

# ORGANISATION DESIGN TO MOBILISE THE POTENTIALS OF THE INDIAN IDENTITY

## Introduction

The Indian Shastraic theory does not accept linear causality. The theory is of simultaneous multiple causalities. Sankhya explains this with the following example: When rain falls on dry ground, it causes the earth to flower. If however, it falls on fertile ground, it causes the earth to flower. If however, it falls in the sea, it will make no difference at all. The recognisable part of the causation is called the Nimittha Kaarana and the unmanifest quality of the ground is called the Upaadana Kaarana. The immediate trigger or agency that sparks off the causation is called the Karana. Other accessories and contextual elements are also considered important in the final form that emerges.

It is thus inconceivable that one can look at creating an Indian organisation by introducing on to a colonial or multinational context a few ideas drawn from our scriptures and shastras. This paper proposes that a much more basic approach to organisation design is essential if one is to create an Indian organisation that can mobilise the best of the Indian identity.

This paper comprises two parts. The first part sets out a framework in which the organisations in India and their evolution can be understood. This framework is then applied to look at an organisation. It looks at the processes of the organisation by examining two cases: One the case of Best and Company based on the paper presented by Mr. M.K. Kumar (Chairman and Managing Director of Best & Crompton) in the International Conference on Transience and Transitions in Organisations 1986. It looks at this case from the point of view of the effect of colonisation on the Indian mind and the implications of the cultural assumptions on organisational design. The second case is that of a group of Vishwakarmas building a temple. The Vishwakarmas being the holders of Indian technology, this case provides an insight into the nature of the organisation that is indigenous to India.

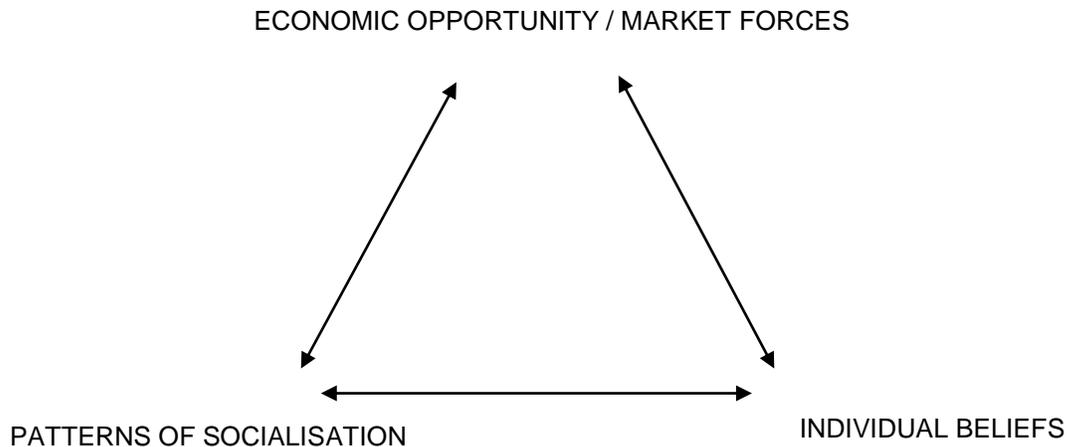
The plea of this paper is that organisational design must be researched for its relevance to our land and our genius before it can become fertile ground for the seeding of indigenous ideas and their growth. The second part of this paper advances a paradigm for organisation design that is based on the essential characteristics of cell functioning. This paradigm will provide a context where the wisdom of our land can take root and create effective organisations.

## The Framework

The framework in which the paper looks at this question is as follows:

An organisation is the product of three powerful forces in society. Firstly, the market forces and the need of man for goods and services. Second the societal structures with their patterns of relatedness indigenous to the people. And thirdly, the idea or model of man that the people hold.

Let us examine this framework in greater detail by looking at the processes by which an organisation is created and sustained. The needs of people create demands for goods and services. This demand is converted into an opportunity for commercial exploitation by a group of entrepreneurs collectively or singly. This group then conceives of the organisation, its systems, and its structures. Economic considerations of return on investments are the primary focus of this group. The framework of organisation structure and systems (that are defined by the imperatives of effective use of resources) is then occupied by people.



If one looks at the evolution of organisations in the West, we find that the people whose needs are being met by the organisation, the people who work in organisations and the group that seizes the opportunity to create the organisation come out of the same milieu. Thus the underlying metaphors, beliefs and the cultural factors of the society from which the organisation springs and the people who work in them are homogenous. This ensures a great degree of coherence in the mind that designs the organisation and the minds that run the organisation. The way people relate to each other and with authority flows from the patterns of relatedness learned in the larger social context.

In the Indian context, however, this does not hold true. The design of the organisation is often created by minds alien to the Indian ethos. These organisations are peopled by "natives". The nature of the interface between the organisation and the people in the organisation is characterised by the demand that the person only gives the product of his head and his hands. In fact, one of the requirements of the Indian who wants to rise up in Industry is that he adjusts to this demand and keep aside his heart and his mind. This coding has affected Indian organisations deeply. Its origins can be seen in the organisations set up by the British and in the policies they followed in education and governance when they ruled over the land. This is especially clear when in the '40s organisations were constrained to admit Indians into their managements.

### **The Upadaana of Indian Organisations**

The history of the evolution of organisations in India has created an Upaadana that is not conducive to the acceptance of ideas from the Indian tradition. In fact, the history of colonialism in India and the fact that our educational systems have done little to alter this, have let a peculiar situation behind. The average Indian in the organisation is brought up in the social traditions of India, but through school and college taught to disregard and hide his belonging. He is encouraged to imbibe and respect the technological knowledge of the West. He is rarely even cognisant of the scientific and technological tradition of India. He is thus fully trained to bring only his products and efforts to the external world and hold his Indian background and tradition private, frozen and in ambivalence.

This paper advances the idea that unless the factors that create a proper Upaadana are addressed to we cannot start the process of creating Indian organisations that mobilise the creative and assertive potentials of the Indian identity. Any introduction of ideas from the Shastras or other Indian dharshanas will at best be cosmetic. It will not change the fundamental character of the Indian organisation, which today is an old mixture of influences.

