

LEADERSHIP IN BUSINESS THROUGH THE HINDU PRISM IN THE WORKS OF DEVDUTT PATTANAİK

Devdutt Pattanaik (b. 1970) is a contemporary Indian mythologist, writer, and illustrator. He writes about the relevance of mythology in modern times, not only in terms of religion but also in such areas as management, business and leadership. He is the author of over 50 books and 1,000 articles. He is an expert in cultural issues, and also takes part in various TV programs [1].

Special attention should be given to works of Devdutt Pattanaik that are devoted to a connection between Hindu mythology and modern processes of work organization. His book “Leader: 50 Insights from Mythology” [2] is a guide for leaders, as well as for usual office workers who experience difficulties while working in a team and wish to succeed in their professional activities.

In search of parallels between Hinduism and business, Devdutt Pattanaik turns a new page in Contemporary Hinduism. Analyzing the behavior of the characters of Sanskrit epics and projecting similar situations into present-day realities, the expert manages to show readers what a real leader should be like, how to secure the company’s success, and by which way one can reach personal and professional growth.

The majority of articles in “Leader: 50 Insights from Mythology” are based on world-famous India’s epics the “Mahabharata” and the “Ramayana”, retellings of which Hindus listen to since childhood. Parallels between modern people, that are related to business, and famous characters of great epic poems such as Krishna, Pandavas, Kauravas, Rama, Lakshmana, Ravana, etc. can be easily seen. In his book, Devdutt Pattanaik also refers to other stories from Hindu mythology as well as to ancient Greek epics “Iliad” and “Odyssey”, the Bible, and even Islamic tenets.

In one of the chapters of the book “Leader: 50 Insights from Mythology” named “Strategic intent of Ravana” [3], Devdutt Pattanaik draws parallels between the main characters of the “Ramayana” Rama and Ravana and two modern characters who work as CEOs, Asutoshji and Trilochanji, and are created by the author.

The mythologist talks about Ravana calling him “one of the most flamboyant villains in Hindu mythology” [3]. While discussing the personality of Ravana and listing his negative sides, the mythologist tries to attribute to him several positive sides of the character, mentioning that he was a great poet and a musician.

Devdutt Pattanaik notes that “Rama, by comparison [to Ravana], seems boring – an upholder of rules who never does anything spontaneous or

dramatic”. Rama “always does the right thing, whether he likes it or not” [3]. When Devdutt Pattanaik calls Rama boring, the question arises – for whom exactly does he seem boring? Ones living in the Kosala Kingdom, as well as inhabitants of neighboring lands, respected and loved Rama for his ability to think wisely and act according to dharma.

Devdutt Pattanaik transfers the storyline to modern times. Projecting two famous characters of the ancient epic the “Ramayana”, the mythologist compares them with characters invented by himself such as Trilochanji whom he identifies with Ravana, and Asutoshji, whom he compares with Rama. Trilochanji “has the money to buy anybody who stands in his way”, “Trilochanji’s organization is in awe of him” and “everyone fears him” [3].

While reading about the second character, Asutoshji, whom Devdutt Pattanaik opposes to Trilochanji, ones can see that he is “a very mild man”, who doesn’t like appearing in media, works together with his team, “dresses like others do”, and in case of difficult situations he will “meticulously plan his action to solve the problem without looking for short cut” instead of asking to help from politicians or other people who have a major influence because, as he states, “short cuts always have long-term repercussions” [3]. Thus, it’s easy to see that Asutoshji looks like Rama.

Devdutt Pattanaik compares Trilochanji with Ravana, and Asutoshji with Rama, because the first one is “flamboyant and commanding” while the second one is “boring and task-oriented” [3]. Rama just does his job, and Ravana with his narcissistic personality cannot live without public admiration. From the perspective of doing their business as well as in terms of leadership qualities, both Ravana and Rama are influential, powerful, and strong personalities but their social identities differ radically. Rama is a law-abiding man committed to dharma, devoted to his family and wife, who is always ready to help close ones as well as strangers. Ravana, instead of taking care of his family, surrounds himself with endless women, and instead of assisting others, he exploits their weaknesses for his own needs.

