

Pedagogical Contextualisation and Integration Challenges for Organisation Development in India: Cultural Wisdom and Rational Modernity in Organisations

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, Indian organisations adopted the new and imported thrust of management knowledge, orientations, practices and systems. But much of what was imported did not take root, as it did not take into account the latent level of emotional and social universe of Indian managers in which their manifest behaviour is grounded. The role design is based on a picture of the organisation that is drawn from the West, and worse still, its models were colonial. It is dysfunctional for the individual, untenable for society and disempowering for the organisation. Indic wisdom has venerated the quintessential Arjuna. In reawakening and valuing this cultural heritage of ours lies our ability to shape a future free of colonial hangovers and envy of Western ways of being. It is only by awakening the Arjuna power and fostering a deep dialogue that we are going to be able to find creative and regenerative ways of living.

Keywords

Organisaton, role design and identity, Indic wisdom, awakening Arjuna, EUM, *Koodam*

Organisational Design and Development in India

Organisation development (OD) in India can trace its origins from the work done by A. K. Rice at the Ahmedabad Manufacturing and Calico Printing Co 1953 (Rice, 1958). The introduction of automatic looms and the disruption it created in the interpersonal and intergroup dynamics necessitated this. Professor Gouranga Chattopadhyaya interpreted this tension as the difference in the ‘picture-in-the-mind’ that is held by a person on account of his socialisation and the new picture that has to be internalised for the transition to the new demands in role-taking (Chattopadhyay, 1975). Professor Pulin Garg had a similar view that extended to how Indian managers understood management and leadership:

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By early 1970s many Indian organisations had experimented with the new and imported thrust of management knowledge, orientations, practices, and systems. But much of what was imported did not take root. The imported managerial technologies manifestly and intellectually proved adequate in coping with shifts in tasks. Their logic was irrefutable. However, the logical adaptations did not create conviction for action and change in people. These formal adaptations did not take into account the latent level emotional and social universe of Indian managers in which their manifest behavior is grounded. (<http://sumedhas.org/media/5.%20The%20corporate%20processes%20in%20India.pdf>)

They went on to argue that managers ensured that results were achieved but at great cost to themselves, and the way they held themselves and the way they understood organisations. ‘We are children of two cultures’ Professor Garg would often say when he referred to this internal tension. This inherent dichotomy in understanding the self and the system has persisted, and we have to take cognizance of this when looking at OD in India.

Malhotra (2019) has used the Existential Universe Mapper to study managerial orientations and the way they look at organisations. His study that spans over 1,000 managers and 100 organisations reveals the same tensions. We, therefore, need to take his conclusions seriously and develop methods of leadership development and OD that are meaningful to India.

Kurt Lewin and Field Theory

Kurt Lewin (1951), who is widely acknowledged as one of the modern pioneers of social, organisational and applied psychology, advanced a simple but powerful idea through which to understand behaviour. The essence of the idea is ‘behaviour is the result of the individual and their environment’. The equation $B = (p, e)$, meaning that behaviour (B) is a function of the person (p), and their environment (e) has become a truism. Professor Pulin Garg used the formulation $B = f(\text{self, system})$ and extended the idea of the person to include deeper aspects of the self (we will examine his ideas soon).

Lewin also introduced the idea of a ‘life-space’. Life-space is the dynamic interaction of all the factors that influences a person’s behaviour at any time. Furthermore, this life-space is a subjective experience; therefore, a personal response to a new environment is filtered through meaning-making and choice-making processes that are hugely impacted by the larger life-space in which the person’s inner processes developed.

In the Indian Society for Individual and Social Development (ISISD), one of the most significant areas of explorations was called the ‘Life Role Analysis’. In Sumedhas, this was expanded to include the ground of the person’s inner processes called ‘Life-Space Exploration’. These were laboratory learning processes, and they revealed a deep struggle in the Indian psyche between the ground created during early childhood (primary socialisation) and the set of ideas about man and the world that confronted the person as they went to school and in the course of their education (secondary socialisation). For many people, the organisational socialisation was not contiguous with either of these! Therefore, the application of the basic idea $B = f(\text{self, system})$ has to be nuanced. The Indian manager is caught between the pulls of at least two ideas of self and two pictures of the system (<https://totallyalignedorganisation.com/sites/default/files/documents/articles/Life%2520Space%2520Exploration.pdf>).

Kurt Lewin also worked with ideas like self-image and how it is influenced by changes in their body, and how changes in these factors can cause instability in behaviour. He envisaged the process as having an innate dynamism and likened it to a stream—constantly flowing, while changing slightly.

