**Leaders in Competitive Business Environment: Lessons from Ancient Text Ramayana**

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*Ramayana has been an epic text in a number of ways. It has been a source of inspiration for both ancient and modern scholars in the enquiry of leadership abilities, strategic execution, stakeholders support and community. This Paper makes an attempt to further this enquiry from the angle of leadership by exploring key traits of Rama as an exemplary leader and matching the same with organizational requirements of making a leader who can champion the cause of sustainable competitive advantage. The key traits emerging from the paper are collective decision making, leading by example, compassion, positive view point, etc.*

1. **Introduction**

With the consistently evolving business environment; the management discipline has gone a long way responding to these changes. Today’s changing era questions for corporate approach towards heightened ethical sensitivity and increasing competition to survive. The corporate objectives, role of value systems, a leaders approach, strategic management planning, leaders-member exchange relationship etc. plays a major role in defining the image and prospects of an organization. This again differs with differences in approach of different continents in our globe. For example the management principles practiced in Indian soil is questioned when it comes to American and western economies of management. However when we connect to our ancient Indian epic texts and literatures they provide an ideal prognosis of management style which are still found to be existing in the governance of an organization. The modern concepts of Management vision, achieving goals, decision making techniques, planning are all discussed in various Indian literatures like Bhagavad Gita, Kautilya’s Arthshastra, Mahabharata and Ramayana. Our ancient and sanctified epic “Ramayana” have always proved exceptional in defining a righteous Leader, an inside-out approach to management, a perfect blend in knowledge management approach etc. For example Ramayana critically speaks of “Ram Rajya” which developed advanced systematic management techniques related to division of labor, hierarchy and teams. Lord Rama long created sets of milestones in his arena of personal life and management to won over the evils. Since he won over the evils, it can be concluded that our past era were also excruciating with the same environment we are facing as of today. His techniques and application of management theories have been incarnated with new terminologies in the present business environment. His dharma developed the sense of ethical values and his karma displayed “Ram Rajya”. Lord Rama had all the thirteen qualities of a great person and so is called “Maryadapurushottam” whereas Lord Krishna from our epic “Mahabharata” had sixteen qualities of a great person and so is called “Purnapurush” which included three negative qualities. The transformational leadership style, social and ethical management of Lord Rama dates back to more than 5000 years back much more than the ancient Chinese military literature, the Sun Tzu Art of War which was written 2500 years ago. The important aim of this article is to bring into light the various management ethos and leadership qualities of Lord Rama in our ancient India and as of today. Also the article focuses on various management styles and highlighting the gaps being practiced in different continents of our earth and its relevance to our epic “Ramayana”.

1. **About Ramayana**

Ramayana has always been a source of spiritual, sociological, political, cultural and artistic inspiration for the Indian people as well to the people of South East Asian countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia etc. Apart from supplementing the national literatures, it has been a source of reference in art form like dance, music, painting and sculpture. In Thailand it is referred to as Ramakein; Serat Rama in Indonesia; Yama Pwe in Myanmar; Maharadia Lawana in the Philippines and Hikayat Seri Rama in Malaysia (J.S. Rosen, 2002). With Ram Rajya standing as a model for Good governance, it offers useful tips on statecraft, politics, values and ethics. This epic comprehends the great heroic life of an ideal person “Lord Rama” who acted as an ideal king, ideal student, ideal husband, ideal friend and most of all an ideal enemy standing to all embodiments of Dharma.

