. Politicians began to assert themselves and also demanded special rights. When these were denied, the temple suddenly found itself being questioned by the local municipality about the legality of its reserved parking. The enquiry stopped when the local legislative council member was given a VIP pass. In the absence of rules, there is chaos. In the presence of rules, there is order. But the order is constantly threatened if it fails to cater to the dominant alpha. With order comes hierarchy.

Rules domesticate the human-animal

Domestication is a violent process. In the Ramayan, Surpanaka is a free spirit who seeks intimacy with Ram. When he introduces her to Sita, Surpanaka sees her as a rival. She is unable to fathom the meaning of marriage and fidelity. These rules make no sense in the jungle. In the jungle, the strongest and the most beautiful gets the mate. So Surpanaka tries to take what she wants by force. She decides to attack Sita hoping that with the wife out of the picture, Ram will succumb to her.

To protect Sita from harm, Lakshman intervenes and pulls Surpanaka back. He then cuts off her nose, disfiguring her, making her less worthy of anyone's affection. With this act, the threat to the laws of the marriage is wiped away. The wild beast is domesticated. Order is restored.

From Lakshman's point of view, one informed by culture, he has done the right thing. From Surpanaka's point of view, she has been humiliated and invalidated. She may behave like an animal but that she feels anger indicates she is not an animal. She is human. Her mental image has taken a severe beating. Lakshman may think he is a hero for upholding the rules of culture, but he has only fuelled Surpanaka's fury. On her part, she feels like a victim, not a villain.

Those who make the rules and enforce them always feel powerful and righteous. Those who are obliged to follow the rules do not feel so. They comply willingly only if they feel good about the rules, else they quietly submit. Then there are some who disagree with the rules, rightly or wrongly, and they feel powerful by breaking them.

The hospitality firm and the builder had a joint venture. The hotel had been built by the builder but he did not know how to run the hotel. So the management was outsourced to the hospitality firm. Vikrant was the hotel manager and he soon had a problem. Sanjay, the son of the builder, would come to the bar every evening and simply grab cash from the counter. When the cashier tried to resist, he would say, “Don’t you know who I am? I own this building.” This had to be stopped. So Vikrant called his bosses in the head office and apprised them of the situation. “I can stop the bully but only if you give me full support.” The bosses assured him full support. The next time Sanjay tried to grab cash, Vikrant and two of his managers intervened and stopped him. Sanjay threatened them with dire consequences. Vikrant pulled out his mobile and called Sanjay’s father and said, “Sir, I have been told by the management to withdraw operations if Sanjay continues to misbehave with the staff and interfere with processes. Please advise on what needs to be done.” The reply made Vikrant smile. Sanjay left the bar shamefaced and never returned again. Surpanaka had been controlled by rules. But Vikrant knew that this would come at a price. The builder’s prestige had been dented and it could sour the relationship with the hospitality firm, create trouble in the future. Vikrant’s bosses knew it too. He was transferred to another hotel and secretly given a cash bonus not to speak of the incident. And because Vikrant displayed immense maturity, his bosses marked him out as talent.

Domestication can be voluntary and involuntary

Garud was born a slave. His mother, Vinata, had lost a wager with her sister, Kadru, as a result of which she and her offspring were obliged to serve Kadru and her children, the nagas. “If you want to be free,” say the nagas to Garud, “fetch amrit for us.”

Garud immediately flies to Amravati and finds the pot of amrit there, guarded by the devas. He spreads his mighty wings, extends his sharp talons and swoops down on them. Indra and the devas are no match for Garud. He shoves them aside and claims the pot with the nectar of immortality.

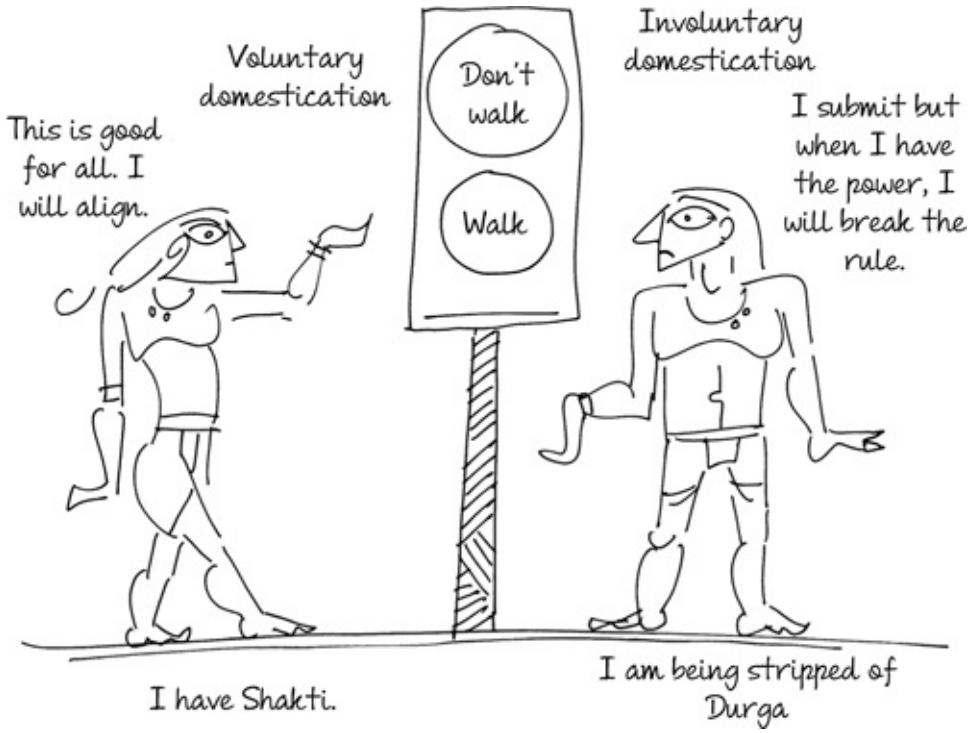
On the way back, he encounters Vishnu. Vishnu says, “There is a way by which you can get your freedom without giving the nagas the amrit. If I tell you how, what will you give me in exchange?” Garud swears to serve him for the rest of his life.

Vishnu then says, “After you give the pot of nectar and secure your freedom, tell the nagas they must bathe before drinking it. They will leave the pot with you, assuming you will safeguard it until their return. Allow Indra to reclaim the pot while the nagas are away. When the nagas question your actions, remind them that you stopped being their slave as soon as you gave them the pot of nectar and were thus under no obligation to stop Indra from stealing what anyway belongs to the devas.” Garud does as he is told: he gets his freedom, Indra gets back the amrit and the nagas get nothing. Indra is so pleased with Garud that he makes nagas the natural food for Garud. Garud then goes to Vaikuntha and serves Vishnu.

In this story, Garud resents serving the nagas while he willingly serves Vishnu. The former is involuntary domestication. The latter is voluntary domestication. In involuntary domestication, we are compelled to work according to other people’s rules. In voluntary domestication, we choose to work according to other people’s rules.

We voluntarily give up our rules and agree to follow other people’s rules, if they grant unto us something that we value. The contract we sign when joining an organization is voluntary domestication.

Srikanth always comes to office on time. He likes coming early and setting up his desk before others. Then, one day, the company introduces the swipe-card system to ensure everyone comes on time. Suddenly, Srikanth does not feel like coming early. He hates his integrity being watched and measured. So he comes to office exactly on time and leaves on the dot too, never giving that extra time that he did before the company made domestication so involuntary. Srikanth would be servant to a trusting Vishnu, not to an exploitative naga.



We dislike those who are indifferent to rules

Sati was the daughter of Daksha Prajapati, the supreme patron of the yagna. When she met Shiva, she asked him, “Where is your home?” “Home? What does that mean?” he said. “Where do you stay when it gets very hot?” “Atop Mount Kailas,” he replied. “Where do you stay when it gets very cold?” “In a crematorium, next to funeral pyres that are always burning,” he said. “Where do you stay when it rains?” “In a cave,” he said, “or even above the clouds!”

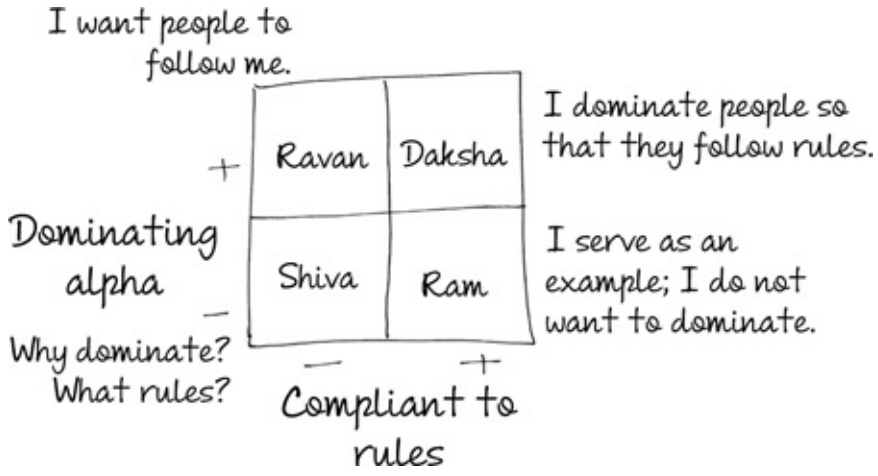
Sati laughed as she realized he did not understand the meaning of a home. She called him Bholenath, the innocent one, and fell in love with him. She even decided to marry him, to which her father agreed with great reluctance.

At the wedding, sons-in-law are supposed to bow to their fathers-in-law. When Shiva refused to do so, Sati’s father Daksha took this as a great insult. At the feast that followed, Shiva fed his companions, ghosts and dogs, with his own hands. Daksha considered these creatures foul and inauspicious. His protests made no sense to Shiva.

Sati realized that Shiva had no mental image of himself, and so had no need for a social body. He was indifferent to property as well as rules that are needed to endorse and affirm one’s self-image. Daksha, on the other hand, saw Shiva very differently. He saw him as the destroyer, a threat to social order. Shiva was comfortable with prakriti as Kali—wild and untamed, unbound by any rules. Daksha insisted on looking upon prakriti as Gauri, bound by his rules, under his control.

Daksha insists on rules being followed for the larger good. He demands domestication. But in enforcing the rules, his self-image gets inflated and he starts behaving as the dominant alpha. So much so that he starts seeing Shiva as an adversary, and not as one who cannot be domesticated.

Shiva is a bull. If a bull is castrated, it turns into an ox, a beast of burden. It can no longer impregnate a cow. It is important to allow Shiva to stay outside the purview of rules. Daksha fails to realize this and takes Shiva’s intransigence as a personal insult. At no point is Shiva defying Daksha; he is just being himself.



Ravan, king of Lanka, defies the rules, and Ram, prince of Ayodhya, follows them, but Ravan is no Shiva and Ram is no Daksha. Unlike Shiva, Ravan wants to control people; he defies authority because he wants to be authority. Shiva is a hermit with no desire to dominate or domesticate anyone. Unlike Daksha, Ram does not want to control people; he respects the rules, not authority. He knows the value of rules and their place in life. He also knows the price one pays to uphold the rules. Thus, he is quite comfortable sacrificing personal happiness in the process of upholding the law.