When we look at the genesis and evolution of Indian organisations we find that the cause for setting up the organisation has been external to the Indian potentials and aspirations. The British origins of most organisations that were set up before independence had little whatsoever to do with the needs of our people. Post-independence has seen the emergence of many public sector institutions that had a perspective of national growth. However, they were modeled on the bureaucratic systems of the Government or blindly followed the systems of the collaborator. Most private sector organisations have also followed a pattern of borrowing organisational structures and systems from abroad. It is very rare to come across an organisation that is Indian in conception and design.

## UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONS THROUGH THIS FRAMEWORK

### The British Organisation in India

We quote from the paper presented by Mr. Kumar a few passages that clearly outline some of the crucial aspects of the growth of Best and Company up to the '50s. A selection of key statements is given below. These statements are self-explanatory when looked at with the background of the framework presented earlier.

1. Best and Crompton Pvt. Ltd. was initially two separate companies, Best and Company founded in 1897 by a trader called Mr. Best, and Crompton Engineering founded in 1890 by Col. Crompton. The initial phase of Best and Company was entirely with the British at the helm of affairs. The policy of shareholding was obviously viewed from the perspective of continued British holding but history was to decide otherwise. Only company executives were allowed to buy shares in the company, and one had to be invited to join this group. Shares were available only when a shareholder put them up for sale or passed away. His widow could hold the shares but no other relative had rights to it.
2. The early part of history was almost entirely within the circuit of the British. Indians provided the labour or at best clerical help only.
3. The 40s saw a new phase as Britain was then involved in the Second World War. Very few English being available for the Company, many Indians were given opportunities to go up the organisation ladder.
4. The Indian officers were given entry into the social institutions of the British. Many of the positive norms of transactions were inculcated into the officers. A sense of playing above board permeated all interactions. One could confront the boss (often an Englishman) on issues and then be invited to share a beer in the evening.
5. Some of the advice the Indian officers received make interesting reading. For example, "The Head Office is never wrong, remember you are an assistant, beginning to the end". The hierarchy was never bypassed, up or down, and one could not use illegitimate channels of communication.
6. Many of the British Officers were often drawn from the Armed Forces. Many of the British Institutions were re-created to bring people closer. Internal cricket matches were times for the Directors and Chairman to mix with all the employees.
7. Most Indians who had felt that their immediate boss was very fair and treated them well also stated that other Britishers did hold prejudices. The functional openness did not include social equality. Some of the reminiscences of the early Indian Directors whilst they highlight the British sense of humour also shows a disregard for 'understanding' the Indian. Like, "You spend Rs. 30 a month on milk – do you bathe in it, young man?" "You don't smoke, you don't drink but what else do you do with life?" ..... We hear the first Indian Director on the Board state "We had reverential regard for our bosses narrowly bordering on fear".
8. The social distance from the Indian showed up very clearly in their dealings with labour. Until some Indian Directors took over and set it right, Best and Crompton budgeted for 2 months of strike every year! British managers were very authoritarian with the native Indians and many companies sustained a very hostile labour – management relationship. The British Managers did not think twice before asking for police help and the labour flexed its muscles too.

9. The company thrived during the early 1900s and showed significant growth and profits. But from the 40s onwards Best and Company Pvt. Ltd. became more and more conservative. The British owners knew that their days of colonising in India were numbered. An attitude of playing safe, not risking any new investments but staying in the game as long as the going is good, becomes the basis for policy decisions.
10. The need to protect its investments, its refusal to commit to the new industrial opportunities opening up in India, its inability to create proper labour relations, combined with an inability to invite collaboration and go through the changes in culture resulted in Best and Company's losing ground.

Some of the key issues for our analysis are:

1. That the company was set up entirely to repatriate profits to Britain.
2. Until the 40's the company was managed entirely by the British expatriates.
3. The advent of Indians into the company is due to the imperatives of the war situation in Europe and not out of any consideration for the Indian.
4. The Indians admitted into the management under these compulsions are groomed into a British mould. In fact, the inculcation of the Indian is after a close look at his background and his family to start with. He is moulded into the form desired by the British through a combination of contempt for the indigenous in him and a seduction to the institutions of the British.

### **The Impact of Colonisation on the Indian mind**

The way in which the British functioned in India was not a benign colonisation and governance. As was to be expected, the British influenced the Indian mind through various means of which organisations was one. I quote from an insightful paper written by Rajesh Vidyasagar on this question titled "Colonialism in the Mind: Issues of Transience and Transition for the Indian organisation".

1. There is .... the pervasive, difficult to detect, psychological colonialism that many educated Indians appear to carry in the mind, even 40 years after India secured political freedom.
2. Colonialism in the mind is a concept developed by Ashis Nandy. 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.
3. The British rule in India became truly imperialist after the Mutiny. It was subsequent to this that the philosophy of imperialism came to be enunciated, elaborated and acted out; simultaneously, recessive chords in the psychological fabric of the colonised were struck, and the psycho-cultural fabric of elite Indian society was re-knitted in the colonial frame of reference. Thus, Indian business and other institutions, as well as the modern Indian of today, both carry this altered colonial state of mind.
4. It is inevitable that this colonialism in the mind has had a drastic impact on our approach to work, how we view organisations, what we bring of ourselves into such systems and what we withhold and how to make our organisations and institutions go to work for us.

5. As Sudhir Kakar says, ..... If changes in (the social environment) are sudden, sharp and basic, then the demands on the individual are quite disconnected from his previous experience, such as foreign invasion for example. In such an event, the change is experienced not as a change that transforms and re-consolidates the individual identity but "as a threat to the integrity of the self, to the psychological status-quo. Such a threat brings in its wake a collapse of self-esteem, which, in turn, demands restitutive and reparatory counter measures. Some individuals make determined, even violent efforts to restore an earlier 'idyllic' state, while others may regress further, reacting with depressive modes of apathy, resignation, and withdrawal.
6. "... we can postulate that there are constructs held 'in the mind' to describe the correctedness between the individual and his enterprise. This may be called 'relatedness'. The individual has a notion of how he is related to his enterprise as an abstraction. He has a picture in his mind. This relatedness structures his actual relations and relationships with others in his enterprise e.g. between himself and his manager. On the basis of his experiences of relations and relationships, the notions of his relatedness may alter. Essentially relatedness enables the individual to make sense of actual relations and relationships". W. Gordon Lawrence, 1986.
7. A major dimension of colonialism in the mind is the unconscious picture that the Indian manager seems to carry which largely determines the realities of relationships in Indian organisations.
8. The advent of Colonial rule in India had a major impact on commercial life in India. The spread of the money economy and the right to sell / alienate property dealt a deathblow to the non-monetary but psycho-culturally integrated Jajmani system administrative of exchange. British rule brought the expansion of that type of business activity, which has the lowest possible prestige rating in India or elsewhere. Another direct impact of British rule on attitudes towards business was in the development in the power of the new colonial elite: the administrative bureaucracy.
9. The original intention of the British educational system in India was to develop a class of administrative personnel to feed the requirements of a rapidly growing bureaucracy. To quote Lord Macaulay, writing in 1835, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions who we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect". 8. "Vocational training was ignored, because the economic policy of imperialism excluded development of indigenous industries in competition with the home market" – Richard Lannoy, 1974.
10. Since independence, there has been little by way of experimentation with the education that is appropriate to our needs. I would hypothesise that our educational institutions were historically structured to serve a colonial need, and their structures and focus must be opened up for re-examination in the light of existing reality.
11. History cannot be unmade. Colonial history cannot be wished away merely by changing road names and taking down statues. What I am proposing is not overcoming our Colonial past, but a reintegration of this past within ourselves and in organisations. Such a reintegration cannot be achieved without deep and intense examination and exploration. We ought to subject ourselves, and our organisations and our institutions to scrutiny in the light of the realities of today and commit ourselves to add to ourselves and our social structures; ultimately, the issue is one of mobilisation.