Ramayana has been divided into seven Kanda’s. The firsts Kanda i.e “Bala Kanda” speaks relates to the divine birth of Sri Rama and his brothers. It is about his childhood being an ideal student and then going to marry Sita thus narrating the qualities of an ideal Husband. The second book “Ayodhya Kanda” speaks of the coronation of Sri Rama going to become an ideal king and his exile to Ayodhya. The third book “ Aranya Kanda” recites for the forest life of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and kidnapping of Sita by Ravana. “Kishkinda Kanda” relates to meeting of Hanuman and Sugriva with Sri Rama where they form a strategic alliance to crown Sugriva as the king of Kishkinda by killing Bali. Hereafter they start searching for Sita and the role of Vanars (monkeys) in assisting Sri Rama in his search. The fifth book “ Sundara Kanda” illustrates the adventures of Hanuman in crossing the ocean to find Sita, his meeting with Ravana and warning him of the dreadful consequences. Yuddha Kanda” the sixth book potrays for the battle between Ravana and Rama and the victorious return of Rama to Ayodhya after his exile is over. The seventh Kanda “Uttara Kanda” speaks of Rama’s son “Kusa and “Lava” born to Sita and her remorseful merging with earth due to her banishment.

1. **Corporate Ethics**

**Kurvann eveha karmaei jijevinec chataa samau evaa tvayi nanyatheto ‘sti na karma lipyate nare (Prabhupada, 1998, p.17)**

The notion of “Ram Rajya” has become a benchmark to all the rulers in his time and even today for all the corporate. He covered all the essential areas in religion, statesmanship, international relation, war, treaties, administration and collection of revenues, rules of taxation, work motivation, decision making, humanism and equanimity. Lord Rama had a concrete vision towards his kingdom. He provided a compelling dream with a lucid scenario of how it would be accomplished. He believed of an individual in consistently performing his duty in the same manner and that sort of work will not bind him to the law of karma. Lord Rama did set high ethical standards in the warfare and invariably sided with dharma and righteousness which bore fruits for the long term. In today’s business context companies like TATA and Siemens stands for ample proof who with their ethics in business environment have been paying dividends to them for the long run. Such institutions enjoy tremendous brand equity in the society through their products and good works.

The US and western economy boasts of themselves being the father of Management practices but they are witnessing a major shakeout in the financial markets. At a time when companies like General Motors, Bank of America, Lehman Bros were the epitome of best practices in their sector had to face failures either due to rising debts or filing for bankruptcy. This is raising doubts about the sustainability of management practices in the European and US institutions. On the other hand, the resilient country India has been in a path of continuous growth even at the time of global financial crisis and stands in a better position to cope with it. Companies like TATA, Bharat Forge and Ranbaxy have shown an aggressive growth in the corporate sector. Above all, India is becoming a dream destination for other countries and economies to invest in. This can be attributed to the ethos derived from our ancient scriptures like Vedas, Upanishads and Ramayana. Indians use their ethos to manage their industries which they have learnt from their great ancestors. As TATA family took the initiative in developing the Jamshedpur city of Jharkhand, similarly Houghton family established Corning Glass and the town of Corning in New York. Lord Rama always referred to company’s by-laws to be positive towards the ethics which in today’s business scenario exists only in terms of papers. He was very transparency with the kingdom. In today’s context very few companies maintain their transparency in corporate accounting and statements and as a resultant this has helped them in gaining and regaining the confidence of shareholders and consumers in all aspects of the business. During the period Sri Rama reined over Ayodhya, the forests, rivers, hills, mountain, seven islands and seas were all favorable in supplying the essentialities to all the beings. All sufferings, diseases, old age, lamentation, distress, fatigue and fear were absent from the people. There were no widows, no diseases and even wild animals gave up their enmity to live in peace with each other. All citizens exhibited righteous character in them and looked up to Sri Rama as their supreme master and protector. Such ideal management transformed entire Ayodhya into a place without Anxiety i.e. Vaikuntha.

1. **Work Motivation**

Motivation can be defined as a psychological process that directs one’s behavior to satisfy their unmet needs and a will to achieve something. In management terms it is very essential to understand the motivational factors of an individual and its working group in order to achieve the required high level of productivity and quality. Rama waged a war against Lanka with very limited resources, backed by an army which is pretty out of the box or unconventional. Such was the level of motivation in them. In Ramayana, the human intellect is taken into consideration and simultaneously being segregated into different levels. Under Sri Rama’s rule, the intellectual elites (Mahat) were offered prime positions which majorly required decision making and planning. The consistent implementation of regular jobs was handed over to mediocre (Madhyam) people in his kingdom. The lower layers of workers (Jaghanya) were appointed to tasks which required less of intelligence and more of manual work. As per Sri Rama’s ideology he believed in assigning work to individuals as per his capability so that he achieves peace and prosperity in his life. This is well versed as below. The concept of people management in Ramayana’s era known as “Social Capital” is today termed as “Human Capital Measurement”.