Mirchandani demands that every member of his accounting firm come to office on time. They lose half-a-day of salary if they are even a minute late, but Mirchandani always comes in late. He believes that as the owner it is his privilege and he rationalizes it by saying he works late into the night unlike other staff members who leave at 6 p.m. sharp. By this, he establishes his domination in the organizational hierarchy like Ravan. Vishal, a senior accountant, just cannot come to office on time. He likes starting work only by 11 a.m., and he does not mind staying back late till all the work is done. Cutting his salary, admonishing him, has had no effect on Vishal. Mirchandani calls him arrogant and insubordinate but Vishal has no desire to defy the system. He simply functions best later in the day and finds it very difficult to wake up early. The tension between Vishal and Mirchandani reaches a point where Vishal is asked to leave. Mirchandani loses a talented worker because, like Daksha, he is more interested in Vishal's obedience and adherence to rules than in Vishal's intelligence.

Rules can be oppressive

Ram's obsession with rules dehumanizes him and makes him detached and dispassionate. The structure he creates does not benefit all: certainly not Shambuka and Sita.

The rules state that only members of the priestly professions can renounce society and become tapasvis, not members of servant professions. So when Shambuka, a servant, becomes a tapsavi, Ram beheads him.

The rules state that the king shall not have a woman who is the subject of gossip as his queen. The abduction of Sita and her stay in Ravan's palace is the subject of gossip and so Ram abandons Sita in the forest when she is heavy with child despite knowing that she has never been unfaithful in letter or spirit.

Often in organizations, people are told to leave jobs on grounds that they have broken a rule. Even though the leader has the power to forgive or overlook such transgressions he does not, for fear of the repercussions to the company as a whole. Forgiveness may be seen as a favour. It may bring ethics into question.

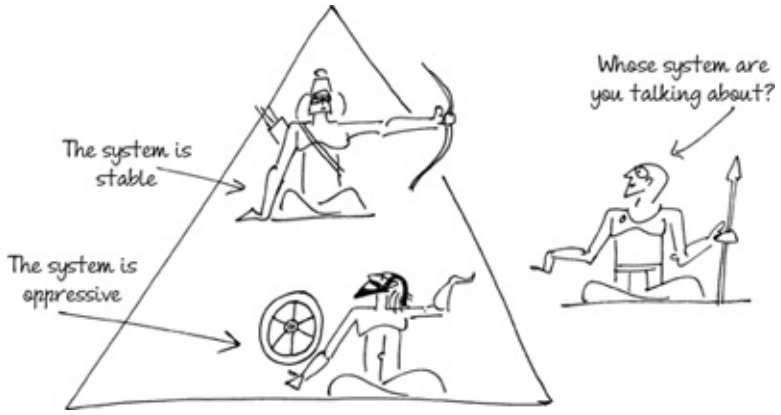
The rules were very clear that bonuses had to be paid as per the bell curve. Some would get more than

others, and at least one person would be denied a bonus. Uday argued that all his team members had done satisfactory work and no one person's work stood out as spectacular. Those upstream did not care: the rule had to be applied every time. The team had to be graded differently. No exceptions could be made. Uday felt disgust but he could do nothing about it. Shambuka had to be beheaded and Sita had to be exiled, if he wished to be Ram.

Rules create underdogs and outsiders

In the Mahabharat, there are three great archers: Arjun, Karna and Eklavya. Rules state that as a member of the royal family, Arjun has the right to hold the bow. The same right is not given to Karna and Eklavya because Karna belongs to a family of charioteers who are servants, while Eklavya is a tribal who lives in the forest. Karna has to learn secretly, denying his identity to his teacher. Eklavya has to learn on his own as the royal tutor, Drona, refuses to teach him. The social structure of the land is anything but fair.

Rules that are meant to subvert the law of the jungle end up creating a culture that is unfair and oppressive. Hence, the god in Hinduism is not just a rule-follower like Ram but also a rule-breaker as in the instance of Krishna. Krishna is leela purushottam who is best at playing games. He is always visualized as a cowherd and charioteer, members of the servant class, even though he is born into a royal family. He seems to be mocking social status.



The point is not the rules, or the following or breaking of them, but the reason behind the rules. Are they helping the helpless as they are supposed to, or are they simply granting more power to the powerful? Rules were created to keep the jungle out of society but more often than not they become tools to make society worse than any jungle.

Mathias knows that because he is the eldest son of the family, his taking over as CEO of his departmental store will always be seen as a function of his bloodline rather than a result of his talent. No matter how hard he works, no matter what his performance is when compared with other professionals in the company, he will always be his father's son. He is the modern-day Arjun, found in almost every family business. In contrast, Mathur knows that despite years of proving himself, he will never become the CEO; he is not part of the family bloodline and the family will never give the mantle to a professional. He is our modern-day Karna, who leaves the family business and joins a professional company, only to realize that even a multinational company has a glass ceiling. He is not an alumnus of any known business-school hence he will never be good enough. He will always be the outsider. Bakshi works as a manager in the very same departmental store. He would have been a part of the strategic team but he will never be, because he is not a business-school graduate either. No school accepted him because in the group discussions he would only express himself in Hindi. His thoughts were outstanding but those who judged him heard only his language and felt he would not fit in because he did not know English. Bakshi did not learn English since the government schools he studied in taught only the local language, because the political parties insisted on supporting the regional language over a 'foreign' language, never mind the fact that the children of these very politicians went to English-medium schools. Bakshi is the modern-day Eklavya; not quite sure why well-meaning politicians and well-meaning academicians denied him his thumb.

Rules create mimics and pretenders

In the Mahabharat, Duryodhan breaks no rules. He simply invites Yudhishtir to play a game of dice for a wager. It is Yudhishtir who gambles away his kingdom and his wife, not Duryodhan. When Draupadi, the common wife of the Pandavs, is dragged by the hair from the inner chambers to the royal court, humiliated and publicly disrobed, no one comes to her rescue, neither Bhisma, Drona, nor Karna, even though she begs them for help. Rules and laws are quoted to justify her treatment.

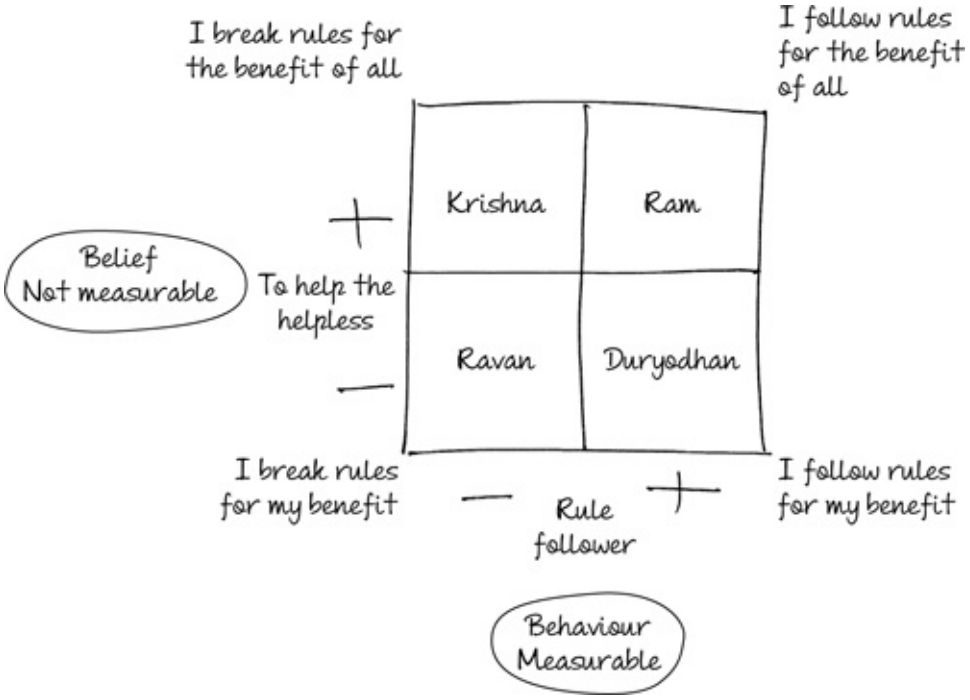
Later, when the Pandavs return from their thirteen-year exile in the forest, Duryodhan refuses to return their lands. He argues that according to his calendar, the Pandavs were seen before the end of the thirteenth year and so as per the agreement, they have to return to the forest for another thirteen years. Krishna offers the counter-argument that the Kaurav calendar does not take into account the concept of leap years. In fact, the Pandavs have lived in exile longer than stipulated. Duryodhan disagrees with this. So Krishna offers a compromise, “Just give five villages to the five brothers for the sake of peace.” Thus cornered, Duryodhan reveals the true intention behind his pretence of rational arguments and says, “I will not give them a needle point of land under any circumstances.”

Duryodhan is the pretender, the mimic, who follows the rules but does not care for the purpose they serve. He uses rules to control the world around him and get his way.

In a world where processes and systems matter more than feelings, it is clear that the overwhelming culture promotes Duryodhans. We assume that the obedient person is the committed person. Yet, we can sense that the team is disconnected and detached emotionally. They become professional because they have stopped caring about people; all they care about is tasks and targets and go about accomplishing these ruthlessly and heartlessly. In fact, when we celebrate professionalism, we celebrate Duryodhan who values the letter of the law, not the spirit. Behaviour can be proven and measured, not belief.

During the breakout sessions at the international conference of a large cosmetics company, everyone was asked to voice their issues with the new positioning of the old product. Yasmin had many

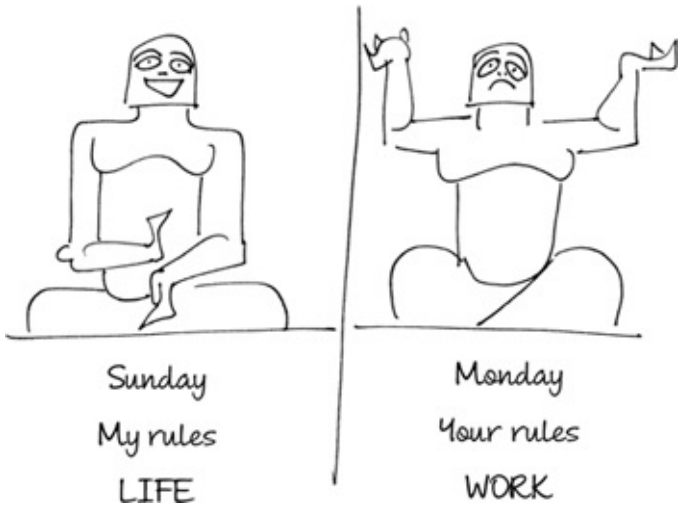
objections arising from the local realities of India. Before she could voice these, her boss, Gajendra, tapped her on the shoulder and said, “This is a charade. They have already printed the brochures and the leaflets and agencies have already filmed the ad-campaign that we have rolled out. So do not bother protesting or being honest. This meeting is just a formality to tell the board of directors that local markets were consulted before the launch. Nobody will believe it but everyone will applaud their efforts. So just smile and tell them how wonderful the new positioning is. That is what they want to hear. And if you tell them what they want to hear, they will reward you by calling you to the next international conference.” With this dialogue, Gajendra encouraged Yasmin to become a Duryodhan and work with the system, her personal views notwithstanding.