Based on the experience of my colleagues and I in Sumedhas (and ISISD) in working with life role analysis and life space exploration, one must raise the question ‘what happens when the inner instability is not dealt with adequately? What happens when the person does not experience legitimacy to act upon secondary systems and becomes a mere recipient?’

Wilfred Bion and Group Dynamics

The influence of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations has been significant among OD practitioners in India. Professor Gouranga Chattopadhyay has been one of the pioneers of this school of thought in India. Bion (1961) introduced the idea that a group can be studied at two levels, namely at the level of its behaviour as a ‘workgroup’ and as a ‘basic assumption group’. The ‘workgroup’ attempts to focus on the primary task for which it is formed and accepts the rational tenets of behaviour that will allow for an effective accomplishment of the primary task. However, at a less manifest level, it behaves like a basic assumption group, where the tacit underlying assumptions such as dependency, fight–flight and pairing characterise the group. This tacit consensus undermines the effectiveness with which the primary task is performed. Dependency is probably the key to understanding the coping mechanism of the Indian manager who has not resolved his meaning-making ground.

Bion has described dependency as an attempt of the group to be protected by one powerful person. This person is treated as external to the immature individual who seeks security. The group members behave passively and do not question the leader. They seem to give up all the agency. Professor Gouranga Chattopadhyay has emphasised the deep dependence that underlies managerial behaviour. In his paper ‘Dependence in Indian Culture—From Mud Huts to Company Board Rooms’, Professor Chattopadhyay urges leaders from different organisations ranging from Business organisations to NGOs to recognise the nature of the problem of dependence in Indian culture. Gouranga and Ashok state (1991):

In the case of individual families, the authority of the parents is also experienced as unquestionable in infancy and childhood. It is also often extended to adolescence and young adulthood. In the family also, therefore, a form of hierarchy is experienced, the essence of which is again unquestionable authority. This is reinforced to some extent in schools. For the infant and the child, the nature of this unquestionable authority is often experienced as unknowable because, quite often, what is passed off for adult logic appears as confusing and irrational, both justly so, and unjustly, due to the ignorance of the infant and the child about the world around them. By the time a person reaches adulthood, this experience of hierarchy and authority becomes so much juxtaposed and internalized that most individuals seem to get out of touch with the reality of their authority as adult human beings.

Lessons from Studying the Vishwakarma Community

To have a glimpse of the way traditional systems work, we examine the organisation of the Vishwakarma community. This community comprises of the Architects and builders of temples, metal workers and sculptors, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths as well as masons. Through a long and sustained association with Shri Ganapathy Stapati, I studied the operations of one of the most modern and successful Stapati’s of our times. I had the privilege of not only visiting many of the worksites but also being invited to advise them on how to organise on modern lines. Ganapathy Stapati and his team have built the famous Tiruvalluvar statue in Cape Comorin and the Shiva Temple in Hawaii to name a few.

A typical site where a new temple is being built resembles a small manufacturing unit. It has an office building where the drawing office and the Accounting staff work. The operations are overseen by a *sutra grahi*—the designation of the head of the site who converts the design and vision of the architect/designer, namely the Stapati onto the ground. He is assisted by a team of *Vardhaki*—master craftsmen who oversee teams working on different aspects of the building process—the foundation, the building blocks, the sculptures, etc. There is a team of blacksmiths constantly shaping and sharpening the chisels that have to be replaced every 15 minutes or so. A small group of people ensure that the ‘supply chain’ is working well, metal sculptures are being made in *Swamimalai*, there needs to be a timely supply of stone from a distant quarry and a regular supply of metal for making chisels. There is a ‘canteen’ in operation to supply food and a small colony set up near the site for the craftsmen. The operation is a commercial enterprise in every sense of the term. Ganapathy Stapati at one point in time had a question about an issue of the *Shastraic* correctness of the design and consulted a scholar from his community to discuss the issue.

While discussing the question ‘What is essentially Indian?’, Professor Pulin Garg (Institutional Meet ISISD 1989) enumerated the following:

1. Work is part of the person’s identity.
2. Task and sentient systems are not separated but form an interdependent system.
3. Environmental resources are allocated to different workgroups, and this, in turn, creates specific areas of the market that each group caters to.
4. The shame of straying from one’s *dharma* is the institutional process of ensuring coherence in a group. But there are no processes of punishment or punitive action for a misdemeanour. Instead, there were institutions for absolving shame and re-establishing the person in the group.
5. The design of social structures followed the understanding of the inner psychic structures of man. Thus, the inner and the outer were seen as interlinked.