It would be clear from this presentation that the mind that manages the Indian organisation is the product of a long colonial history. It is a mind that is uprooted from its tradition as well as dominated by an oppressive colonial heritage. The structures of its thinking are neither creative nor indigenous. They are set in a mould that is irrelevant to the present context.

### **The Cultural origins of Organisation Design**

To complete our analysis of the organisations in India, we look at the key statements made by Sri. Supriyo Chaudhuri in his paper “Modern Industrial organisation – an Exploration of Cultural Origins and Their Implications”. This paper examines the cultural assumptions and sub-conscious metaphors of thought that influence organisations.

1. The hypothesis is that there is no structure and design principle of organisations, which is not culture-bound. Any structure of any human system is an expression of the culture that gives birth to that system like any other human artefact. Though culture determined to start with, as our hypotheses claim, a structure in operation begins to have its own impact on the culture.
2. Structure and design principles of the Modern Industrial Organisations (MIOS) are perhaps being treated at par with non-human technology and resources, which can be imported or exported, implanted or transplanted at will. And this “instrument” view ties in with the principle of rationality that Weber had identified and which was used by Frederick Taylor in his “scientific management” design of the assembly line.
3. Industrialisation itself is the product or the expression of a specific culture at a specific stage of its evolution and it could not have randomly happened in any culture at any stage of its evolution.
4. It was in insular Britain in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, till then a remote corner of the Christian World, reclaimed from barbarism by the Catholic Church, and subsequently the venue of the successful Protestant revolt against that church, where industrialisation as we know today began.
5. Max Weber has seen in the individualistic an achievement-oriented ethic of Protestantism the primary driving force behind the growth of the capitalist – industrialism.
6. Yahweh, Christ, and Prometheus were the primary operating symbols of the culture that bred industrialisation in the first place, and then the structure and design principles of the MIOS that became the vehicles for industrialisation.
7. The Judeo-Christian pantheon is pyramidal with the God sitting at the apex, a challenging, punitive, transcendent God. If we add to it our earlier hypothesis that industrialisation is an act of power then we can claim that the MIO pyramidal structure is really a replication of that pantheon. The logic of power almost automatically dictates a pyramidal structure.
8. If we look at the concept of the unity of the chain of command, we just have to look at the logic of a Power-pyramid that power flows from the apex, and below the apex, there can be only subordinate centres of power but not alternate centres. There is no place for lateral power in the logic and this is exactly what the unity of the chain of command implies.
9. The famous theory Y of Douglas McGregor (McGregor 1960), while trying to change the working philosophy and ideology in the MIOS, fails to examine how the structure and design imperatives hanging over the MIOS may be pulling them toward Theory X. Philip Selznick

speaks of organisations not only as "economies" but also as adoptive social structures (Selznick 1948). Using Talcott Parsons' structural-functional analysis as his tool Selznick concludes that the MIOS which remains or become effective invariably opts for the "co-optation mechanism" to deal with dissent. Warren Bennis in his study of the "decline of bureaucracy" and the emergence of "organic-adoptive systems" makes a split between structure and culture, ignoring the possibilities that structure is a cultural artefact, as we have tried to show earlier (Bennis 1964). Chris Argyris grapples with the issues of behavioural manifestations of Theory Y values and gets caught there (Argyris 1971). Lawrence and Lorsch deal with both structures and processes in their famous Differentiation – Integration Model (Lawrence and Lorsch 1969) but the thrust remains micro-cultural with no questioning of the basic principles of structure, design, and processes.

Mr. Supriyo Chaudhuri's analysis takes us through the macro forces and unarticulated assumptions that the designs of Western organisations are based upon. These myths and ideas in the unconscious that form the ground from which organisations have grown have little or nothing in common with the Indian psyche.

### **Conclusions from the case discussed**

The Upaadana or the clay out of which the modern Indian organisation is moulded is very foreign to us. But we persist with battling within the frameworks of these organisations. Most recent efforts to discover effectiveness and creativity in our organisations have been imitations of the efforts of other countries particularly Japan. One would assume from this that India either lacks indigenous models of an organisation totally or that we have no trust whatsoever in learning for ourselves what a modern Indian organisation should be.

### **The Organisation of the Vishwakarma**

Let us examine the case of an Indian organisation of great antiquity. This organisation has an unbroken history of a few thousand years. The leaders of this group of people and its members have followed specific methods of building and design and have developed the skills and technology with time. It is only in the last century that this development and growth have got stunted and this technological community has stagnated. The cause of this in the pre-independence period is easy to discern. The continuing marginalisation of these people after our independence is puzzling and deplorable. It is possible that the only links that we have with our scientific and technological past are through these people.

### **The Approach of a Sthapati to his work**

We quote below a few statements made by Sri. Ganapathy Sthapati in connection with the design and construction of the temple.

1. "Why is the temple divine? and why are the stone image divine? How can stone or brick have divinity?"

When we make a temple we say that the measurements are divine and teach each sculptor to treat this with great respect. A Garbha Griha is very often a perfect cube. When space is created out of perfect proportion people will often say 'It is beautiful. It gives me peace' a sculpture of perfect proportion also creates this experience. It is the minute care paid to the work and the importance given to the mathematical perfection of the design that gives it a special quality.