**(kaccin mukhyaa mahatsu eva madhyameshu ca madhyamaah; jaghanyaah ca jaghanyeshu bhrityaah karmasu yojitaah) (Ayodhya Kanda, Chapter 100, Verse 25)**

Extremely pleased with Hanuman’s work invading Sri Lanka, he narrated three types of employees or servants. For him the servants who accomplishes the task more than what has been entrusted by his master is the best. A servant who has the ability to perform to its fullest but never aspires to accomplish the tasks is referred to as mediocre servant. The worst servant ranks in those categories that willfully never carry out his master’s orders.

**(Yuddha Kanda, Chapter 1, Verses 7–9 – yo hi bhrityo niyuktah san bhartraa karmani dushhkare, kuryaattadunuraagena tamahuh puirushhottamam. yo niyuktah param kaaryam na kuryaannaripateh priyam, bhrityo yuktah samarthashcha tamaahurmadhyam naram. niyukto nripateh kaaryam na kuryaadyah samaahitah, bhrityo yuktah samarthashcha tamaahuh purushhdhamam)**

The modern management however speaks of motivation in different perspectives. The business goals set in modern management are more audacious than ever thought possible. Such managers need something more than skills, knowledge, tools and techniques to achieve such objectives i.e. to bring in a sense of belongingness of “US” rather than “I”. This is compounded by many factors like acknowledgement and maintenance of standards, creating mutual trust and confidence etc. In order to achieve this Sri Rama had advised Bharata to share the fruits of achievements among its people and thus bringing in a collectivist perspective. The current ambitious generation seeks for more pay package and a fast track career growth as its motivational factor in India whereas in US Job profile and other benefits holds the higher note in defining their motivation. The higher pay package (Extrinsic motivator) has led to loss of control in behavior of today’s human being leading to his lesser internal satisfaction and thus his intrinsic motivation has declined at workplace. Organizations tend to forget that verbal rewards increase the intrinsic motivation of a human being rather than tangible rewards. Different industries motivate their employees in different manner. For example a German software firm SAP motivates people by stretching their goals which ultimately would double the company’s market capitalization. The employees in return would be awarded with bonuses. In Chinese context employees are motivated by being compensated based on seniority rather than based on performance. Japanese companies allow job sharing at work to keep people motivated since they are extremely reluctant in firing people. They believe in “Man Maximum, Machine Minimum”.

1. **Team Work and Decision Making**

Lord Rama had a firm belief in consulting with his sub-ordinates on important matters and listening to everyone’s opinion. The foremost example can be traced to when Vibhishan was defected; Rama took him under his protection. He had a consultation with his army chiefs of whom some disagreed to his deliberation. Instead of punishing them he assuaged their suspicions and convinced them to accept his decisions. The manner in which he handled the situation left no gap in anyone’s mind that his opinions weren’t heard and their objections were clarified. Empowering his sub-ordinates to question his decision was one of the unique quality in Rama was never present in Ravana who never allowed anybody to contradict his decision. Sri Rama had a strong conviction that the source of victory for Kings comes from collective decision making which are incorporated by a concealed council of ministers well versed in politics and who hide their thoughts within themselves. The decision does not flow out to the public even before it is carried out.

**(Ayodhya Kanda, Chapter 100, Verse 16 – mantro vijaya muulam hi raajnaam bhavati raaghava, susamvr ito mantra dharair amaatyaih shaastra kovidaih) In Ayodhya Kanda, Chapter 100, Verse 18, Sri Rama again says to Bharata, (kaccin mantrayase na ekaH kaccin na bahubhih saha, kaccit te mantrito mantro raashtram na paridhaavati)**

While accruing towards collective decision making only the experienced and intelligent beings is to be included in the council of ministers that arrives with positive attitude. People with negative intelligence always try to propel their ideas upon others posing a negative biasness in the overall discussion. According to Sri Rama, even one wise, astute and a learned minister can lead to the prosperity of king and his kingdom. This is well explained in the verse below.