One could observe all of these processes at work in the way Ganapathy Stapati led the group. There was a clear skill-based hierarchy observable while they performed there, but this became blurred when the workday ended. The discussions after work happened in a seated circle and ranged from the comparative qualities of various types of steel available for making chisels; nuances of working with different types of stone, where all the workmen were invited to participate; personal issues of workmen that were aired in the group, and the head of the site responded with solutions and others chipped in; stories about masters of the past were narrated, the styles of different temples were compared; musical terms like *tAla* and *rAga* were used to teach the sculptors to appreciate the quality of their work. The behaviour of people (both functional and dysfunctional) was discussed using popular figures from the Mahabharata and Ramayana! The discourse was respectful but held a sense of equity. The author even witnessed a discussion about how a person who had chosen to take up a job in a bank could be brought back into the team that now needed new skills to interface with requirements of bookkeeping and auditing.

While there were tensions at work, issues of quality of work and demands for higher wages and the like that occurred during the 4 years that it took for the temple to be built, and there were contingencies and personal issues to manage. The operations were not totally without challenges; however, I did not experience a lack of community. I did not hear the members speak of a loss of meaning at work, or seek ‘role clarity’. Celebration of each other’s work as well as criticism were done spontaneously, and many aspects of what one reads about self-organising teams were evident.

The immersive study of the Vishwakarma reminded me of the early research that led to the formulation of the idea of the socio-technical system put forward by the Tavistock Institute (Trist & Bamforth, 1951).

Interrogating the Idea of the Colonised Self

We must at this point examine whether modern Indian organisations and its members are unable to bring in their full potential to bear when they play organisational roles because they have internalised some aspects of the colonised self. Colonialism in the mind is a concept developed by Nandy (2009). It is an inner response, a psycho-cultural response to foreign domination. It is the psychological adjustments and surrenders that have been made and continue to be lived by the colonised, that ensure the continued survival of colonialism in Indian people and institutions today.

If we look at the seminal work of Fanon (1986), we see reflections of some of the attitudes that I have come across in managers and leaders who were otherwise upright and responsible people.

In his book ‘Black Skin, White Masks’, Fanon discusses how coloured people internalise two dimensions of behaviour—one among his people; the other in the context of the White man. He attributes this self-division to colonialist subjugation. He also speaks poignantly about how this self-division reflects in the self-concept, language and body use of his patients.

DuBois (1903) made the idea of ‘double consciousness’ an important lens through which to look at the colonised mind:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, *but* not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.

The Indian Cultural Imprint

When we examine the picture-in-the-mind held by the average Indian manager through the Existential Universe Mapper—Organisation (EUM-O) developed by Ashok Malhotra), we see that this picture is not what is held in the deeper recesses of the mind. The picture is often of a family or a clan. The EUM shows up unconsciously held answer to three questions:

- My organisation is....
- Other organisations are....
- My ideal organisation is....

These pictures are often at variance. After poring over many such maps of a variety of organisations, my interpretation is that there is a deeply held ‘universal’ idea of what an organisation should be. This is a purposeful network that is manned by rational people, the world of the homo-economicus. There is an unconscious often culturally embedded idea of an organisation. This resembles one’s culturally imbibed maps, often of supportive communities where people share similar world views and form emotional bonds. There is also a suspicion that most people around the author in the organisation he work in hold pictures in their minds that do not harmonise with mine and maybe even antagonistic.

In the author’s book ‘The Totally Aligned Organisation’ (Ananthanarayanan, 2000), the author had advanced the idea that an organisation is founded upon Individual energy. The author had formulated a recursive definition of the organisation as follows:

- Individual energy is a function of identity and life role.
- Role effectiveness is a function of *individual energy* and role design.
- Organisation synergy is a function of *role effectiveness* and organisation design.
- Organisational effectiveness is a function of *organisational synergy* and business strategy.
- Organisational *dharma* is a function of *organisational effectiveness* and perennial *dharma*.

If we apply the ‘double consciousness’ lens and the lessons that we derive from EUM to the first two elements, namely individual energy and role effectiveness, as the building blocks of the living system, we encounter a double bind at the very roots of the organisation. The identity and life role of the person are shaped in an Indian home, and with Indian values and sensibilities. Therefore, the picture-in-the-mind of what constitutes good behaviour, namely what constitutes the nature of one’s relationship with authority, what constitutes a community of belonging, what is the nature of a task, what is responsibility and accountability, and negotiability, etc., are all held in the unconscious. These are internalised before the individual becomes aware and cognizant of the self and the world. Who I am and the larger purpose of my life are defined in terms very different from the assumptions that go into the design of my role.

The role design is based on a picture of the organisation that is drawn from the West, and worse still, its models were colonial. All the components of interpretation of the human context of the organisation and therefore behaviour are alien. However, they have rationality and logic, and they do make sense. The double bind arises because the source of meaning and therefore of power and authenticity of oneself is located in the unconscious pictures of self and other, that is, one’s identity processes and the deployment of one’s skills and capabilities happen in another space with different expectations. These two do not cohere, nor is there an acknowledgement in the organisational space of this lack of coherence.