## 2. What is beauty?

It is a sense of order that the proportion evokes in the person. This order triggers feelings of deep peace and happiness this is rasa anubhava. This experience of order is the touching of that which is divine in oneself. It is this evocation of the order and rasa in the person that makes the stone and space divine. Only great attention to every part of the building will create this perfection. To create a beautiful temple where people feel peace and quiet, every artisan must work with respect for the proportion and with care.

3. When we create a beautiful piece of work we will look at it and enjoy it. We are a proud people; without Swabhimaanam – a feeling that "I can do something worthy of me" "What I create is a reflection of me" an artisan cannot create beauty. We encourage this pride in our people. But we also deeply feel gratitude to the tradition that has given us this skill. Given us the ability to create a space or piece of stone that will touch people's hearts.
4. A sculptor must be soft and sensitive, he must be confident of his skill and have pride in his work; he must be a sattvic person. "My father used to get very angry and punish a sculptor or an artist who made a mistake. But these people always came back to him and had great respect for him. I always wondered how? Then I discovered his anger was at the lack of care, lack of love for the work it was because of his passion for perfection. He was never angry with the person. He would scold and immediately teach. He would overflow with joy at good work done. This anger is from avesham and every person who works must have it.
5. The Sthaptis and craftsmen who worked with my father were afraid of him. Because he was intense and serious and had great integrity. When anyone spoke to him he knew that his words will be taken seriously and he will be taken seriously. We also knew that he was never afraid to speak his mind. We could not approach him casually.
6. The Sthaptis identity is largely his heritage and his community more than the individual. All decisions are taken by first looking at its implication for heritage, then community. It is taken for granted that "what is good for the community is good for me. I have often had to humble myself before small government employees. I and my personal feeling are not important. I can't do or say something that will affect my group. And I have kept this in mind always even when I was working directly under the CM!
7. Pride in the self (Swabhimaanam) is very important for us. We encourage our people to have this. Without this, a person will not care if he does bad work. With this, he will look at his work as a reflection of himself. He will see himself in his work and enjoy this. But this pride is kept in place by our great Bhakti for the heritage and our feeling for our community. Today we have taught a lot of people outside our community also and many commercial minds are taking to this art. But good art and sculpture and architecture cannot be done without the feeling of Bhakti. Bhakti for the Divine, feeling for our people, respect for the heritage and pride in our work.
8. Elaborate training generates these feelings, training's starts at birth with the sound of the chisel ringing in the home. Each person tendency comes out through how he plays and what he responds to as a child. This tendency is encouraged and given scope to grow it becomes his area of expertise.

A conversation with Sri. Shanmugam Sthapati the supervising architect sculptor at the site of the temple is given below:

1. Feeling together is the basis for working together. The contractors keep making mistakes and the company does not see us capable of doing the concreting work. We do much more complicated work here and abroad. The company has given a contract; the contractors ask for labour from a labour contractor and give other small tasks to individuals on contract. How can this work properly? All the lack of feeling will show up as delays or mistakes on the job. The feeling of the leader can never be reflected by the workman. Who is the workman working for and why? Working only for money makes one insecure.
2. We make sure that there is no space (Edaiveli) between the Sthapati the worker and his work. First, we make sure all the workmen stay as a group next to the work itself. He must get up in the morning see the work he did and feel. "I have done well or I must improve" his friends will discuss his work and his art (Kalai) will improve.
3. We first fix up a cook to make food etc. apart from the staying arrangements for the workman. The wages include the cost of food etc. and the workman organise the canteen themselves. As the man supervising the work I make all payments directly with my hands. At the time of paying him, I tell him what I think of the work he has done. This is done at the work spot and everyone is there.
4. We work so that our leader (Muthalaali) will get a name. Only if he gets a name we can get work.
5. In what we pay our artisan what we look for is not how much we pay but how much he actually gets. Thus by making him stay next to the work and by looking after the kitchen etc. we make sure he gets to more in his hand than other labour. We are disciplined people. Even when we go abroad we don't get into bad habits. We are god-fearing. We respect our leader (Muthalaali). We also have affection for him. Our relationship is permanent. We might work with different Sthapatis at different times but we are one unit.
6. The organisation of the workgroup is according to skill and capability:
  - Sthapati – Chief Designer and leader of the group.
  - Sutragrahi – Makes the measurements and markings. "Holds the thread". Knows the Vaastu Sutras. Links the Sthapati to the work.
  - Vaarthaki – all the supervisory work and on the job training of the artisans
  - Thakshakan- artisans – all stone / brick/ wood/ metalwork.
7. When we get a job the old practice was to call the whole group and speak about the work then choose the craftsmen. Each person is told why he is chosen and for what work. If anyone wants to object or challenge he can. But must demonstrate at work what he claims. Any upgrading of the work of a craftsman is done here in the open group. Once the decision is made everyone must abide by it. All payments are made publically by the Sthapati himself. At this time he talks about work and enquires about the person. This way we create affection and communicate pride in work. What we do is art. The workers feeling will reflect on the work. 'The shilpi is his shilpam'.
8. In the mind of a carver, there should be no thought except of the work ( ) only then he will improve. That is why in every sthapatis home there will be a pattra. The sound of the chisel must be the music to which he wakes up and lives. The carvers security is his skill at work. It will never let him down.

## Discussion of the Case

The two extracts presented above are far from complete or comprehensive. But they do clearly indicate a whole different perspective in which the Vishwakarma operates. The relationship between people at work is vastly different from what we see in most industrial organisations today. The structure of the organisation is pyramidal but the crucial difference lies in the attitude of each person to his work and the feeling with which he relates to his superiors, his subordinates, and his colleagues. Rather than imitate the military model where the entire army looks towards the commander for initiative and direction the Vishwakarma group resembles a sports team. Each player exercises his skill within the area available to him and with respect to his position. The head Sthapati takes the position of a coach who oversees and gives appropriate suggestions at the time when the team loses its effectiveness.

A lot more work must be done to discover and study in-depth the organisation of the Vishwakarma workgroups. While looking at this model we must also bear in mind that these groups have strong familial bondings and belonging to a tradition of long-standing. However, the essential principles that they follow are extremely valuable to us. We could certainly learn from these people many aspects of management and organisation design as this briefcase study clearly demonstrates.