We want to live by our own rules

Ravan is the most charismatic and enchanting villain of Hindu mythology. With ten heads, twenty arms, a flying chariot and a city of gold in the middle of the sea, he stands out in the epic Ramayan. He drives his brother Kuber out of the city of Lanka and declares himself king. When Ram and his brother humiliate his sister, Surpanaka, he decides to teach them a lesson by abducting Ram's wife, Sita. Ravan is much admired as he lives by his own rules. What is overlooked is that he is the dominant alpha male, who does not care for anyone except those who please him. He kicks his brother Vibhishan out of the house because he refuses to align with him. He wakes up his other brother, Kumbhakarn, even though it has been foretold that if he is disturbed before it is his time to wake up he will meet certain death. He lets his city Lanka burn and his sons and brothers die, but refuses to give Sita up.

In the Mahabharat, the Pandav Bhim also displays this trait of living by his own rules. He is in the habit of walking straight towards his destination, refusing to take any turn, destroying everything that stands in his path. Fearing Bhim's might, rocks, trees and animals make way for him. Once, while on his way to fetch a flower for his beloved wife, Bhim finds an old monkey lying across his path. Too proud to go around this old creature, Bhim introduces himself and insists that the monkey make way for him. The old monkey tells Bhim, "I cannot move, I am too weak. Just kick my tail aside and go forth," Bhim tries to do that, but fails. The tail is just too heavy! The monkey reveals he is Hanuman, representing nature that refuses to submit to the excesses of man.



We admire people who do things their way, who stand up to governments, change policies and make their mark in industry and society. These defiant heroes represent raw power that shapes the world around them by grit and determination. Upon closer observation, we realize they use rules to dominate and control the world around them. Their rules only serve them.

Prakash wants to be an entrepreneur. Not because he has any great idea or a great service to offer, he simply wants to be his own boss. He is tired of obeying others, submitting to the whims and fancies of his superiors who he feels are much less talented than him. He refuses to be a cog in the wheel; he wants to be the owner of the wheel. He wants to be an alpha. He wants everyone to listen to him and live life on his own terms.

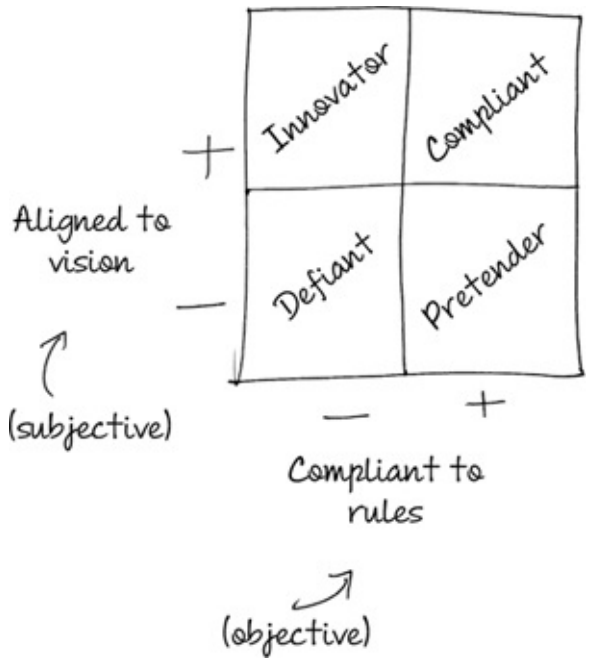
Innovation is not possible unless rules are broken

As a child, Krishna defies rules when he steals the butter of milkmaids as well as their hearts earning the titles of makhan-chor and chit-chor. Yet, he is forgiven, for his actions bring joy and compel people to be more generous with their resources and affection.

As a grown man, Krishna defies rules several times in the battlefield. He does it when he gets the patriarch Bhisma to lower his bow, by getting the androgynous Shikhandi to ride on his chariot in front of Arjun. To get Drona to lower his weapons, Krishna spreads the rumour that Drona's son, Ashwatthama, is dead. He is referring to an elephant, but he knows Drona will assume it is his son and lower his weapons, giving Dhristadhyumna the chance to behead the old teacher. Krishna goads Arjun to strike Karna even though Karna is unarmed, helpless and busy trying to release the wheel of his chariot from the ground. He goads Bhim to strike Duryodhan with a fatal blow below the navel on his thigh, which is expressly forbidden by the rules of war.

Krishna can be described as an innovator, one who creates better rules by breaking and bending old rules that do not serve their purpose. But he does so gently, with a smile, taking people into confidence. The shift is subtle, taking one by surprise. And the change is aimed to create a society where jungle laws do not exist.

Every person is an innovator, a pretender—compliant and defiant in different contexts. Every team has someone who is such a person. This is the world of sanskriti, where all is not as it seems. It lacks the transparency of nature. As long as there is imagination, such transparency of feelings will not exist.



Mohit took a huge risk. Breaking all company policies, he told his team to talk to the client directly rather than go through official intermediaries. This led to a huge furore and Mohit was summoned to the CEO's office. The client-facing team was there with proof of Mohit's audacity. Mohit did not deny the charges. He simply presented a slide show that proved the difference in turnaround time in the six months before he broke and after he broke the rule. The turnaround time had shortened and the number of customer complaints had dramatically gone down. Bypassing the client-serving team, the delivery team had reduced affairs getting lost in translation thereby improving the equity of the firm. The client trusted the firm more. Mohit was a Krishna breaking the rules not out of spite or indifference, but because they were doing more harm than good. The CEO agreed and Mohit was allowed to continue his initiative.

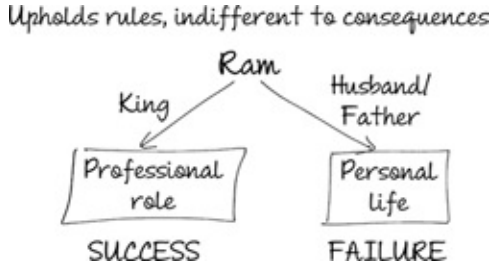
We respect those who uphold rules

Ram is maryada purushottam, supreme upholder of laws that make up the social order. He is the only form of Vishnu to be worshipped as king. He upholds rules even at the cost of personal happiness.

The rules state that the king shall always keep his word. When Dashrath tells Ram about Kaikeyi's demands, Ram leaves for exile immediately without a word of protest. This is not the act of an obedient son; this is an act of a law-abiding prince who upholds rules to ensure the integrity of the royal family.

The rules state that a man shall always be faithful to his wife. Ram never looks at another woman or remarries when separated from Sita. This, too, is an act of upholding the law rather than an act borne out of love. Ram does not make rules—he follows them. He is supremely compliant. And the kingdom he fosters is described as a world where nothing is unpredictable and everything is organized.

When the branch office is established in Ahmedabad, Sunil is clear he wants Alok as the branch head. Alok is straightforward and trustworthy. He will follow the rules meticulously and ensure all processes are implemented and followed. He will create a culture of compliance. As the branch office is primarily a delivery centre and not a client-facing arm, Sunil is looking for a Ram to create a predictable and controllable environment. Alok is perfect for the job.



Rules need not determine our value

Sita goes into forest exile twice in the Ramayan. The first time, it is voluntary; she follows Ram as a dutiful wife. The second time, it is involuntary; she is abandoned in the forest on Ram's instruction following street gossip about her reputation. Ram does not see Sita. His gaze is only on the rules.

Despite this Sita never begrudges Ram. Though abandoned and alone in the forest, she knows that his role as a king compels him to take this drastic step. She knows where he is coming from, his commitment to the rules, his obligation as scion of a royal clan and his responsibility to his people. While she knows the consequences of his decisions, she also knows that he will always be true to her. When her sons are old enough, she sends them to their father. Ram asks her to come back, but she refuses. As a resident of the forest, she is no longer bound by the rules of the city. In the forest she is not obliged to obey. She asks the earth-goddess, her mother, to take her back. The earth opens up and takes her in.

Sita no longer needs the Durga offered by social rules. She has enough Shakti within her to live without them. She does not need a social body; she does not need to be wife or queen. Her mental body no longer seeks external validation.

Prathamesh was accused of sexual misconduct and asked to leave the firm as long as the enquiry was pending. Keeping him around would affect the image of the company negatively. It would speak volumes about the company's moral stand in such matters. Prathamesh was furious. He knew that it was impossible to prove what actually transpired behind closed doors. It was his word against the lady who had accused him. His conscience was clear but he kept reliving the day in his mind: had he said, or done something that could have been misunderstood? Three months later, Prathamesh was asked to rejoin the firm. There was insufficient evidence against him. It was a case of cultural misunderstanding. Prathamesh declined the offer. He had learned that there was life beyond the wealth and privilege offered by the firm.

Stability

Nature is changing. Markets are changing. Human needs are changing. New tools and technologies are appearing and old ones disappearing. Some seek stability, certainty and predictability: the status quo. Others seek change, revolution, and transformation: a change in their status. With stability comes peace, monotony and stagnation. With change comes stress, excitement and growth.