If I act from my convictions and deep evocations I feel fragmented from the organisational context, If I act from within the limitations of my role (as it is designed) I feel powerless

Thus, ‘role-taking’ is founded upon deep feelings of lack of legitimacy and ownership to anything beyond one’s role boundaries. Differences create anxieties, and challenge leads to passive aggression. This stress is usually managed in ways that erode the self. The lack of an authentic sense of power and ownership is managed by becoming dependent on a few ‘father figures’, or procedural task focus. The lack of competence in negotiating for one’s space, for one’s ways is internalised as lack of self-worth and, in some cases, self-hate. Training then becomes a message that enhances this lack of coherence, skill acquisition and becoming indispensable to take the place of maturing and learning leadership.

Dignifying What It Means to be a Person in a Role

One of the key themes in the OD work modelled by Professor Garg is the process of dissolving the sense of illegitimacy in being who one is and experiencing stress in trying to change one’s identity to respond to role expectations and become an organisation-man. Professor Garg redefined what it means to be human in his unpublished manuscript ‘Aphorisms On Being Human’. It is very instructive to look at some of his key statements:

Identity Processes and the Dynamism of Being

1. Self is a cosmic entity, it is a structure of energy.
2. The being is constituted by a limited number of elements of the self.
3. The constituents of the self have no qualities.

4. The self has a call to relate and express, in order to feel alive and discover the wholeness of its own existence. The purpose of the self in relating and expressing itself is to discover its existential wholeness as it unfolds in the phenomenological world.
5. The modalities of relatedness and expression change in relation to time and space. time, space, location, movement, differentiation, tonality, form, content and context of meaning are the qualities of the phenomenological world. These qualities are also the co-ordinates of any experience.
6. The response to the call mobilises some elements of the self to form a prototype of the being. Being is the medium for the self to unfold into the phenomenological world.
7. The process of the unfolding of being has a natural rhythm and flow.
8. The dynamism of being is ever alive.
9. To respond to the call of the self the individual has to share the living space with others.
10. In the shared living space, each individual has his/her distinct modalities of relatedness and expression.
11. Inhibitions constraints and controls are experienced by individuals as a natural consequence of these differences.
12. The experience causes a build-up of residues in the individual.
13. These residues are the causes of the delinking of living processes from the dynamism of being and continue to reinforce the delinking. The phenomenological world is the space where the systems of living processes continue to unfold.
14. When the unfolding of the being in the living processes stops, its dynamism lies dormant.
15. The residues get organised in a reactive pattern of relatedness and expression.
16. The residues create a world of anxiety, preoccupation, insecurity and doubt about the dynamism of Being and the nature of living space.
17. It codes the individual with a sense of poor self-worth, shame and guilt.
18. It unleashes frustration and anger unto the being and the living space.
19. This, in turn, reinforces the reactive patterns of the residue.
20. The individual starts holding his belonging to any space with shame and guilt.
21. When this happens, the prototype and dynamism of the being become untouchable. This codes the quality of untouchability to being and the self and becomes the basis of primary agony and the anchor of hell.
22. Individuals experience isolation and loneliness, and they lose communication with others.
23. Connectedness and togetherness of any kind get coded with doubt and reservation.
24. The individual then demands continuity and consistency of modes of relatedness and expression from self and others.
25. This creates the experience of meaninglessness and unwholesomeness is being.
26. Unfolding and growth can be experienced only by getting in touch with the origins of being.

These aphorisms capture the essential struggle of the Indian manager to release himself/herself from the grip of colonialism in the mind. He/she is caught in the vice-like grip of a double bind: *If I ground myself in the idea of self and system that I have inherited (from primary systems), I am an outsider in organisations and If I ground myself in the idea of self and system that I have internalised (from secondary systems), I must hold myself in low self-worth.*

It is no wonder that the manager ends up becoming dysfunctional to himself, whichever pole of the double bind he chooses. If she chooses 'professional success', she disowns her deeper self and with it the source of meaning, replenishment and a sense of belonging. If she chooses 'authenticity', she has to also empower herself to shape the organisation in a way that is coherent with her picture-in-the-mind.

I have seen this play out in the struggles of managers to take on leadership roles. On the one hand, they experience the lack of commitment and ownership of the workgroup structures by the members of the organisation, but, on the other hand, they do not authorise themselves to change it and shape the systems and structures to be coherent with the identity processes of the group.

What Therefore Is the Key to Organisation Development in India?