While discussing the question "What is essentially Indian?" Prof. Pulin Garg (Institutional Meet ISISD 1989) enumerated the following:

1. Work is part of the person's identity
2. Task & 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.

Many of these qualities can be seen reflected in the way in which the Vishwakarma have organised themselves. They look at shared feeling as the basis of shared working; Each part of the working group is seen as an extension of a single "designing-creating" whole; Interdependence between various people and roles in the system is understood.

## **PART 2**

### **The Alternative Model for Design of Organisations**

We present in this paper a possible alternative model for designing organisations. The existing paradigms of organisation design are mechanical and systemic. The model advanced here is based on the essential features of organisms and cell functioning.

#### **A Brief Overview of the Evolution of organisations**

The transition of man from animal existence to a social being is founded upon three very significant developments. One is the understanding of tool making, two the use of language and communication to impart knowledge and insight and three the realisation of interdependence for survival.

These three factors together created a context for the growth and development of the species. In the deployment of these modes of responding to the environment, man is unique.

In the early stages of development of man, the content and complexity of these facets were not very vast; a single community with a few diverse roles would contain it. The entire knowledge could have been comprehended and deeply internalised by an individual. The movement of man from this stage into the agrarian era saw a greater complexity both in the content of knowledge and in the patterns of interdependence and relatedness. But, the change was gradual and extended over several lifetimes thus society evolved ways of coping with these changes. The transition did not imply uncertainty and unpredictabilities of a discontinuous nature. Each progressive step forward, though creative and new, had time for internalisation by the group and adaptation in work and lifestyle.

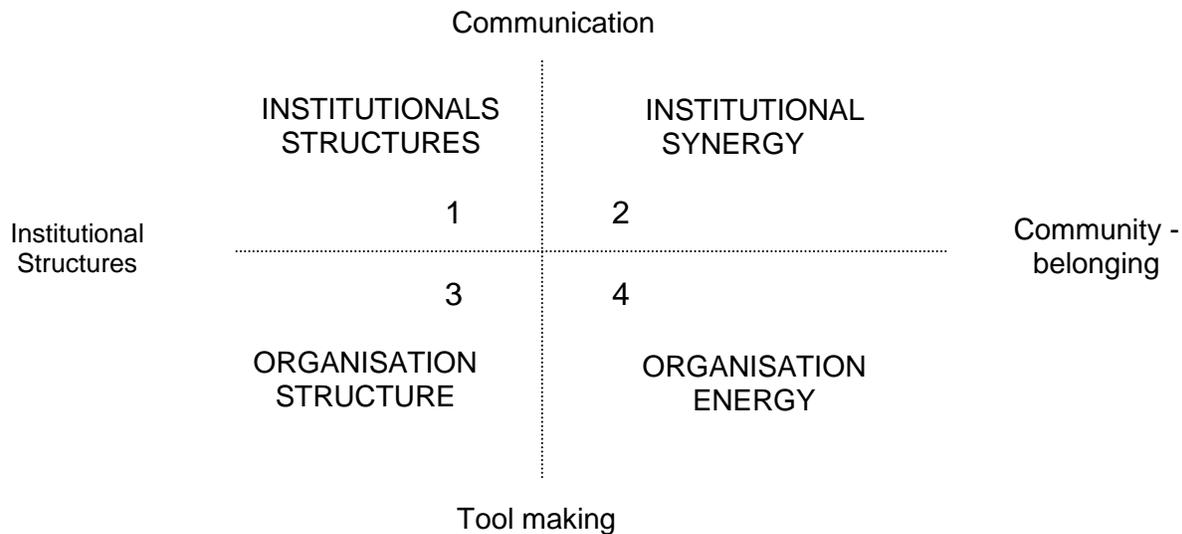
The changes that have occurred in the last two hundred years have been much more profound and swift than all the changes man has encountered in the preceding millennia. One must add that the pace is accelerating all the time and the last few decades have seen a bewildering explosion of knowledge and technology. Let us look at how it has affected us in more detail with particular focus on the three factors that generated the movement towards group survival and organisation in man.

#### **Model for looking at Organisational and Institutional Process**

A possible framework in which to understand this development in man is attempted below:

The two sides of the individual abilities developed through the ages have been tool making or skill acquisition and communication or processes of sharing knowledge and internal realities.

The aspects of interdependence and feeling of community and shared belonging are the two aspects of group functioning. Putting these together we get a framework like this.



Quadrants 1 & 4 represent institutional processes and quadrants 2 & 3 represent organisational processes.

The expression of togetherness and feelings through various modes of communication creates the basis of shared belonging and bonding as human beings sharing the same struggle. I refer to this as the **Institutional Synergy** – the metaphors of being together (quadrant 1). The creation of ways and patterns of interdependence through the communication of shared process of socialisation. This is the **Institutional Structure** or the metaphors of acting together (quadrant 4).

The interaction between skills in tool making and the feeling community create the forces of mobilisation and shared commitment to invest one's abilities, the process of **Organisation Energy** (quadrant 2). The ways in which the knowledge and skills can inter-depend are mediated by **Organisation Structure** and systems (quadrant 3).

As long as the communities remained small and homogenous, the institutional processes could be taken for granted. Man concentrated his development on increasing his understanding of external realities and technology i.e., the organisation skills & processes.

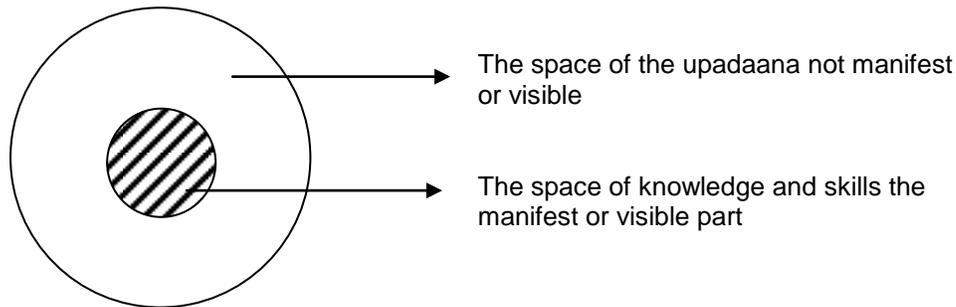
The only aspect of our framework that has been invested in continuously for the last two centuries is the quadrant of knowledge and skills at the service of the organisation have been through the interface of a contractual obligation or through the recent attempts at Human Resource Development.