When the world changes, our social body dies

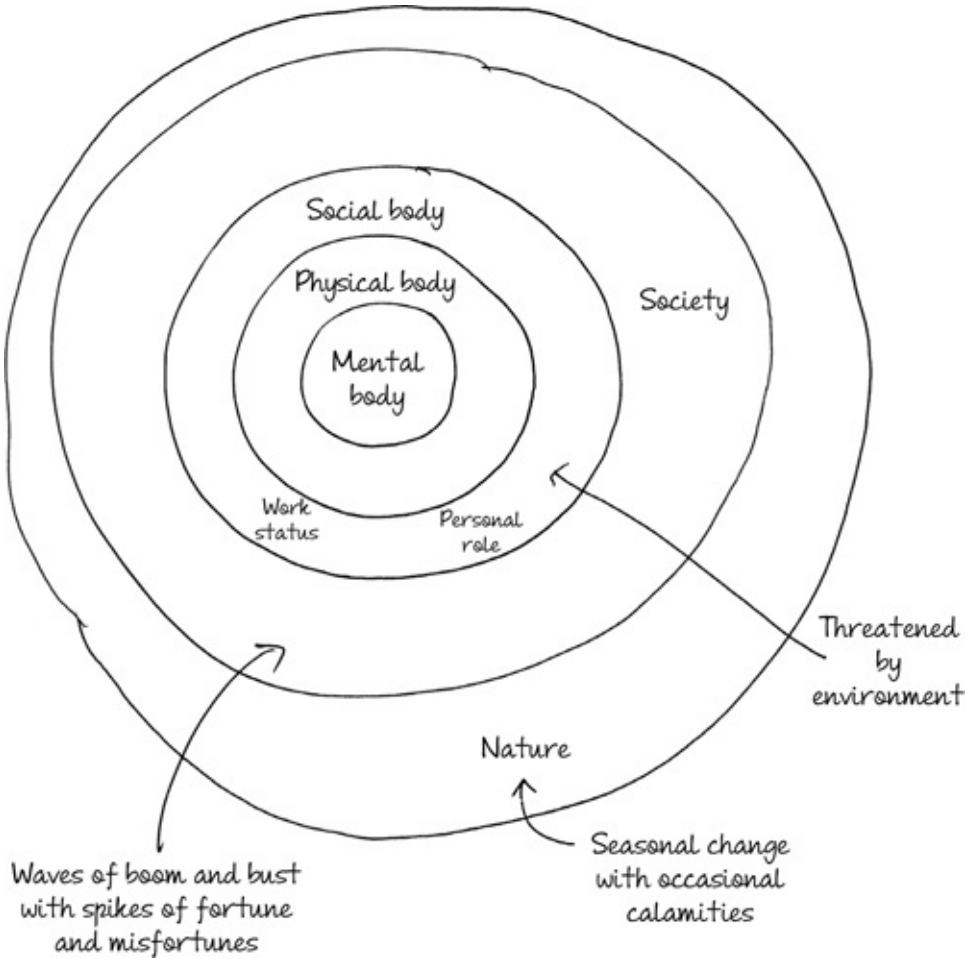
Markandeya has the boon of immortality, yet he feels great fear. One day, he sees the rains fall and the oceans rise until the whole world, every mountain, continent and person he knew, every village and city he'd visited, get dissolved. The sun disappears from the sky along with the moon, the stars and every cloud. Markandeya finds himself surrounded by vast, limitless water. Alone in the midst of nothingness, Markandeya experiences great dread. There is no one to see him or call him by his name. Without the world, who is he? He has no identity. Does he even exist?

As these thoughts cross his mind, he sees a banyan leaf floating on the waves. A child is sitting on the leaf and gurgling happily, sucking his big toe joyfully. The child breathes in and Markandeya finds himself being sucked into the child's body. Inside, he can see the entire universe—the sky, the earth and the underworld. He sees the realms of devas, asuras, yakshas, rakshasas, nagas, and manavas, some of whom recognize him and call him by name. Markandeya feels secure, his identity and value restored. All the fear that Markandeya experienced now disappears, thanks to the intervention of the child, who is undoubtedly Vishnu. Then the child breathes Markandeya out. He is back in the realm of the waters, of nothingness, where his fears return.

Markandeya's physical body may be immortal, but when the world around him collapses, his social body dies. He is stripped of all relationships, titles and status. He belongs to no hierarchy; is a nobody. That is why we cling to social structures around us: hierarchy, the rules of an organization, these grant us our identity and meaning. Sanskriti exists to make humans feel secure. That is why any change in society frightens us.

Our social structures depend on the organization. The organization depends on industry, which in turn depends on the market. The market depends on society, which in turn relies on the environment. All these are susceptible to change, and so are constant threats to our physical, social and mental body. We are only comfortable with change that nourishes our social body and reinforces our mental image. This constant, looming threat to our social beings is an eternal source of stress.

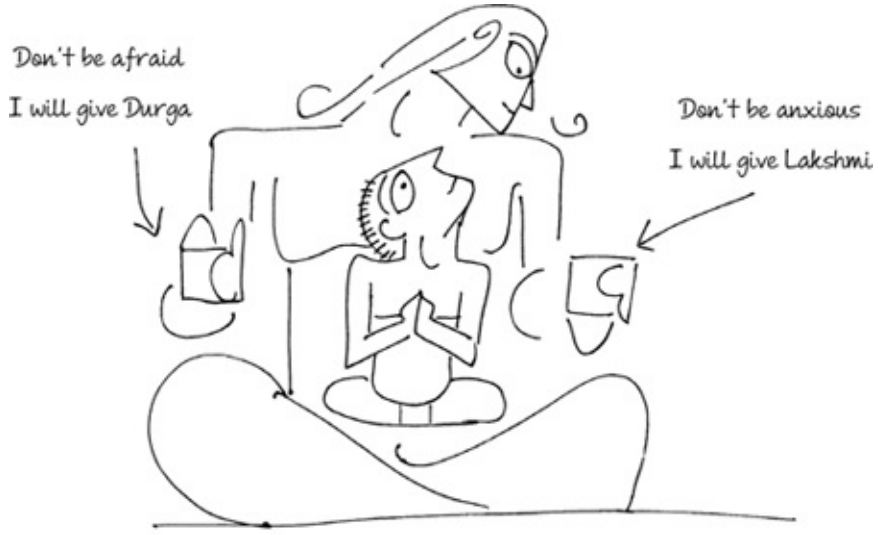
For ten years, Rupen handled the accounts of the jewellery factory where he worked. He did his job well and loved the routine of his life. Everything was familiar and in order. His boss, Motwani, loved him and his job was assured. Then Motwani died and his wife, unable to handle the business, sold it to a large conglomerate. Suddenly, all certainty disappears from Rupen's life. He has a boss to report to and is now seen as an old-school accountant who does not fit into the new way of thinking. With the end of one sanskriti and the rise of another, the social body also needs to die and be reborn, locate itself in the new structure.



We want organizations to secure our social body

A little boy called Dhruva is pulled down from his father's lap by his stepmother. Feeling deprived and denied, he seeks a father from whose lap he will never be pulled down. He prays fervently until Vishnu picks him up and places him in his lap. There he sits in the sky, on Vishnu's lap, as the steadfast Pole Star. No one can pull him down.

We yearn for permanence in structures, systems and rules, as it reassures us about the permanence of who we are. When bosses change, organizations get restructured, when new teams are formed, when we are moved to another department, fear envelopes us. Like Dhruva, we hope there is a Vishnu out there, a parent who will always keep us in his lap.



Please let no one pull me down from your lap

In medieval times, many wars were fought between the Mughals and the Marathas, but both agreed on one thing: the role of the king. For the Mughals, the king was jahanpanah—shelter of the world; for the Marathas, he was chattrapati—bearer of the umbrella that protects us from problems. The king was seen as one who grants security, not just physical but also social security that

assures us of our meaning.

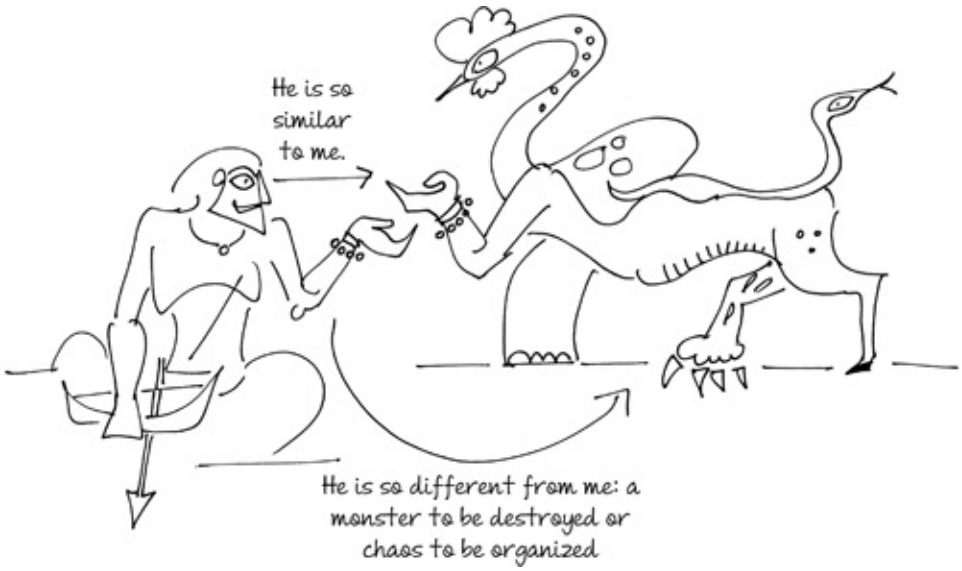
People are often loyal to bosses or to an organization because it guarantees them both livelihood and social status. Many see this as a fair bargain, a social contract. Some people believe that a leader should provide security actively like a cat that carries her kittens (by the scruff of their neck) to safety. Others believe a leader is there to provide security passively in the way baby monkeys cling to their mothers to feel secure.

Underlying this belief is the assumption that we are dependent and we need not be dependable. Most devatas want to remain Dhruvas, few want to grow up and be Vishnu for others. We do not wish to rise in the varna ladder. We are comfortable being karya-kartas and not becoming yajamans.

All his life, Sudha wanted a permanent job like her brother, Sai, who worked for the government, but it never happened. First, the company she worked for got shut down. The next company shifted office three times. Then her boss changed, after which the company was reorganized and she was given various roles over a span of two years. She was never able to settle down, feel a sense of stability or order. When she complained and told her brother how lucky he was, he moaned, “Not quite. I have been transferred to three cities in the past ten years and now I have to use all my influence to avoid the next transfer.” Both siblings are like Dhruva yearning for a lap from where no one can pull them down.

We resist anything that is new

This story comes from the Oriya Mahabharat. One day, Arjun sees a strange creature in the forest, one he has never seen before. At first, Arjun thinks it is a monster and raises his bow to kill it. All of a sudden, he notices a human hand and realizes the creature is not as unfamiliar as he thinks. On closer observation, he finds Navagunjara, the creature with the head of a rooster, neck of a peacock, back of a bull, waist of a lion, tail of a serpent and the four limbs of a human, deer, tiger and elephant. Every part is familiar but not the whole. Why did he assume the creature was a monster simply because it was not something he had encountered?



Often, we see the world full of predators and rivals threatening our business and us. We condemn unfamiliar markets as being chaotic and unethical. We want to dominate, domesticate or destroy the unfamiliar, rather than understand it. We assume what we know is the objective truth and everything else is threatening. Yet, it is the unfamiliar that offers us the opportunity to grow. We need to seek the familiar in the unfamiliar and allow ourselves to embrace the new. Rather than seek control of the union it is important to include and

assimilate the unknown.

When Christopher first came to Mumbai, he was frightened. The roads were bad, traffic was all over the place, there were crowds of people everywhere, slums poured out of every corner, there was construction work wherever he turned; so different from back home where there were hardly any people on the road, where streets were neatly arranged, everyone drove cars, and poverty was practically non-existent. For Christopher, Mumbai felt like a monster that needed to be killed or tamed, until he noticed that the people he dealt with were no different from the people in his native land, kind as well as complex. They argued, negotiated and offered solutions. In Mumbai, he discovered a market for his company, a much-needed lifeline. This was different. It had to be different. In the difference lay new ideas, new thoughts and new challenges. Slowly the fear dissipated. Navagunjara need not be feared; it has to be admired and understood.

