

Guiding Principles

Realising that Indian cultural tradition is rich in leadership values, corporations are beginning to analyse and absorb the wisdom of the scriptures

KURUKSHETRA. Arjun pauses, then declines to fight. Is there glory in a victory that kills fathers, sons, teachers and pupils? One of the most able warriors in the land is paraded by eminent Lord Krishna reminds him of the consequences to the state and society.

Modern day managers face the same situation everyday—a conflict between tough decisions and the larger good. "Corporate playing fields are much like Kurukshetra," says Delhi-based management consultant M.B. Athreya. "They can be viewed as *Dharmik Kshetra*, where the role of leadership is to re-establish *dharma* and resolve the conflicts that arise between customers and suppliers, pollution and the environment, manipulative politics in the organisation and unfair practices towards workers."

Concepts like *Uthstha* (stand up and be counted), *Vishadha* (doubt), *Svadharma* (duty) and *Nishkama Karma* (work without attachment to results) have always existed in the *shastras*. Now, driven by the understanding that the Indian cultural tradition is rich in these leadership values, managers are beginning to examine the wisdom embodied in the scriptures. Many across the country who have tried to inculcate the values prescribed in the *Gita* are starting to show positive results. Says Dr. Subir Choudhury, director Indian Institute of Management Calcutta: "It's back to basics. If traditional values are transplanted to modern times, a new management style can develop as opposed to the Japanese and the American style".

Companies like Crompton Greaves, Larsen & Toubro, Excel Industries and the Marath Group are beginning to reinterpret business in the context of Indian heritage. Asea Brown Boveri Limited's (ABB) unit in Vadodara is one such place which has been experimenting with the Vedanta style as part of its total quality management programme for the past four years. Consultant Varajit Jhala was called to hold workshops for workers. The results are visible and can be quantified.

At ABB, one group of worker reduced the time to make a circuit breaker from 120 days to 68 days, while customer delivery has improved 100 per cent. "The foundation of the change programme lies in getting away from the hand-body syndrome and engaging the minds of people in a creative manner towards an overall vision," says ABB Vice-President K.K. Kaura. The *shastras* have been used in more sophisticated management missions than improving shop floor objective.

its relevance in the context of Indian psyche. Excessive emphasis on competition and not enough on integrative cooperation has begun to expose its imperfections. "In line with the integrative mode, companies like Thermax and Sundaram Fastners have been trying to evolve 'shared vision' and core corporate values," says Jhala. "Once that is done, it has a powerful emotive appeal within the organisation."

Jhala says that he is amazed at the resonance with which Indian workers take to concepts like *Karma Yoga*. His studies have shown that even three years after the training in *shastras*, the new set of values survive erosion.

He thinks that when a management educator uses the *shastras*, he literally taps into what Carl Jung calls the "collective unconscious" or the *samskaras*. Better work ethics, cooperation between departments and improved management-union relationships begin to emerge naturally.

Results appear to match the theory. And companies like Logic Control Private Limited, which manufactures voltage stabilisers, are beginning to experience them. "Most workers lack a purpose in life," says S.K. Bahl, managing director of Logic Control. "Their lives are full of misgivings, doubts and complexes. Within two months of lectures on the *Vedas*, the transformation at Logic Control became evident. Workers became aware of the contribution they make and

WHAT Khanna discovered are key solutions which the top management were looking at the *Vedas* for corporate guidance. Says Controls and Switchgear Managing Director Ravinder Nath Khanna: "I took wanted to be in the same boat." Soon, Controls and Switchgear's 2,000 employees, including the management, were looking at the *Vedas* for corporate guidance. "We encourage workers to deliberate on their actions," says Khanna. "We see it transforming my people psychologically."

The transformation is inevitable, suggests Dr. Y. Jayadev, director of Bombay's 75-year-old Yoga Institute. His experience has shown that the *Vedas* as well as yoga help cultivate an other-worldly attitude. With industry and business showing and increasing interest in the value of the *shastras*, IIT Delhi is conducting an efficiency study at Logic Control to quantify the gains. Whatever its findings, the need for a specifically Indian movement has become imperative to balance the western dynamics of progress. "A sobering effect to the mindless rat race is the need of the hour," says Chakrabarty of IIM, Calcutta where Professor S.K. Chakrabarty is setting up a Centre for Management of Human Values. Recognised as one of the first to use the *shastras* in management Chakrabarty has been holding workshops and lectures for managers for more than six years now.

Unfortunately, many consultants who use the *shastras* are sometimes viewed as cranks as cranks or even religious fundamentalists. But they continue to look towards the great Indian epics for inspiration, helping resolve the conflicts between individual, corporate and social objectives. The attitude is in keeping with what Simha observes in his book, "Public interest must always take precedence over private interest. That is the path of *Dharma*." A path that could help bring in improved work ethics and enhance productivity—a mission statement that any management would be proud of.

—with RUBEN BANERJEE



Illustration by JAVANTO

The *shastras* are being used to meet management needs and shop floor objectives.