Clearly, this development is European in origin and colour. Without going into the details of the history it would be sufficient to point out that it was seeded in Britain as the Industrial Revolution and prospered through the age of colonialism (discussed in part 1 of this paper).

The question one asks in the Indian context is: what patterns of organisation building and institution building would be relevant to India?

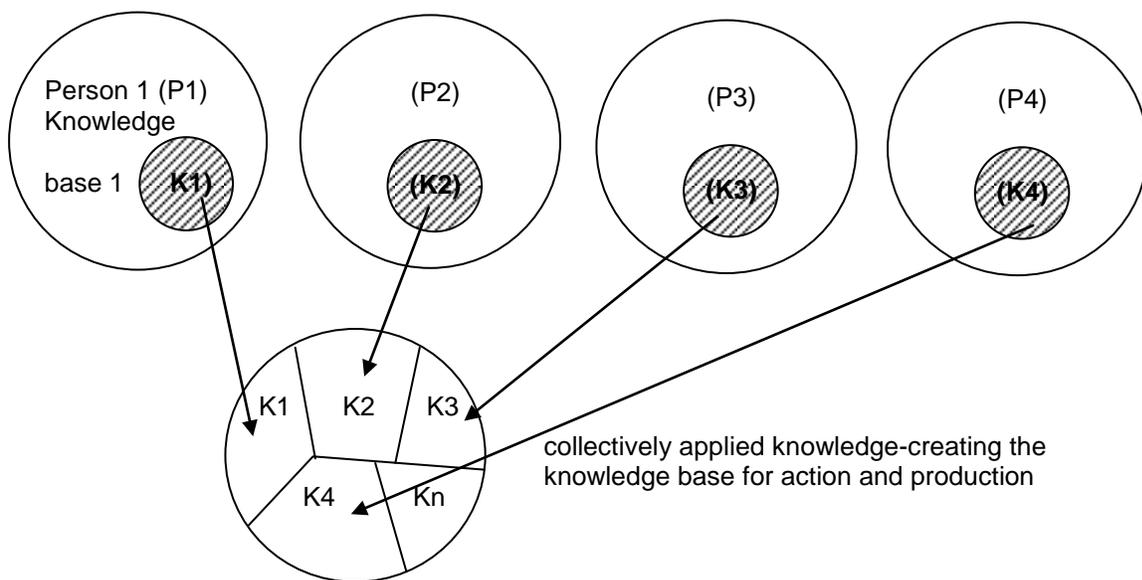
## A Model of Role Making

In order to build a framework through which to look at these factors, we must examine the processes through which man uses his technology. The idea of the man that is proposed in Sankhya (I have discussed this in greater detail in my paper "Understanding behaviour through Indigenous Sources") speaks of the upadaana or the ground from which actions and thoughts arise as a major factor in determining a person's response. The upadaana is the space within the person that contains his conditioning, his memories, his past hurts and joys, his aspirations, his needs and wants, his instincts, etc. etc., a space that can be compared with the unconscious as Erich Fromm describes in his book "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism". The more conscious area of a man that holds his knowledge and skills is embedded in this ground. A person can thus be represented like this



The spread of knowledge and its extent of specialisation has rendered it impossible in today's world for one person to hold all the knowledge and skills necessary for the production or manufacture of even the simplest of articles. A cumulation of the skills and knowledge of many is necessary to provide the basic tools for production. This was not the case even about 50 years ago as acutely as it is today.

Thus the creation of the skills and knowledge for production can be represented as follows:



This sharing is not a mechanical or logical action. It is a response mediated by the upadaana or the cauldron of human emotions and struggles. The fundamental assumption on which organisations are designed today is of an instrument or part of a machine. The organisation itself is seen in terms of mechanical systems. Individuals are then trained to fit into the shapes and forms assigned to them, feelings and other human responses are a hindrance and barrier to the proper functioning of this machine. The "Scientific Management" of Frederick Taylor that created the assembly lines of Detroit is clearly based on this metaphor.

Therefore, one raises the all important questions in the context of the organisation: What conditions of human relatedness would allow for a committed and voluntary sharing of knowledge and skills? What metaphors of organisation design would allow us to design organisations that can evoke and channelise this human energy in synergistic forms?

Obviously, an organisation metaphor drawn from an alien culture would not evoke the upadaana of a person socialised in the Indian way.

### **The outline of the Problem**

Let us restate the problem:

1. Specialisation is the order of the day and individuals hold in-depth knowledge of small areas of realities.
2. To use the technology and put it to work one must depend upon others who hold complementing and supplementing knowledge and skills.
3. Unless a person is held in dignity and feels nourished by his environment his interface with others will be characterised by defensiveness, suspicion, competition, conflict, ensuring personal gain, etc.
4. These feelings are a product of his upadaana. The organisation reality of today forces a person to uproot from his familial and community base and compels him to interdepend with people of various backgrounds and different world views.

The quest in front of us today is how do we create a nurturant medium, a nurturant institutional space where the person can discover ways of feeling with others as well as developing positive interdependence in mobilising his energies? Such an attempt should obviously harmonise with the roots and heritage of the society in which the organisation is located if the genius of the people is to be mobilised. This surely is the most significant learning from the Japanese experience.

### **Learning from the cases discussed in Part 1**

The structure and institutions of the Vishwakarmas seem to offer some pointers to the alternative that we are seeking.

1. Each person working in the group that builds the temple is a specialist in his work.
2. The knowledge base of the person is held in the identity of the person while his individual identity is held within the family identity and this in turn within the community identity and this in turn within the cultural matrix almost like a series of Chinese boxes.
3. The institution metaphor and organisation structure emerge from the shared world views and role identities of each specialist.

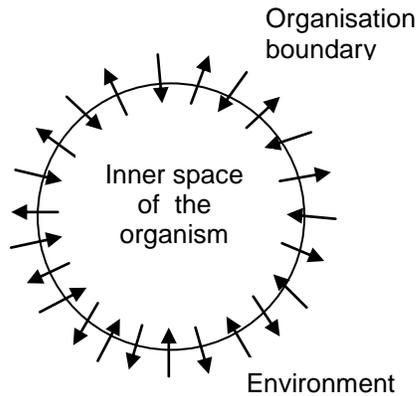
Thought this alternative points away, we cannot recreate this in its entirety in today's reality. But we can evolve a way of understanding an organisation that allows us to work towards creating such a powerful feeling based grouping so that organisation energy and synergy could emerge from these in forms relevant to today.