The mythologist concludes, stating that “In Hindu mythology, a leader is not one who rules a city of gold or travels on a flying chariot. He is one who lives to make a positive impact on the lives of others” [3]. It’s impossible to deny that for society, as well as various organizations and groups, a leader with positive qualities, such as Rama from the “Ramayana”, who lives for the sake of others and not for himself, or a modern character Asutoshji, created by Devdutt Pattanaik, is more preferable.

As the author rightly points out, “the journey [of Rama] is not easy – for one can never please everybody” [3]. Rama lives his life without looking for easy actions that will lead to a quick result but will harm the well-being of others or don’t correspond to dharma. At the same time Ravana achieves his

goals in any possible way that is convenient for him, he takes destructive actions, kills people, steals women, and destroys everything around him, without pity even for loved ones.

Rama was so devoted to people and selfless in the service to them, that he sacrificed his well-being and even his beloved wife Sita. When Rama heard rumors from the inhabitants of Ayodhya concerning the purity of Sita after long captivity under Ravana, with a heavy heart he decided to send Sita into forests. Rama understood that the duty of the ruler to his people (rajadharma) was more important than the duty of the husband to his wife. However, despite this controversial and painful decision, Rama retained his love and commitment to Sita. He didn't marry any other women and placed a golden statue of Sita next to him on the throne. To maintain piety, Rama went through a path full of difficulties and sufferings.

Thus, Devdutt Pattanaik gave an example of what a modern leader should be like. The right leader shouldn't look for easy but unsavory ways, should follow the path of devotion to his organization and be able to sacrifice his interests for the well-being of his employees.

The mythologist notes that Trilochanji wishes to dominate and produce fear in others like Ravana, while Asutoshji aims to provide employees with maximum comfort and security. According to the author, "the difference in strategic intent makes one Ravana and the other Rama" [3].

In his work, Devdutt Pattanaik uses the principle of analogy. According to A. I. Uemov, "analogy is a conclusion in which inference refers to another subject than the one which was stated in the premise" [4, p. 19]. Devdutt Pattanaik in his book "Leader: 50 Insights from Mythology" uses the analogy of properties and the analogy of relations. The mythologist draws a connection between invented characters and protagonists of Hindu mythology. Analyzing modern realities, Devdutt Pattanaik takes examples of situations from business and compares them with ancient myths and stories. We can conclude that, in his opinion, an ideal leader should have positive traits of heroes of Hindu mythology, such as wisdom, judgment, and determination, as well as treat his employees as a protector who worries about the future of the company.

The opposition of good and evil that is easily seen in Hindu mythology, provides people with universal paradigms of moral behavior that can be taken into consideration in the various situations including business, management, and leadership.

By drawing parallels between Hinduism and business, Devdutt Pattanaik opens a new page in Contemporary Hinduism. Analyzing the behavior of the characters of Hindu epics and projecting similar situations into present-day realities, the mythologist manages to show his readers what a real leader

should be like and by which ways he can ensure the success of the company, as well as how a usual worker should show himself in the team.

Due to the fact that the books of Devdutt Pattanaik are published in English and are translated into other languages, he has the opportunity to contribute to the popularization of the ideas of Hinduism around the world, as well as have an influence on modern religious and philosophical thought and spheres of society.

Devdutt Pattanaik can be considered a modern interpreter and innovator who applies the orthodox ideas of Hinduism in the fields of culture, management, leadership, etc. His works are important not only for his contemporaries and compatriots including ones who are acquainted with Hindu culture and follow Hinduism as well as ones who are not yet familiar with it. The books of Devdutt Pattanaik are also of special interest to researchers of Contemporary Hinduism.

References

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