**(Ayodhya Kanda, Chapter 100, Verses 38 and 39 – kaccin na lokaayatikaan braahmanaamh taata sevase, anartha kushalaa hy ete baalaah pandita maaninah. dharma shaastreshu mukhyeshu vidyamaaneshu durbudhaah, buddhimaan viikshikiim praapya nirartham pravadanti te)**

Indian ethos teaches to co-operate with each other to grow along and share with each other. It instructs one to excel in its one area and concentrate on how to best utilize the resources and serve the people. The ideal decisions are to be directed towards the goal and the best strategy is how well it serves in solving the deeper problems of people and the customer. Dharma (Virtue, Righteousness) should always excel over two other goals i.e. Artha (Wealth) and Kama (Enjoyment). The Indian approach in decision making directs seniors to pay attention to each and every person on the board and not to ignore anyone’s opinion be it however young or inexperienced. On the other hand Japanese way of decision making lays down the task of writing proposal to the youngest and newest member of the department involved. This new member talks to everyone soliciting their opinions and in the process he adds his own thoughts to the consensual process. This is how Japanese firm engraves variety in their decision making process. They spend a lot of time trying to develop consensus in the decision group. The virtue of it is although it takes a longer time to conclude to a decision, implementation goes a lot faster since there isn’t any resistance or sabotage that works its way through the organization. In Chinese context, they quickly come to a decision point leaving the essence of detailing to the later stage which later on propels them to input their more effort at work.

1. **Personality Attributes of a Leader**

Lord Rama didn’t undergo any perturbation in his mind while he exited for his exile in the forest. A man of great courage and valor refused everything since he was beyond worldly pain and pleasure. Even the loss of kingdom couldn’t diminish the finesse of a great personality like Rama. His mind and soul confined equanimity which allowed him to take judicious decisions even at adversarial times. The character of virtue and integrity helped Lord Rama in being confident about his actions and words with ever a question of blamelessness. The sense of assurance and a well-developed mind gifted Lord Rama faith in him. Quality of understanding or wisdom in his personality attributed him to segregate a human being from his actions and accept for the changes in environment without his heart contracting or resisting to it. One of the special attribute he possessed was insight and freedom. Where insight helped him maneuvering for the deep innate thought into the nature of things; character of freedom built in him the tolerance to let go the reactive tendencies in his heart and visioning a brighter future than what is apparently visible. The below verse explains the character of equanimity in Lord Rama which is also exhibited by his brother Lakshmana while they started for their exile. Sri Rama paid respect to his beloved people and with his subdued senses went to his mother to inform the unpleasant news. He exhibited no such remorse or pain while sharing the information to his mother.

**(Ayodhya Kanda, Chapter, 19, Verse 32–39 – na ca asya mahatiim laksmiim raajya naasho apakarsati, loka kaantasya kaantatvam shiita rashmer iva ksapaa. na vanam gantu kaamasya tyajatah ca vasumdharaam, sarva loka atigasya iva laksyate citta vikriyaa. pratishhiddhya shubham chhatram vyajane cha svalamkr ite, visarjayitvaa svajanam ratham pauraastathaa jannaan. dhaarayan manasaa duhkham indriyaani nigrhya ca, pravivesha aatmavaan veshma maatura priya shamsivaan. sarvo hyabhijanah shriimaan shriimatah satyavaadinah, naalakshayat raamasya kimchidaakaaramaanane. uchitam cha maihaabaahurna jahau harshhamaatmanah, shaaradah samudiirnaamshushchandrasteja ivaatmajam. vaachaa madhurayaa raamah srvam sammaanayan janam, maatussamiipam dhiiraatmaa pravivesha mahaayashaah. tam gunaissamataam praapto bhraataa vipulavikramah, saumitriranuvavraaja dhaarayan duhkhamaatmajam)**

If we look into today’s leadership style being practiced all over the globe, we could find a varied difference in their approach. In European continent, Leaders usually exhibit diplomatic, casual, seeking to be fair even if they may not be. They are helpful and possess willingness to compromise but can be ruthless when necessary. Due to their traditional inheritance of leadership character, they fail to comprehend the differing values in different human beings thus exhibiting inflexibility and intransigence in their character.