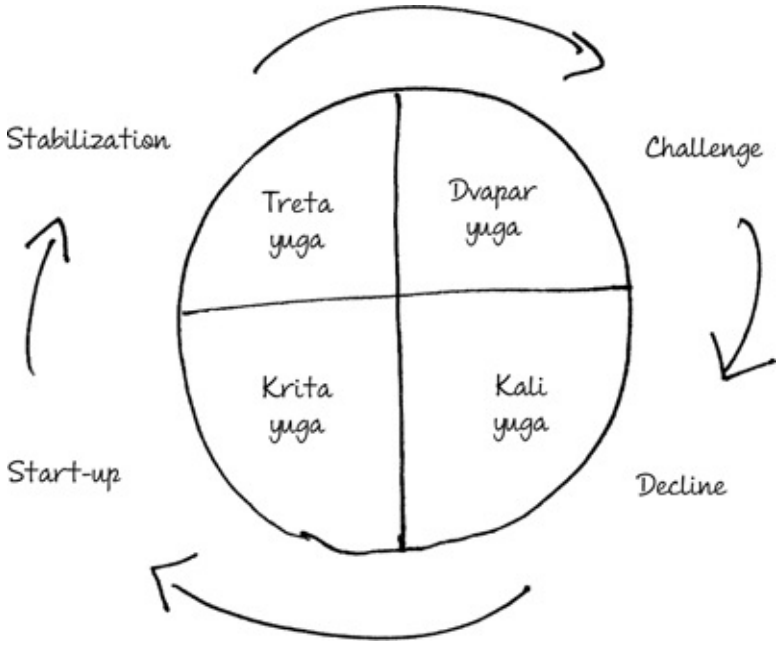
We want to control change

In the *Kathasaritsagar*, Vikramaditya hopes to rule forever by asking that he die only at the hands of a child borne by a girl who is only two-and-a-half years old. The impossible happens. One day he encounters Shalivahan whose mother is barely two-and-a-half years older than him. His father is Vasuki, the king of serpents. In a duel that follows, Vikramaditya is killed and his glorious reign comes to an end.

Hindu mythology is replete with stories where the impossible happens. Asuras demand boons that make killing them near impossible, and yet someone finds a chink in the perfect armour and they end up dead.

We create structures, systems and rules that we are convinced are perfect and will last forever, but they never do. Eventually, inevitably, they do collapse. Ultimately sanskriti is no match for prakriti.

Buddhism keeps describing the world as impermanent. Hindus saw time as cyclical, each cycle a kalpa composed of four yugas, marking childhood (Krita), youth (Treta), maturity (Dvapar) and old age (Kali) before death (pralay), which is followed by rebirth. And yet, Indra craves amrit and the asuras do tapasya, seeking immortality.



Organizations go through cycles and restructuring repeatedly. Change in market conditions, a new boss, target, merger, acquisition, *etc.* happens constantly, changing everything around us. Change can be upstream (bosses, investors, regulators) or downstream (employees, customers). Change can be central (strategy) or peripheral (market conditions). We ourselves can change, struck by boredom or desire. Still, everyone hopes to secure their position like Vikramaditya, getting upset when Shalivahan invariably appears.

Shekhar likes people who are organized and compliant. Organized and obedient people get ahead in

his organization. Now the market is changing, and old familiarities are going out the window. He needs people who can think in the absence of structures, who can be proactive and take on-the-spot decisions. He needs kartas. But over the years he has groomed only karya-kartas. They ensured his success for a long time, but in the new market he needs kartas and there is no one around.

Insecurity turns us into villains

In the Bhagavat Puran, Kansa is told that his sister's eighth child will be responsible for his death. So he goes about killing all her children as soon as they are born in the hope of defying fate. In the Ramayan, as Ram's army nears Lanka, Ravan gets increasingly intolerant and demanding. When his brother, Vibhishan, pleads with him to let Sita go to save Lanka, Ravan views this as an attack on his mental image and kicks Vibhishan out. On the other hand, Ravan starts to increasingly rely on Kumbhakarn who does not challenge his mental image and keeps agreeing with him.

In the Mahabharat, Duryodhan tries to poison Bhim and sets fire to the palace in which the Pandavs are sleeping. He believes that with the Pandavs gone, his claim on the throne of Hastinapur will be secure. He wants to be king. He needs that social body and will do anything to destroy those who threaten it. Kansa fears for his physical body, Ravan for his mental body, and Duryodhan for his social body. In their own eyes, they are victims, fighting for survival. None accepts that death is inevitable.

Here, death is a metaphor for change. We do not want to accept the inevitable—that one day we will be replaced. We go about ensuring there is no rival, or threat to our existence. We create structures and systems that secure our roles, hence our self-image. But in securing ourselves, we end up hurting others. We become villains.

Rakesh thinks he is very smart. He can compute better than others and can organize things better than anybody else. If anybody challenges his system, he gets furious. He does not appreciate criticism, viewing it as opposition and a challenge. Smart people leave his team or sit there resenting everything he says, allowing him to make stupid mistakes, because they know he will not listen. Rakesh is a bully, he needs to be aggressive and dominating because this enables him to get Durga forcibly from people and feed his own sense of inadequacy. In doing so, he destroys all relationships. He remains alone and vulnerable, with no one around to help him when he really needs support.

Our stability prevents other people's growth

When Jarasandha, king of Magadha, learns that Krishna has killed his son-in-law Kansa, the dictator of Mathura, and that the people of Mathura rejoiced at his death, he is furious. He orders his army to kill Krishna and set the city aflame. Krishna and the people of Mathura are forced to take refuge in the faraway island of Dwaraka.

Years later, after the Pandavs build the city of Indraprastha with the help of Krishna, Yudhishtir, the eldest of the Pandav brothers, declares their desire to be kings. Krishna says, "As long as Jarasandha is alive that is not possible. Jarasandha has subdued all the kings of the land. Until those kings are liberated, until they are free to attend your coronation and recognize your sovereignty, you cannot be king."

Jarasandha is a chakravarti, an emperor of all the lands he surveys. In Jain chronicles he is prati-vasudev, the enemy of vasudev (Krishna) and his pacifist brother Baladev. Jarasandha's control and systems do not let other kings thrive. He may have established stability and order but the stability and order serve him, not Krishna or the Pandavs. Naturally, the vasudev considers the chakravarti as the prati-vasudev.

Without realizing it, our structures end up curtailing innovation. Innovators hate institutions and yet institutions are built on the principles of fairness and equality. In an equal world, no one can be special. An innovator, though, sees himself as different. From his different point of view come new ideas and innovation that will change the old order of things.

We call the innovator a rebel because he does not align with authority. We call the innovator a prophet because he challenges authority. But eventually, every innovator becomes a chakravarti and institutionalizes his rules. And with that he becomes a prati-vasudev or enemy to young entrepreneurs and other innovators.

Revant liked the licence raj era when business was assured from the government. Now, with liberalization he has to give tenders every year, deal with officers and prove his capability time and again, as the officers keep changing. They say this competitive environment is good for the country. But weren't the services he provided of top quality? What Revant does not realize is that because of the old system, many talented businessmen were denied opportunities to grow. They, in turn, resented the likes of Revant whose family had benefitted from British rule and subsequently, under the socialist governments. Revant saw himself as a chakravarti who creates order and stability around him. But ambitious men like Bilvamangal saw him as old money that does not like new money: a prati-vasudev, who uses his power to create rules that block others from rising.

We would rather change the world than ourselves

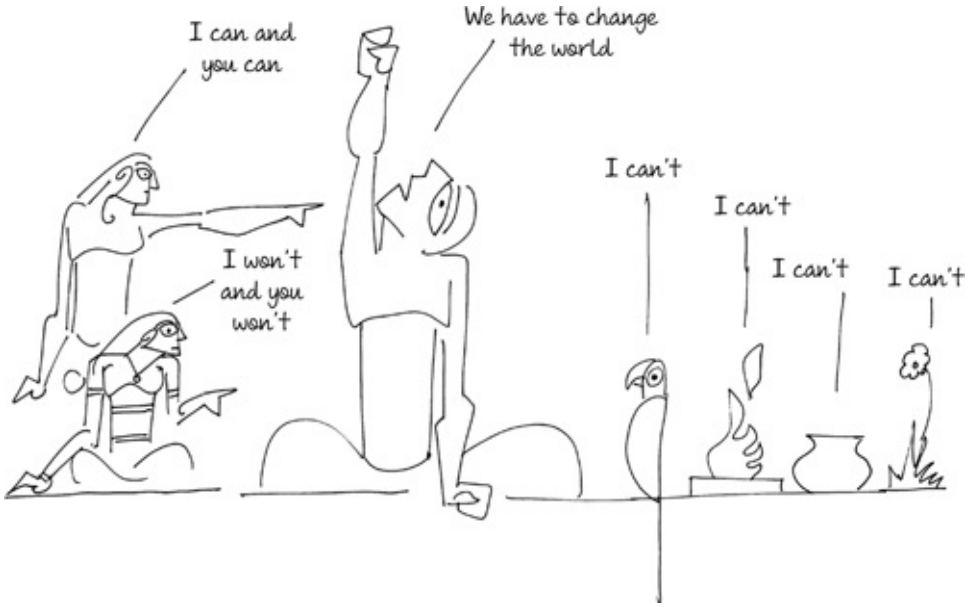
Shishupala was born deformed with extra limbs and eyes. The oracles revealed that he would become normal the day he was picked up by a man who was destined to kill him. That man turned out to be Krishna. Shishupala's mother begged Krishna to forgive a hundred crimes of her son. Krishna promised to do so.

At the coronation of Yudhishtir, Shishupala insulted Krishna several times. Krishna did not say anything and kept forgiving him, but eventually, after the hundredth insult, Krishna was under no obligation to forgive the lout. He hurled his Sudarshan Chakra and killed Shishupala.

While Shishupala's mother got an assurance from Krishna, at no point did Shishupala's mother tell her son never to upset Krishna. Shishupala's mother gains Durga from Krishna but does not invoke Shakti in her own son. She relies on external powers for protection and has no faith in internal power. The burden of invoking inner power is too great. It demands too much effort. Like Indra, Shishupala's mother seeks external intervention to save her during crisis.

In the Puran, Indra never changes. Despite crisis after crisis and the repeated attacks of asuras, he does not change. He keeps asking for help from his father Brahma who asks Vishnu for help. When Vishnu solves the problem, Indra returns to his indulgent ways. We want problems to be solved, but we refuse to develop divya-drishti or realize that we want to change only the objective world and are convinced the subjective world needs no improvement.

When Atul resigned and moved to another firm, Derek was furious. He raved and ranted about Atul's lack of loyalty and his betrayal. "We should never hire professionals," he told his son. In his rage, he gave more powers to those who were loyal to him, not realizing that it was precisely this behaviour that had alienated the very talented Atul. Derek's insecurity meant he was always suspicious of people who did not demonstrate loyalty. He wanted to hedge his bets and so gave equal value to those loyal as well as those who were talented. He wanted the world to be loyal to him, but did nothing to evoke loyalty in men like Atul by giving them the freedom and space they needed to perform. He believed, like Shishupala's mother, that the problem was with the world.


I can and
you can
We have to change
the world
I won't
and you
won't
I can't
I can't
I can't
I can't

When the context changes, we have to change

Vishnu is at once mortal and immortal. Each of his avatars goes through birth and death, yet he never dies. The avatar adapts to the age. Jaisa yug, vaisa avatar (as is the context, so is the action). With each avatar his social body undergoes a change. He is at first animal (fish, turtle, boar, half-lion) and then human (priest, warrior, prince, cowherd, charioteer).