In my consulting experience, there are a few key shifts that occur at the core of the self-construct to unleash the immense potential that Indian managers have. A change in the relationship between individual energy and role effectiveness unleashes hidden potentials and legitimises the process by which the manager exerts influence and uses power. This, in turn, has a very positive impact on organisational synergy. Without this inner shift, their energies are used up in distorting themselves to present a professional persona that is variance with their identity.

This approach has evolved through many dialogues with my colleagues in Sumedhas. In his paper 'Process Centered Institution Building: A Perspective and an Introduction to the Practice', Banerjee (2007) outlines many of these principles and shares an experience of institution building as a way of enabling an organisation to change its identity. Abstract of his paper:

This paper offers a new term 'Process Centered Institution Building' (PCIB). It distinguishes itself from the classical analytical approach of managerial problem-solving paradigm by relying largely on experience-based learning methodology for designing interventions. The author states that PCIB recognizes the complexity of organisations by using a hermeneutic approach and aims to modify the phenomenology and the identity of the client organisation. It sees the organisation as a living entity that gradually develops a distinct identity. It maps the current narrative of the organisation and designs and implements interventions for a more desirable narrative for the future. (<http://sumedhas.org/media/PCIB.pdf>)

Some of the key processes, that I have worked with, are (Table 1):

1. Redefining the idea of organisation culture: rules that govern what can be seen, said, owned up and acted upon (and it is converse)
2. Dissolving the incoherent 'picture-in-the-mind' of an organisation by designing simulations that enable playing with other possibilities in experiential learning settings.
3. Dissolving the incoherent self-constructs through enabling participants to play with culturally meaningful archetypes of heroes, and through this play, they discover their propensities, value them and authorise themselves to shape their meaning-making and role-taking processes.

Table 1. A Summary of the Key Differences Between Generic OD and the Indian Experience

Unit of Analysis	Generic OD Pedagogy	In Context of Indian Experience
Individual	A fairly integrated idea of self is encouraged to assume more agency and develop skills	Dissolving the split in the self between one's intrinsic Indian-ness and the self constructed through colonised frames that leads to deep inner conflict, loss of creativity and negative self image; valuing of one's authentic self enhanced; cognitive dissonance between rationality and identity to be dissolved; and legitimacy of influencing the 'professional' world to be experienced

(Table 1 Continued)

(Table 1 Continued)

Unit of Analysis	Generic OD Pedagogy	In Context of Indian Experience
Group	Shared idea of task and relationships create shared primary task and clear expectations	Differential pictures in the mind of teaming to be dignified and made coherent; sense of cohesion and mutuality in the emotional level to be created; and the emotional networking allows negotiation necessary to evolve consensus
Organisation	Idea of task-based contracts and enlightened self-interest is built upon through creating shared purpose and appropriate policies	Organisation has to be experienced as a community; emotional security experienced in power and authority relationships; experiencing trust as the basis for transaction; discovering convergence between identity and role; and role and larger systemic belonging
Community	Homogenous idea of self and the world, shared ideas and norms and collective issues leveraged for mutual benefit	Dissolving clannish belonging; dissolving the tensions created by social status; creating trust between different communities and their aspirations, values, etc.; discovering the shared idea of <i>dharma</i> ; and invoke cultural memory of institutions of collaboration

Source: The author.

Designing the Interventions

Winnicott (2011) introduced the concepts of ‘transitional objects’ and ‘transitional experience’ to explain how a child creates an intermediate space between the psychic and external reality at a critical developmental phase. In this ‘transitional space’, the young child plays with a ‘transitional object’. This play enables the child to grow out of infantile dependency into mature stages of independence and interdependence.

The learning spaces that I designed are essentially spaces, where through the use of theatre and simulations, I encourage the participants to play with their constructs of both self and systems. This enables them to review their mental constructs and discover ways by which they can jettison dysfunctional assumptions about self and system and find coherence within. These have been called ‘Voyages into the inner realms’ by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), where the programme on Leadership Development called ‘A Leader Prepares’ has run its 80th edition (covering more than 1,500 senior leaders).

Legitimate and Illegitimate Models of Power

What is the consequence of this picture-in-the-mind at the level of exercising power? Each mental model evokes a different idea of power. The clan/familial picture appreciates the power that is inclusive and nurturing. Most Indian managers hold this idea of the organisation and therefore of power unconsciously (Ananthanarayanan, 2016). However, the business world as an arena and the organisation as a hierarchy are held more consciously. The aspirational forms of power that are therefore valued are those of the ‘warrior’ or the ‘king’. The archetype of a ‘king’ is not very difficult to internalise for the Indian manager, but the ‘warrior’ is the one he envies. And here too, the behavioural model is drawn from Western ideas that are taken as universal.