### **The Alternative Model of Organisation**

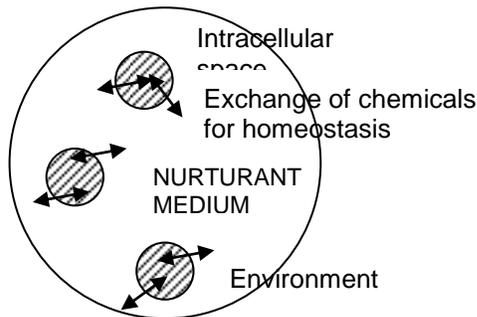
Let us examine a biological organism in its essential features. The process of this system offers an analogy that might be better suited to our search than the theories operating today.

1. The system is separated from the environment by a semi-permeable membrane. This membrane acts as a boundary between the "inside" and the "outside" of the entity. The boundary is able to let into the entity only some elements from the outside in order to nourish and maintain the health of the entity.
2. The inside of the organism is bathed in a medium that is the life-supporting base for all the cells and specialised units within the biological system. This medium also acts as the path or link between the various cells and other units of the biological system. The biologist who wishes to study micro-organisms cultures the microorganism in such a specific medium. This medium is the life-supporting, integrating base as well as the communication channel of the whole biological entity.
3. The specific abilities and functions of the organism are due to the specialised abilities of each of the cells in the system. Nerve cells differ from blood cells and these in turn from muscle cells etc. The ability of these cells to act together gives the organism its viability and strength.
4. The cells function both hierarchically and in non-hierarchical subsystems. The brain and the senses have a higher order of function, but various subsystems in the organism can function independently of conscious decision making of the brain. This subconscious functioning is always in harmony with the whole and interdependent with other subsystems.

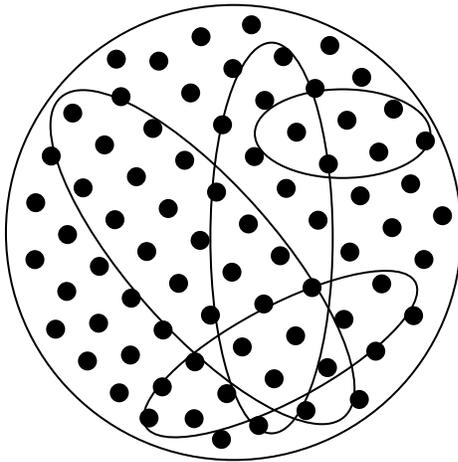
The proposed model related to an organisation, therefore, looks like this:



There is an organisation boundary, which creates distinctiveness. The maintenance of the boundary raises questions of survival and health. This entity is not an isolated fragment since the inside and the outside are in constant interaction in terms of material movement, cultural influence, political influences, etc. The boundary is a membrane and not a wall.



The culture or nutrient medium holds the quality / homeostasis of the organisation. It is influenced by the environment and by the action of the cells. It holds the organisation history and myths, its unwritten agendas, what individuals bring in, etc. This is the institution's space of the organisation and defines its human quality and culture.



Each cell is a holon – has a separate function, but retains the perspective of belonging to a subsystem, to several subsystems, and the whole simultaneously. Its actions are constrained or aided by the quality of the medium. The cell's ability to be relevant and harmonious makes it functional. Each cell is analogous to a role space. The space of the organisation is not filled by the subsystems. There is a lot of 'no man's land'. Individual positions task responsibilities are defined – not the externals of a job. This systemic linking of the role spaces is the organisation process and its structure.

To summarise, the organisation has a boundary with the environment. The internal space of the organisation is filled with its 'culture' i.e., growth-promoting medium, 'cells' or individuals work in this medium. These cells form subsystems and a cell can be simultaneously a member of 2 or more subsystems. Each cell is responsible for its own function as well as the organisation's wellbeing. All definitions of role or cell functioning are internal response based. Each cell is a whole and not a fragment.

In my understanding, a Japanese worker enjoys this simultaneous multiple belonging to various subsystems in the organisation. Apart from being a workman he could belong to the quality circle, he is consulted in decision making, he understands his role in maintaining working quality and quality of organisation life, he is part of the family. It is no wonder that when the conductors and drivers of a public transport system in Japan went on strike they ran the buses but refused to collect the fares. They explained their stand to the commuters. The top management apologised for not being sensitive to their needs! They made a point and took a stand but did not tear the fibre of the society nor compromise the service commitment of their organisation to the commuters in their demand for rights.

### **The Model in the context of Indian thought**

This model has given me the scope to redefine some of the values held in our culture in a way that they become relevant to an organisational context. This model makes it possible to view an organisation in terms comparable to the description of the man or the fundamental entity that goes to form an organisation. The strength of Indian thought has always been its ability to relate to man and his microcosms to many of its concepts and philosophy of institutions. I have attempted to delve into the basic meanings of three words that have been used in Indian thought to create an ethos of behaviour. I have redefined them in a more current manner: Dharma, Yama, and Niyama.

The word Dharma has been a central concept in the Indian context. It is derived from the root Dharati which means to sustain. The word Dharma, therefore, means an action that sustains the quality of living. The question of Dharma is, therefore, the question "What do I sustain through my action?"

Dharma is the cornerstone of the social design of India. The understanding of the patterns of interrelatedness and group functioning are the universes of the meaning of this word. The enquiry into this necessarily means a study and review of the traditional concepts and ways in which Indian Communities organised themselves and contributed to society.

There are two very important dimensions of Dharma. These are the concepts of Yama and Niyama. The root that these words are derived from is "Ma" – to measure. Yama can, therefore, be translated to mean the measure of the quality of transactions or relatedness at the interpersonal relatedness. These concepts, therefore, contain the following elements: Firstly, the concept of a boundary within which one operates, Secondly the implications of one's actions to others and the system and thirdly, the quality of one's action within this boundary i.e., its implications to the self. Yama would demand clarity of communication, humanness, care and the like in transactions. Niyama demands inner order, understanding of one's potentials, the intensity of action. Yama is the process of one's contribution to the group effort and social wellbeing and in the context of an organisation, it implies growth and wellbeing of the organisation. Niyama is the process of one's personal growth in a holistic manner.