When Hiranayaksha dragged the earth under the sea, Vishnu took the form of the boar Varaha, plunged into the waters and gored the asura to death, placing the earth on his own snout, raising it back to the surface. This confrontation was highly physical.

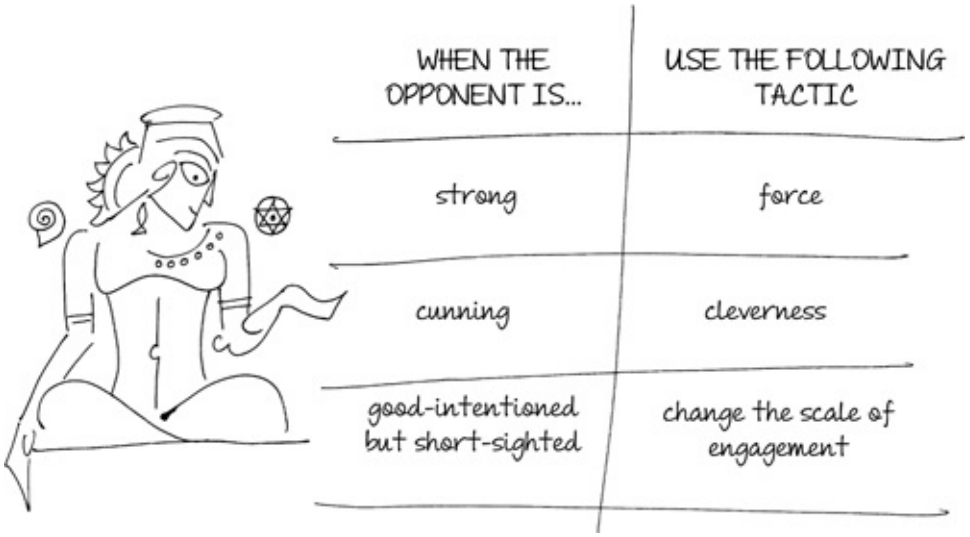
Hiranakashipu was a different kind of asura. He obtained a boon that made him near invincible: he could not be killed either by a man or an animal, either in the day or in the night, neither inside a dwelling nor outside, nor on the ground noroff it, and not with a weapon or tool. To kill this asura, Vishnu transformed himself into Narasimha, a creature that was half-lion and half-human, neither man nor completely animal. He dragged the asura at twilight, which is neither day nor night, to the threshold, which is neither inside a house nor outside, and placing him on his thigh, which is neither on the ground nor off, disembowelled him with his sharp claws, which were neither weapons nor tools. This complex confrontation was highly intellectual, a battle of wits if you will.

Then came Bali, an asura who was so noble and so generous that his realm expanded beyond the subterranean realms to include the earth and sky. To put him back in his place, Vishnu took the form of the dwarf Vaman and asked him for three paces of land. When Bali granted this wish, the dwarf turned into a giant and with two steps claimed the earth and sky, shoving Bali back to the nether regions with the third step. This battle involved not so much defeating the opponent as it did transforming oneself.

A study of these avatars of Vishnu indicates a discernible shift in tactics. From Varaha to Narasimha to Vamana there is a shift from brute force, to brain over brawn and, finally, an exercise in outgrowing rather than outwitting. The demons become increasingly complex—Hiranayaksha is violent, Hiranakashipu is cunning and Bali is good but fails to see the big picture. Each one forces

Vishnu to change, adapt and evolve. There is no standard approach, each approach is customized as per the context determined by the other. At all times, Vishnu's intention does not change.

Narsi knew that some problems could only be solved by force. So he hired a security firm known for strong-arm tactics. He also had a team of powerful lawyers because he knew many problems could be prevented by watertight contracts and fear of litigation. When the head of his marketing department was being too impudent, Narsi decided to change the proportions of the business relationship. He appointed a senior group marketing head to oversee the marketing operations of all his businesses. Suddenly, the marketing head, once a big fish in a small pond, found that he had become a small fish in a big pond, and stopped being an upstart and creating too much trouble. Some people think Narsi has multiple-personality disorder. Sometimes he gives people complete freedom. Sometimes he controls every aspect of the project. Sometimes he is kind and understanding. Sometime he shouts and screams. Narsi told his nephew, Vishal, that he changes his management style depending on the situation and the person in front of him. "Some situations demand creativity and others demand control. Some people need to be instructed while others can be inspired. We need to change as per the situation and the people around us in order to succeed." Narsi is Vishnu who knows every context is a yuga and every yuga has its own appropriate avatar.



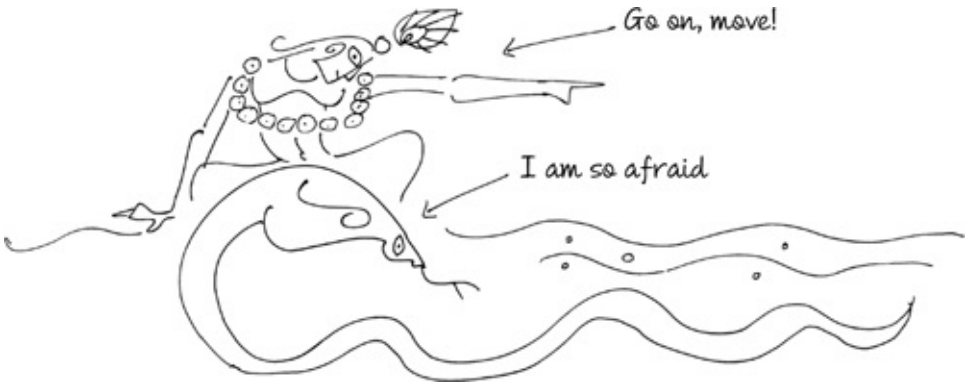
Unless we change, we cannot grow

There was once a serpent called Kaliya who poisoned a bend of the river Yamuna. No cow, cowherd or milkmaid could come near the stretch of water inhabited by Kaliya. Krishna jumped into the water and challenged Kaliya to a duel. After a fierce fight, Krishna succeeded in overpowering the serpent; he danced on Kaliya's hood until the serpent, very reluctantly, agreed to move.

"What is the problem?" asked Krishna, out of concern for Kaliya. Kaliya explained that the eagle, Garud, wanted to eat him and because of a spell cast by a sage on that particular bend of the river Yamuna, he could not follow him there. "This is the only place where I am safe from Garud. That is why I do not venture out of this place." Fear had made Kaliya cling to a location. This location was his Durga. His refusal to move made the waters poisonous and deemed him a villain in everyone's eyes, though he felt he was a victim only trying to save himself.

Kaliya feels like an abandoned child. He seeks a yajaman who will protect him. Finding none, he has to protect himself. He is the animal in the forest with no one to turn to. The bend in the river Yamuna symbolizes the organization, the role and rules that guarantee his self-image. He refuses to move on. He refuses to grow. Growth demands changing himself and the world around him. That frightens him unless it is on his own terms. He feels safe in the old familiar way and resists any attempt to make him cross over to the new unfamiliar way.

But the world is constantly changing. Things will never remain constant. If we focus only on the coming and going of fortune, we will always be anxious and frustrated. On the other hand, if we focus on learning with every rise and fall, we will keep growing and generating internal Shakti rather than depending on external Durga for our survival.



Shivkumar got transfer orders a week ago and he is upset. For years he has served the company loyally, taken not a single day's leave. He made it to office even when he had fever. All his life he stayed in Lucknow, in his family house. He walked to work and enjoyed the neighbourhood. Now this! How could they do this to him? How could they transfer him to Allahabad? Yes, the new office needed setting up, but why him? He had not taken a promotion so that he could stay here. He was even willing to take a pay cut to stay. He just did not want to go to Allahabad. But his new boss who has come from Delhi is a scoundrel and refuses to listen to reason. "You must go to Allahabad, Shivkumarji. The company needs you to do this. And I need you to do this. And it is for your own good." How can it be for his good? Moving to a new place, a new neighbourhood, a new house, the headache of school admissions, the pain of shifting furniture. And who would look after his family house while he was away? And his parents? Would they also have to move? His mother would never agree. Shivkumar believes his boss from Delhi is Kaliya who needs to be kicked back by Krishna. But, in fact, he is the Kaliya himself. His boss has recognized his potential—his ability to contribute, not just to the organization but also to himself. Shivkumar sells himself short. He hides behind apparent contentment. Deep down, he is envious of the young ones in the company who have been promoted and given better bonuses and incentives. He gets upset when bosses accept transfers, when the houses in the neighbourhood are broken down to make way for new structures. Things are changing every day around Shivkumar, but he is refusing to adapt. Before him is an opportunity to experience something new, but he is afraid. Garud lurks beyond the bend of his river. He is angry with Krishna. He does not want to go. But Krishna's dance will not stop; the transfer order will not be revoked.

We will always resist change

In the Bhagavat Puran, it is said that one day a charioteer called Akrura comes to Vrindavan to fetch Krishna and take him to Mathura. As Krishna prepares to leave with his brother Balaram, the milkmaids of the village break into tears. They throw themselves before the chariot and cling to its wheels, begging Akrura not to take Krishna away. Krishna requests the women to let him go and assures them that he will come back, but he does not return.

This event marks the end of the Bhagavat Puran and the start of Krishna's role in the Mahabharat. The ranga-bhoomi of Vrindavan, full of song and dance, in the middle of the forest, is replaced by the rana-bhoomi of Mathura, Dwaraka, Indraprastha, Hastinapur and Kurukshetra.

Every year, the chariot festival at Puri, Orissa, is a festive expression of the desire of devotees for Krishna to return. He does so for a brief period and then returns to his temples once again. For ultimately, the gopikas have to let go.

The gopikas had found great security in the company of Krishna. They had grown to depend on the Durga he gave them. But, by leaving, Krishna compels them to grow, find Shakti within themselves. It is time for them to become Krishna for others. It is time for them to be less dependent and more dependable, move away from tamas-guna towards sattva-guna.

Krishna leaves his beloved Radha behind because duty beckons him in Mathura. By letting him go, she grows by being more independent. By letting her go, he grows by being able to bear more responsibility. But the change has consequences. Never again will Krishna play the flute as he did in Radha's presence.

We cannot stay dependent forever. We have to learn to be independent. Like Hanuman who found Ram in his heart, the gopikas have to find Krishna inside them and create the rasa-mandala, the circle of joy and security around them.

During a conference of entrepreneurs, Kalra spoke on the value of letting go, allowing people to grow up and take responsibility. "When I had fifty people working for me, I interfered in every aspect of business. When I had five hundred, I had to change and they, too, had to change. I had to let managers think for themselves, transform from being karya-kartas to kartas. And the only way to do this is by

becoming a yajaman, allowing others to take the decision. Unless we let go, the dependent will never become dependable, and neither they nor we will ever grow."