This pattern shows up in the thousands of *Pandava* profiles (based on EUM) that we have examined. The nurturant Nakula is the unconsciously held idea of power in most cases, and the kingly Yudhishtira is a close second. The envy is for the Bhima type of power.

This envy, when examined a little more deeply, often reveals a colonised frame through which one looks at oneself. While the Nakula model is often held in shame, it is often seen as a weakness. A form of power that is emotional and therefore to be kept out of organisational spaces. The author suspects that it is in the Nakula model that is the one that contains traditional wisdom. In the minds of most managers, tradition and modernity cannot coexist; they cannot enable each other to develop and unfold in healthy ways. The traditional is a priori ‘less than’ the globalised, universalised modern idea of organisations and styles of leadership.

Self-authoring and Self-censoring

The author recounts his experience of an OD intervention to examine this further. He was working with EID Parry (in the early 1980s), the organisation had just been bought over by the Murugappa family. The sugar factory at Cuddalore is one of the oldest organisations set up in India. When I travelled to the site, I stayed at the Clive Guesthouse! It still had the old cannons facing the sea. It was very clear that the leadership of the organisation held onto the colonial ways of playing their roles. We started the process of working with changing the hearts and minds of these people through a series of 5-day experiential learning processes. The entire management team went through this process. The inflection point came when working with the top management team. We asked the participants to draw a picture of what in their minds was the impact of a managerial decision they took. The general manager (GM)—who was heading the unit—drew a picture that had a strong boundary around the factory and all the elements he controlled. Others had drawn the impact they had on the farmers and the transport agents, etc. As we put the various pictures together and started a dialogue, he realised that the health of the sugar factory determined the well-being of the whole district comprising of nearly a million people! It impacted children going to school, it impacted the local grocer. The GM became very silent. When we gathered the next morning, he requested time to speak. He had written a beautiful poem in Tamil (my free translation of the critical portion):

I have been like a caged parrot

Imitating the ways of my mentors

I flew above the fortress-like walls of the factory

Like an eagle, I soared

I saw my land.

I sat like an Arjuna deep in doubt,

I saw that I was a Karna

Having mortgaged my heart to my mentors

I have shut myself up in a mind-prison

It is time to wake up

He was overcome with emotion, and tears flowed from his eyes. He then committed to his team that he would show them the face that he showed to his dear ones at home and to his *pangAli's* (a term which means 'people who share in my joys and sorrows, profits and losses'—implying the larger community one belongs to). The GM was known to be distant and very formal. He did change drastically, and his ability to be vulnerable impacted the whole group. He then shared with the group that his family was traditionally the elders in the area, and he had witnessed his father conduct in panchayat meetings and family decision-making processes. He compared the dialogue we were having to that process of the panchayat that is called a *Koodam*.

Koodam the Space for Dialogue and Consensus Building

The *Koodam* (Suresh & Pradip, 2019) is a space-time when the village elder places before the village community a critical decision that they need to take. The whole community then discusses the implications. During this process, there is great equity. No differences in status, task roles or caste belonging are brought in. The entire dialogue is anchored on the concern 'what is the most *dharmic* action for us to take?' A consensus is arrived at and communicated to village elder through various members of the panchayat. He then articulates the decision. After this, everyone in the community is expected to adhere to the decision taken and set aside all the reservations the individual may have had (Ramasubramaniam, 2019).

What is of importance to us is the conversation the GM had with me after the learning session:

I thought the two worlds I was living in were separate. In the organisation, I should not bring in my tradition and my native ways. I had to follow the modes of my bosses. I followed what I was taught. Now that I know that the traditional part of me is not illegitimate, I can bring in the wisdom I have gathered there.

True to his word, the GM went about creating a feeling of community in the organisational space, designed a consensus-building process and an adherence process for the organisation. He started reaching out to the larger farming community and used his stature in the community in very positive ways. Many of the members of his team as well as his boss understood the process and spontaneously related it with the *Koodam* process that many of them had experienced in their community. Cultural festivals that were hitherto taboo in the factory colony were welcomed. His managers were encouraged to take part in the larger farmer community.

Flow and Constriction

If we look at this from our lens, the GM was trying hard to fit into what he thought was the 'legitimate way'. This excluded the Nakula community-building power and the Arjuna power of asking questions and engaging with *dharmasankata* (dilemmas, polarities and paradoxes). The Yudhishtira mode that he had learnt at the feet of his mentors had a fit with his traditional moorings, but he imposed on this a feudal mode that is also present in the rural areas. His idea of a Bhima also fitted in but sat very

uncomfortably with him. His preference was for a Nakula way of deploying power. But he held this in some shame; it was not conforming with his idea of Bhima. He, therefore, tried very hard to project a harsh side of himself when he played the GM role, further distancing himself from his team. All this changed when he set aside his inner censor. He found the flexibility to play his role in contextually relevant ways.