The words Yama and Niyama describe individual behaviour. The concepts of Yoga, the Buddhist and Jain ideas of man and various other schools of thought build their models of man based on these two words. An understanding of the depth of these words and finding ways of inculcating them implies a deep study of Indian thought and finding ways of bringing them into the socialisation processes of the organisation.

Since all these 3 words are derived from verbs they are cybernetic and contextual. They describe the action and not an ideal; the oughts and not the shoulds.

With reference to the organism model proposed, this implies that the individual who forms the basic cell must ask the following questions of himself -- What is my measure – or what are the boundaries of my action? What are my responsibilities and functions? In what context am I operating i.e. what is the organisation perspective? Such questions would constitute questions that relate to Dharma.

What is the quality of my interactions? What am I contributing to my environment? What response do I evoke? How do I contribute to others growth and well being? What is the quality of my communication? What commitment do I bring into my work? These are some questions that I think relate to Yama.

What is the quality of my perception and understanding? What anxieties and expectations do I hold? What is my involvement in learning? How persistent are my efforts? How clear are my evaluations of myself? The word Niyama brings some of these questions to my mind.

An enquiry into these types of questions would certainly help one be more of an organisation than just adopting a few techniques derived from the HBR!

Redefining and creating a new web of meanings to this word Dharma that is relevant to today's context is, therefore a process that liberates us from the negatives associated with it. It links us to Indian reality and provides us with a more positive view of ourselves. A view that says, "I can rely on myself and my resources to manage the emerging environment". This orientation requires rigorous and reflective thinking. One has to explore both the tangible and hard realities of one's action, be refined and skilled in that and also examine deeply the tangible mass of impressions, assumption, and conditioning out of which one's thinking and behaviour emerge.

### **Application of the Model to Organisations**

A new reading of this history of the people of Indian and China, in particular, reveals the fact that both these nations were very far advanced in basic science, in technology and the political administration of their vast lands and population that the European nations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We are therefore faced today with the task of helping those forces and potentials that existed in the eastern psyche to re-emerge and flower in the present context.

The application of this model to an organisation has three components: firstly on line changes that create new cultural processes in the organisation, secondly offline training to help an individual clarify their role and re-examine perspectives and thirdly deep sustained research into the Indian reality and continuity to identify and redefine the positives of our culture. I have discussed one possible way of introducing this new perspective to organisations in my paper "Values Formation".

In order to explain the direction an organisation has to take in creating this changed perspective let us look at the oughts of an organisation that holds this paradigm:

1. There will be much greater diagonal and lateral communication, more sharing of task-related information as opposed to controlled vertical communication that is mediated by the 'hierarchy and channels'. The communication is immediate, relevant and context-oriented, not held down by formalities.
2. Individuals would show task commitment and orientation to organisation growth and not get narrowed down to personalised loyalties.

3. Interactions between people will tend to be problem centred, confrontative and fact-based, leading to participative decision making and not forcing, dominating, leading to centralised decision making.
4. Leadership in task groups will emerge based on real skill and competence and not be granted based on status.
5. Individuals will feel able to effect task-related changes and thus view themselves and their roles in a much more positive way.

This does not imply that the organism model is more positive in all circumstances. There are some conditions that are essential for it to prove effective.

1. The most important factor is the environment or the context of the organisation as a whole. When the environment is changing and unpredictable, markets are competitive, the organisation needs to retain high adaptability and suppleness to maintain its effectiveness. Such organisations need to have individuals who hold and act from the "organism concept" of an organisation.
2. Tasks that require a variety of skills and interdependency or that have systemic implications cannot be performed effectively when rigid compartmentalised ideas are held on to.
3. The higher the level of manager the more whole and participative his thinking must be. He is far away from the pitch of the shoe in his own department and is closer to policy matters. Without deeply understood skills of participative and creative working together his decisions will be blind to organisation realities.
4. The technology that is employed by the organisation has its implication on the relevance of the concept. Technologies requiring high specialisation, differentiation and "technology bound" tasks constrain one to follow a systemic model.
5. One of the underlying or implied requirements is the internal environment of the organisation. It is necessary that individuals have high group skills and task competence. Defensiveness, suspicion, internal competition, etc. would not allow a healthy atmosphere to grow.

Since one is discussing conceptual and behavioural changes it does imply that these cannot be created by mere information dissemination or use of new techniques. It calls for an OD approach starting with a diagnosis of where the organisation is and having an idea of the desired direction to go in. It calls for a series of training and other inputs that telescope into each other so that short term benefits are not sacrificed for long term goals. The inputs have to be organisation specific. One cannot go in with predetermined strategies.

I would like to add in conclusion that I am not suggesting a model that opposes or is in competition with the system model. The system model is like the skeleton – it has a rigid structure but no life. It does not seem to be appropriate in the context of the Indian reality. An organism has structure and much more. It could provide the framework for seeding processes more relevant to our conditions. Let me, illustrate with an example. The archaic ideas of the organisation often lead to a scenario like this: The manager is the figure of authority – the top brass of the regiment. All the others look to him for orders and follow the orders. Discipline is maintained. It is a situation where the authority and the followers look at each other. Routine and structure drive out the unstructured and unpredictable. There is in the top the need to maintain authority and in the followers a need to give evidence of being obedient. Efficiency is the order

of the day. What the authority sees as the organisation reality and responds to in its decision making defines the space of the organisation.

The organism model would lead to another scenario: This has its manager and the team but the team is out in the field playing crucial matches. Everyone is oriented towards their roles and the ultimate goal. The manager watches the game, watches each player advising him replaces tired or injured players, coaches the weak ones restructures roles depending on the need. The whole team faces the tasks. The manager supports the team. Each member has autonomy but works in harmony. There is implicit order not enforced discipline. Effectiveness is the criterion within the framework of overall strategy and individual roles. The leader establishes the Dharma, Yama, and Niyama appropriate for the group in its task.

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The basic foundations of this paper are drawn from discussions, oral instructions, and dialogues with some important teachers of Indian tradition. All the ideas on Yoga, Sankhya and other Indian text referred to in the paper are from the oral teachings of Yogacharya T. Krishnamacharya. The understanding of the Vishwakarma tradition is from the discussion, lectures and group process work sessions of Shri Pulin K. Garg and his colleagues in ISISD provides the basis for the organisational aspects and insights. Dialogues and discussions with Shri Dharmपाल form the background of the understanding of India's Social History. Some of these are quoted explicitly others have been impossible to separate from my own understanding and insights.

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