Adapting to change is not growth

Animals adapt to circumstances. Some hibernate, some migrate. Humans can change with circumstances, too. Organizations have to change to keep up with the new realities of the market and industry, and that compels people to change, learn new skills, adapt to new organizational structures. But such change is adaptability, not growth.

Adaptability is the ability to change with the context to achieve the same end-result. Growth is change in mindset, when the same context can be seen differently. Adaptability enables the conversion of Bhudevi (natural wealth) to Shridevi (personal wealth) no matter what the context. Growth is turning Durga (dependence on external power) to Shakti (dependability by invoking internal power).

In the Treta yuga, the enemy is Ravan. In the Dvapar yuga, the enemy is Duryodhan. From a subjective point of view, neither is different from the other. Both are frightened. They differ from an objective point of view. Ravan is strong while Duryodhan is cunning. So Ravan openly confronts Ram while Duryodhan uses guile to overpower the Pandavs.

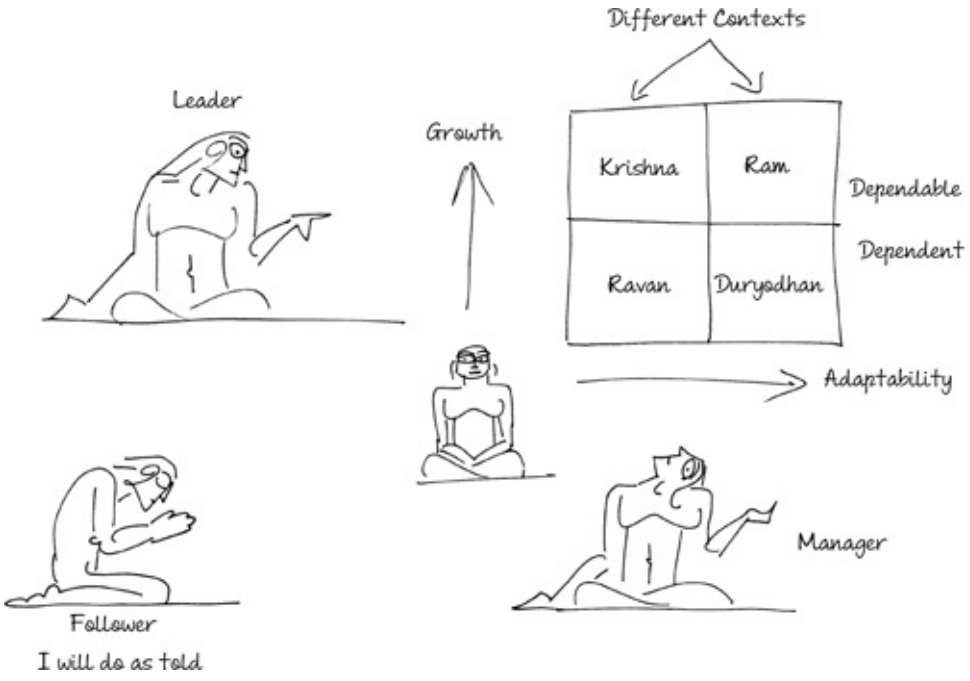
Likewise, Vishnu changes his tactics when dealing with Ravan and Duryodhan. For the rule-breaking villain, he chooses to be the rule-following Ram and for the rule-following villain, he chooses to be the rule-breaking Krishna. These tactical changes indicate adaptability, not growth.

Growth happens when Brahma's sons (Daksha, Indra, Ravan and Duryodhan) make the journey to Vishnu, when intention shifts from self-preservation, self-propagation and self-actualization to a greater concern for the Other, a greater inclusiveness. This can only happen by invoking Shakti and outgrowing fear. Such growth can never be collective; it is always individual. But the yajaman can create an ecosystem where such growth is encouraged and enabled.

A manager is expected to adapt to changes in the organization. A leader is expected to change the circumstances, have greater vision. A follower does as told.

In Jain mythology, a vasudev thinks in terms of growth and a chakravarti

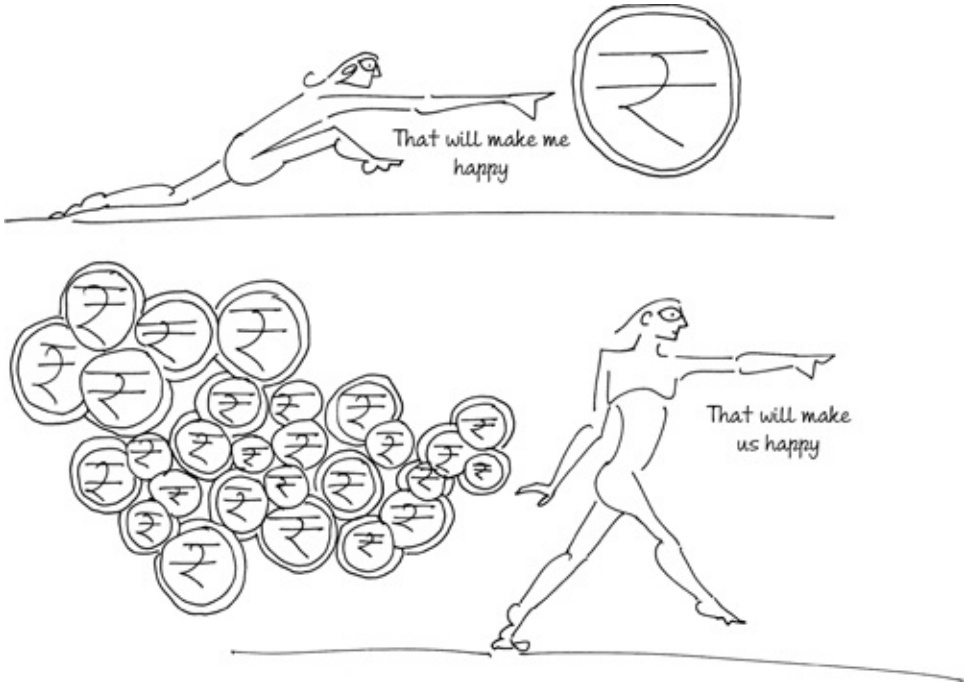
thinks in terms of adaptability; the tirthankar takes both into consideration for he understands the value of both adaptability to context, and growth.



Following the merger, the company's focus changed from commodity-selling to brand-creating. This meant that the sales force now had to sell concepts, not products. Everyone was expected to change. Many people who could not adapt to the change left the organization. Rajiv adapted to the situation and continued to serve as manager. Rohit, on the other hand, was curious to know why the organization had changed its strategy. He wanted to know what change in the market had prompted such a change in the company. His curiosity enabled him to expand his mind, appreciate the thought process of the company. His shift was not just behavioural. Rajiv is merely a manager, but Rohit has the potential of a leader.

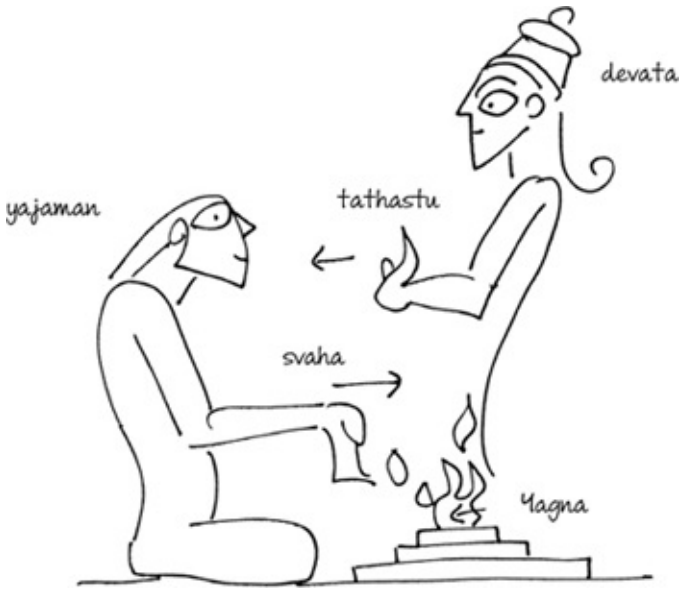
Conclusion

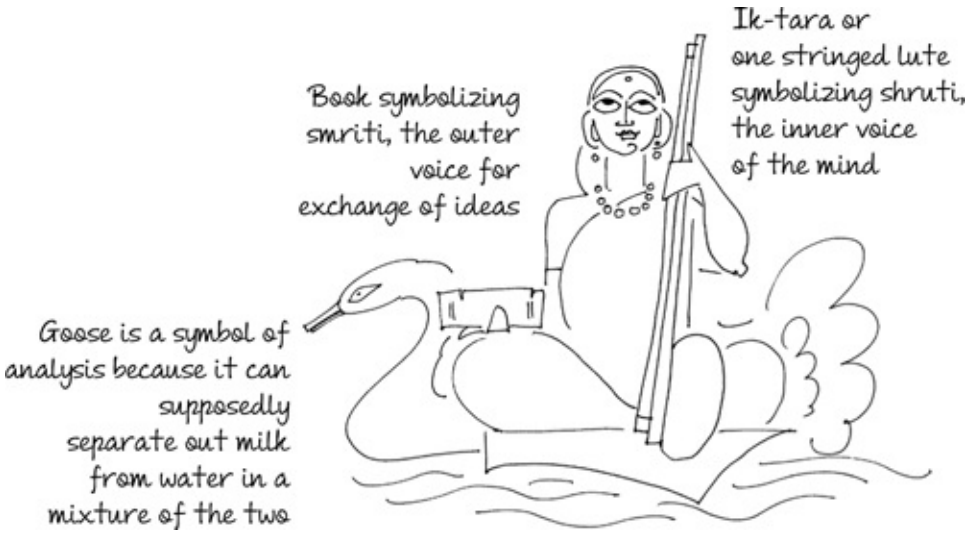
Modern management is all about chasing a target, the Promised Land of Abrahamic mythology, the Elysium of Greek mythology. Hindu mythology, however, warns against chasing Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; it will result in conflict. Instead they advise making oneself attractive to Lakshmi, worthy of her affection and auspiciousness, so she walks our way. For that we have to be less like Indra, king of the gods, who is consumed by his own hunger, and more like Vishnu, preserver of the world, who is consumed by other people's hunger. Vishnu knows that human hunger is threefold: for wealth, power and knowledge.



As we have seen, at the heart of the Indian approach to management is the ritual of yagna, the oldest of Hindu rituals mentioned in the very first hymn of the Rig Veda. It is commonly mistranslated as sacrifice, or worship, but in fact means exchange, the cornerstone of any economy. When we give in order to get, we are the yajaman. When we give only after getting, we are the devata. When

we seek without giving, we are the asura. When we grab, we are the rakshasa. When we hoard, we are the yaksha. When we do not exchange, we are the shramana, or the hermit, who has outgrown his hunger, and so does not seek to be fed, nor feeds. Vishnu is the bhagavan, he who gives despite having outgrown his hunger. He receives only to make the devata feel significant.





The yajaman is a social being: the entrepreneur, the professional, the businessman, the promoter, the manufacturer, the service-provider who satisfies the hunger of a stakeholder, be it customer, employee, vendor, partner, boss or investor, in order to get what he wants. He is always conscious of human hunger, which if not catered to can plunge the world into violence, as we see all around us today.