To complete the story, EID Parry made a dramatic turnaround and went on to become a model sugar factory. The fact that the vice-president (VP) heading the whole independent strategic unit (ISU) also came from a rural background and retained a strong link with his origins enabled an easy transition in the team from a feudal-colonial style to an institution-building style. The VP joined in an experiential learning process and enthusiastically supported the changes because he was able to value cultural wisdom.

The Koodam as a Process of Governance Processes

The learning the author got from this experience was immense. The author went into studying the *Koodam* process in more detail. When an opportunity came to look at how to transform the workings of the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board (TWAD), my colleagues Dr V. Suresh and Pradip Prabhu from the Barefoot Academy of Governance and I designed and deployed the *Koodam* model to enable governance reform (Suresh, 2016). The bureaucracy is as colonial as it gets! Through the *Koodam*, they enabled the Public Works Department (PWD) engineers (and the Indian Administrative Service—IAS—officer heading the department) to review themselves and ask themselves serious questions: ‘Were they trapped in the idea of being government employees? Could they look at themselves and their purpose differently?’. The outcome was the ‘*Maraimalai* declaration’, a document in which the engineers said that their role was that of ‘social engineers’, not just PWD engineers, and their purpose to ensure drinking water for future generations. The changes they made to their role-taking processes and their deployment of power and leadership made a lasting impact on the water conservation processes in Tamil Nadu.

Ten Years Later

This model proved to be very successful, and when the IAS officer who headed TWAD moved to the Agricultural department, he invited us to undertake a similar exercise. We worked with the agricultural department to replicate the process. This has been documented in detail by Bala Kailasam in the film *Neerundu Nimaundu*, Mission Possible (Kailasam, 2010).

In this documentary, one can follow the whole OD process. One can see the rigidity and lack of involvement in the managers who hold an alien model of organisation and role-taking in their minds and their transformation into highly motivated wise leaders when their faith and legitimacy in their cultural practices and wisdom is restored. In the documentary, some of them speak about their cultural memory and recall the way the *Koodam* was used in their community.

Energising Organisational Change

The author has encountered this tension and suppression of cultural and traditional wisdom in many other situations. For instance, when Tube Investments (TI) of India took the help of one of the big five to look at strategy, the head of TI invited the author to work with his team (the late 1980s). He recognised

the tension between the intellectually appealing strategy and the cultural complexity of energising the members of his organisation to execute the strategy. Through a series of dialogues and intensive workshops, we were able to build a consensus among the leadership team and their direct reports. The team made appropriate changes to the strategy, envisaged the behavioural changes necessary to make the strategy work and felt convinced that they could transform themselves. The inner struggles were similar, the tension between the organisation in the mind, leadership behaviours in the mind and their inner propensities surfaced again and again. The natural tendency of the Indian manager to act from his/her Nakula propensity was devalued; a distorted idea of a Yudhishtira–Bhima model held sway. Sahadeva propensities were valued in the Research and Development (R&D) processes but suppressed in other areas under the need to be process disciplined in the operations. Arjuna with his ability to value doubt and *dharma sankata* (dilemma, polarities and paradoxes) was held in fear. The energy that was unleashed in the team, as they valued themselves, and their genius was immense.

Energising Leaders Through Dignifying Cultural Wisdom

This pattern repeats itself in the managers across the many leadership development programmes the author has conducted. In TCS, for example, my colleagues from FLAME TAO Knoware and I have conducted a very successful ongoing leadership development programme called ‘A Leader Prepares’. We just celebrated the 75th version of the programme that began in 2006. Here, we introduce the concept of five types of power exemplified by the five Pandava brothers. We contrast it with the unidimensional idea of power that is the most commonly held idea of heroism and leadership, namely the Bhima–Rambo model. It is poignant and gratifying to see how the dignifying and legitimising all five modes, especially of the Nakula and Arjuna ways of deploying power, release the shackles these leaders put on themselves. Their inner experience is not very different from our GM from EID Parry! Once they shed their inhibitions, they are then able to also relate to many possible pictures-in-the-mind of organisations. Some of them relate to the many battle formations described in the Mahabharata War, the *Chakra-vyuha* (the circular formation), the *Padma-vyuha* (the lotus formation), etc. The idea that organisation design has to be contextually intelligent becomes meaningful, and their legitimacy and conviction in conceiving of an organisation in ways other than steep hierarchies get reinforced. They then understand how to design and nurture agile teams. The wisdom that they have hitherto kept suppressed becomes accessible to them.