The leaders from the US corporate are action and goal oriented. They place individual above the team and are converged towards progressing their own career. Always ready for the change, they are vigorous, confident and optimistic while working in teams or be in individual sense. There exists an emotional contagion between the leaders and his followers which maneuvers his followers in achieving high performance. An excellent example can be cited to that of Mr. Douglas Conant, CEO of Campbell Soup who exemplifies authentic leadership. He is an extraordinary leader who behaves with utmost integrity. People follow him and believe in him. To motivate his employees he has written 16,000 thank you notes to employees ranging from receptionist to Chief Investment Officer.

Similarly German Leaders strive to create a perfect system. They create a clear chain of command in each department through which important information pass by. Considerable value is given more towards innovation and on consensus decision making. German leaders are basically authority based leaders and value functional expertise. They tend to be ineffective communicators but more of a strategic thinker.

The Indian scenario exhibits a lot of favoritism when it comes to leadership context. Family members hold more of key positions than the outsiders since they believe in trust and confidence to achieve results. He is value driven and a result oriented person and employs people to achieve results and to be ethical in every sense.

A classic example can be illustrated to the start of Infosys-Tech giant in India. Four partners (Leaders) at the initiation of the company were giving a thought process towards setting the vision, mission and objectives of the company.

**First Partner**- We should try to become India’s largest software company

**Second Partner**- Our goal should be to become India’s biggest job creator

**Third Partner**- we should aim at building a firm with the highest market capitalization

**Fourth Partner**- Why don’t we aim to be India’s most respected company [stated by N.R. Narayan Murthy- value driven and ethical leader]

Chinese culture emphasizes being polite, considerate and unselfish and moreover collectivist in nature. Leaders are expected to display proper behavior, be considerate, kind hearted and lead through moral character. Above all the whole leadership context is based on paternalism. The head of the institution display autocratic style of leadership wherein he is the decision maker and has power but is obliged to take care of his sub-ordinates. In the process he adheres to acceptance of authority and role conformity.

To be more precise companies in today’s context seeks for a transformational leader scoring high on forward thinking and innovative scale when they aspire for a business keen to grow and develop in new directions. Similarly to manage the status quo of an organization, it seeks for a democratic, conventional and rule following scale leader. So it can be said that as per the demand and competition in current business scenario leaders are required to change their role and skill sets in particular.

1. **Conclusion**

Ramayana teaches us to attain a righteous living without infringing any rule of the nature. The leaders and the role they play in corporations are vital in ensuring transparency, good conduct and maintaining harmony with the society and environment to keep the optimum balance. The corporate as of today should seek for creating shared value with the society. Shared value means a business needs a successful community to create demand and provide critical public assets whereas a community requires successful business to provide jobs and wealth creation opportunities for its citizens. Profit maximization is essential but economical and societal benefits also accrue to a higher level in community value creation. Such shared values lays down righteous policies and operating practices that enhances the competitiveness of a firm and simultaneously advancing the social and economic conditions of the community in which it operates. Leaders and management researcher’s need to dive into the various fields of Ramayana in order to extract valuable management lessons from it and simultaneously emulate to bore fruits. This would help them in analyzing and connecting each variable of that ancient era to that of modern management approaches and predicting how far or close we follow. Defining a team culture Sri Rama helped every individual realized what is required of them in both collective and individual manner. He skillfully analyzed the team values, standards and norms and accordingly suggested on how team members are expected to work together. He critically examined the quality of conflict acceptable or unacceptable. This is what is required of our current managers to exhibit in their leadership and personal role. For application of our rich Indian tradition, we need to maintain our social and ethical values in every sense and manner.

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