Modern management has been today reduced to looking at business as a set of targets, or as a set of tasks. But business is essentially about a set of people who satisfy the hunger of the shareholder at one end and consumers at the other. Every stakeholder in business, employees and entrepreneur included, are

essentially animals who can imagine. Like every hungry predator, s/he suffers from the fear of death by starvation, hence seeks food. Like every hunted prey, s/he suffers from the fear of death by predation, and hence seeks security and power. This is further fuelled by the imagination, hence creating the insatiable yearning for wealth and power in humans. Further, humans wonder who they are, why they exist, and whether their lives have meaning. This fear of invalidation consumes us. Hence, every yajaman needs to have an intimate knowledge of Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati, the goddesses of wealth, power and knowledge, the hunger for whom exists in different proportions in different stakeholders.

Together the three goddesses (LDS, or LSD, in short) constitute the three arms of human happiness. To make the world a happy place *should be* the ultimate aim of every yagna, hence every business. For this businesses have to be approached as yagnas where we satisfy the other's hunger in order to satisfy ours. That is dharma.

Notes

With new words are created new worlds, as they are vehicles of new ideas. They enable the process of expanding the mind. The words and terms explained below are common to the books in my sutra series—*Business Sutra*, *The Success Sutra*, *The Leadership Sutra* and *The Talent Sutra*.

	Business context	Conventional context
agni	that which is used to tame and control nature	fire god
Amravati	the ideal goal where all needs are met without effort	Indra's paradise
ankush	a tool used for pushing people to do their job, and pulling them back	elephant goad
Arjun	one who argues too much, shooting counter questions like arrows when questioned	the third Pandav who is a skilled archer
asura	one who feels his entitlement has been denied, resulting in rage and ambition	eternal enemies of the devas
avasarpini	pessimistic gaze	waning period of an era
avatar	role adapted to the context for the benefit of the Other	descent of Vishnu
bali	what is destroyed in the process of creation	sacrifice
bhagavan	a being who is not hungry but pays attention to others' hunger	a being who is never hungry but feeds others
bhaya	insecurities	fear
Bhim	One who wants to act rather than think	the second Pandav who is very strong

bhog	that which satisfies hunger	consumption
Bhoj	a leader who balances creativity with accountability	a legendary king
Brahma	subject of the subjective truth	the creator
brahmanda	imagined reality	subjective world
chakravarti	the king who controls his kingdom with rules	emperor of the world
Chandra	one who is very moody and has favourites	the moon god
Chaturbhuj	the one who multitasks	another name for Vishnu indicating he has four arms
Chintamani	that which satisfies every wish	wish-fulfilling jewel of paradise
Daksha	one who is obsessed with rules	the patron of the yagna
darshan	observing the subject of subjective reality	gaze
deva	he who sees what comes to him as entitlement	Brahma's sons who live in luxury above the sky
devata	he who responds to the transaction initiated by the yajaman	the deity being invoked
Draupadi	one who has to deal with multiple bosses and subordinates	the common wife of the five Pandavs
drishti	observing objective reality	vision
Durga	power that grants security and authority	goddess of war
dushama	bust	negative period
Ganesha	one who can easily wear many hats and so communicate between many departments	the elephant-headed god who removes obstacles
Gangu-teli	the one doing a monotonous job	legendary oil presser
garud-drishti	strategy, wide vision, long-term thinking	bird's-eye view
Gauri	organization based on rules	the domesticated form of the Goddess Kali
Goloka	sustainable happy business	paradise of cows

Gobar-ka-Ganesh	he who does what he is told to do with no view of his own	legendary dumb character
grama-devata	the manager who adapts principles of the centre to the realities of the periphery	village god
Halahal	the negative output of any action	poison that comes with nectar
Hanuman	he who obeys unconditionally and without question	the monkey who serves Ram and is worshipped in his own right
Indra	he who wants high return on investment always	king of devas
ishta-devata	one who grants us personal favours	personal god
Kailas	where there is no hunger	abode of Shiva
Kali	marketplace with no regulatory control	the wild form of the Goddess Gauri
Kalpataru	that which satisfies every wish	wish-fulfilling tree
Kama	right-brain activity, creativity, which does not like structure	god of desire
Kamadhenu	that which satisfies every wish	wish-fulfilling cow
karma	consequences of actions	the cycle of cause and consequence
karta	the one who gives the directive	a leader
karya-karta	the one who follows the directive	a follower
Kauravs	those who stubbornly refuse to learn	the hundred brothers led by Duryodhan who oppose the five Pandavs
Krishna	he who breaks rules to help others grow on their terms	cowherd avatar of Vishnu
Kubera	the one who hoards	king of yakshas
kula-devata	one who grants us departmental favours	the family god
Lakshmi	wealth	goddess of wealth
Mitti-ka-Madhav	he who does what he is told to do with no view of his own	folk character

Nakul	one who looks pretty but delivers nothing	the fourth Pandav who is very handsome
Narad	he who makes people insecure by comparing and contrasting	trouble-making sage
Narayan	human potential	God
Narayani	resources	Goddess
nirguna	not measurable	intangible
Pandavs	students who have made mistakes but are open to learning	the five protagonists of the epic Mahabharat
parashu	analysis	axe
Parashuram	leader who punishes rule-breakers sternly	the warrior-sage form of Vishnu
pasha	synthesis	string
prakriti	material world	nature
pralay	end of an organization or a market	the end of the world when everything dissolves into the sea
purush	imagination	humanity
Radha	leader who lets talent go without begrudging them	the milkmaid who is the beloved of Krishna
rakshasa	one who takes things by force	demon who grabs
Ram	he who follows the rules at any cost to help others grow on their terms	the royal form of Vishnu
rana-bhoomi	competitive environment	warzone
ranga-boomi	joyful environment where everybody grows	playground
Ravan	he who breaks the rule for his growth at the cost of others	king of rakshasas
rishi	one who has more insight than others	seer who can see what others do not see
saguna	measurable	tangible
Sahadev	one who only speaks when spoken to even though he knows solutions to problems	the youngest Pandav who was very wise and never spoke unless spoken to
sanskriti	culture	society
Saraswati	human imagination	goddess of knowledge

sarpa-drishti	tactic, narrow-vision, short-term thinking	snake vision
sattra	an organization with many processes	a complex set of multiple yagnas
Shakti	inborn strength, capacity and capability	goddess of power
Shankar	he who is content and sensitive to others	another name of Shiva
Sharda	knowledge of purusha	goddess of wisdom
Shekchilli	dreamer with no accountability	folk character who dreams
Shiva	he who is independent but withdrawn from the world	God who destroys
shruti	personal ideas that cannot be shared	inner voice that is heard but cannot be spoken or transmitted
smriti	public ideas that are exchanged	outer voice that is spoken or transmitted but not necessarily heard
sthula-sharira	how we appear physically to others	the physical body
Surya	one who is radiant and attracts all attention	the sun god
sushama	boom	positive period
svaha	input	this of me I offer
Swarga	Indra’s paradise	another name for Amravati
tapasya	introspection, contemplation, analysis	the practice of churning tapa (mental fire)
tathastu	output	so be it
utasarpini	optimistic gaze	upwards movement of time
Vaikuntha	workplace where everything comes together without conflict	Vishnu's abode in the middle of the ocean of milk
Vaman	he who grows big and thus makes the Other feel small and insignificant	dwarf avatar of Vishnu
vasudev	one who is action driven	the hero who is a man of action who seeks wealth

vetal	facilitator who asks questions that provoke thought, but does not know the answer	the teacher who never goes to the student and who provokes discomforting reflections
Vikramaditya	the student who goes to the teacher	a legendary king
Vishnu	he who grows on his terms by enabling others to grow on their terms at their pace	God who preserves
yagna	the process of exchange	Vedic fire ritual
yajaman	the one who initiates the offer of exchange	patron
yaksha	one who hoards	Brahma's son who hoards
Yama	left-brain activity that is highly structured	god of death
yoga	outgrowing hunger	alignment
Yudhishtir	upright but naïve leader	the eldest Pandav

Index of Sutras

ALSO BY DEVDUTT PATTANAIK

BUSINESS SUTRA:
A Very Indian Approach to Management In this landmark book, bestselling author, leadership coach and mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik shows how, despite its veneer of objectivity, modern management is rooted in Western beliefs and obsessed with accomplishing rigid objectives and increasing shareholder value. By contrast, the Indian way of doing business—as apparent in Indian mythology, but no longer seen in practice—accommodates subjectivity and diversity, and offers an inclusive, more empathetic way of achieving success. Great value is placed on darshan, that is, on how we see the world and our relationship with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

Business Sutra uses stories, symbols and rituals drawn from Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mythology to understand a wide variety of business situations that range from running a successful tea stall to nurturing talent in a large multinational corporation. At the heart of the book is a compelling premise: if we believe that wealth needs to be chased, the workplace becomes a rana-bhoomi—a battleground of investors, regulators, employers, employees, vendors, competitors and customers; if we believe that wealth needs to be attracted, the workplace becomes a ranga-bhoomi—a playground where everyone is happy.

Brilliantly argued, original and thoroughly accessible, *Business Sutra* presents a radical and nuanced approach to management, business and leadership

in a diverse, fast-changing, and increasingly polarized world.

THE SUCCESS SUTRA:
An Indian Approach to Wealth

Most human beings hunger after riches and success. There are any number of management books which provide theories and techniques on how to become rich and successful. All of them advise us to chase Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, in order to make her our own. But the Indian approach to prosperity and fulfilment warns against the relentless pursuit of the goddess, writes noted thinker and mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik, as it will result in conflict. Rather, we have to give in order to get, we have to satisfy the hunger of others in order to satisfy our own. If we learn and practise this fundamental truth, Lakshmi will enter our homes and our lives.

Derived from his acclaimed bestseller *Business Sutra*, this book is filled with lessons and insights into management, business and the creation of wealth and success.

THE TALENT SUTRA:

An Indian Approach to Learning (Forthcoming: November 2016) Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge in Hinduism, as well as in Buddhism and Jainism. Her name is derived from the fluidity (saras) of the imagination. Human imagination enables us to invent and innovate, visualize, plan and de-risk. Yet imagination is a bad word in the world of business and management. It strips us of certainty. We want to control the imagination of those who work for us, prevent their minds from wandering from work. Yet, every human being lives in an imagined reality. Recognizing this enables us to work with talent, build strong relationships and nurture people to face any situation with faith and patience. Failure to recognize imagination is why family-owned businesses are unable to manage professionals and how professionally run companies end up creating ineffective, mechanistic talent management systems. Training, learning and development, are not just about skills and knowledge and competencies, they are about appreciating the human-animal, recognizing that neither we nor those around us are programmable machines that we can plug and play. Managing people, hence relationships, is key to the survival of an organization.

Derived from Devdutt Pattanaik's influential bestseller *Business Sutra*, this book explores concepts like creativity in the workplace, nurturing talent, and the importance of teamwork. It will help employers and managers become more inclusive leaders who are able to carry their team along with them.