Why is Dignifying Cultural Wisdom Critical Today?

It is a no brainer to say that as Indian organisations become global leaders, we ought to shed our reluctance to value our cultural wisdom. We cannot be the best that we can be by suppressing what our natural propensities are and wearing ill-fitting masks (Useem, 2011. *Management the Indian way*).

At a more global level, two very important trends have to be taken into account while designing organisations among many others. First, the depth and width of knowledge required to run even relatively small organisations. Second, the speed with which changes are sweeping the marketplace. This means that autonomy, consensus building, innovation and inclusiveness become paramount in determining the success, long-term viability and sustainability of organisations. This implies a mature deployment of the power of Nakula, Arjuna and Sahadeva. It further implies that leaders must be capable of holding many

alternative pictures-in-the-mind of organisations with ease. Letting go of homogenised, universalised and globalised ideas of business, organisations and leadership become an urgent prerequisite to navigate the future.

Cultural Wisdom and Dialogue

The tension between the role mask and the identity angst is an unsustainable way of being for the Indian professional. It is dysfunctional for the individual, untenable for society and disempowering for the organisation. The role mask reflects an exaggerated Yudhishtira conformity to the stereotype of a ‘Westernised Oriental Gentleman’. The angst identity reflects a Karna yearning to be owned by a system that rejects his core selfhood. For Indian organisations, especially start-ups to develop, evolve and grow in healthy ways, there is an urgent need for a middle ground, a space similar to the experiential learning spaces that created the *Koodam*, a space where traditional cultural wisdom meets rational modernity in mutual respect; a space where Arjuna’s deep questioning and Nakula’s healing touch are held inasmuch value as the aggression of a Bhima, the orderliness of a Yudhishtira and the innovative ability of a Sahadeva.

Awakening Arjuna

Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 2017) advances the idea that the most important hero archetype in many ancient mythologies is that of the Trickster hero. This is the hero who enters the realms of the Gods and discovers fire through his ingenuity and intelligence. However, he argues that when civilisations became more centrally organised, these figures were either removed from pre-eminence or forgotten. We, therefore, see that when Handy (1996) writes the ‘Gods of Management’, he uses four archetypes to exemplify four distinct types of leadership. These closely resemble Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva. Arjuna is absent. Arjuna epitomises the power of systems’ thinking and the power of deep fundamental questioning.

Indic wisdom has venerated the quintessential Arjuna. Gautama Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela are reflections of the Arjuna archetype. Jamshedji Tata and Steve Jobs come to mind when one looks for paradigm-shifting thinkers in the business world. In reawakening and valuing this cultural heritage of ours lies our ability to shape a future free of colonial hangovers and envy of Western ways of being.

What Are the Essential Features of the Arjuna Archetype?

The ability to say ‘I don’t know, all the existing ways of understanding reality are not meaningful anymore!’ is the starting point of deep inquiry and therefore of dialogue. Arjuna having asked this question becomes vulnerable and quiet. He becomes open to listening to his deeper divine intelligence. Through this contemplative dialogue, Arjuna discovers conviction in *dharmic* action. These are prerequisites for engaging in dialogue and for enabling a rethink of existing paradigms. This openness to re-examining one’s core assumptions and conclusions is emphasised in Bohmian dialogue (Bohm, 2004).

Needless to say, deep and fundamental inquiry can be very unsettling. However, it is only by awakening the Arjuna power and fostering a deep dialogue that we are going to be able to find creative and regenerative ways of living.

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Bio-sketch

Three extraordinary teachers mentored Raghu Ananthanarayanan when in very difficult phases of his life, namely; J. Krishnamurti, Yogacharya Krishnamacharya and Pulin K. Garg. He was intimately involved with them for more than a decade from his late 20s. This engagement not only transformed him, it evoked from him his service orientation, his *sadhana*. His work revolves around helping individuals, groups and organisations discover their *dharma*, and they become the best they can be. This he believes aligns with his own personal *sadhana*. Formally trained as an engineer with an MS in Bio-Medical Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, he has been in immersive involvement in questions of human life. In academic areas, he has been co-founder of the Sumedhas Academy of Human Context since 1995, and of the Barefoot Academy of Governance with TISS since 2012. As Director of Flame Tao Knoware Pvt Ltd, Raghu spans the commercial world of consulting by helping redesign the client organisation for greater alignment and synergy. Raghu has authored several books: *Learning Through Yoga*, *The Totally Aligned Organization*, *Leadership Dharma* and *Organizational Development and Alignment: The Tensegrity Mandala* (as co-author with Gagandeep Singh). Currently, he is also working with his wife Sashi on Earth Spirituality at Rithambara, donning his role as Chief Mentor amid the Nilgiris.