

# **What constitutes good management? Lessons from Ancient Sanskrit Scriptures**

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## **Introduction**

Let me first of all take this opportunity to thank Thirunarayana trust for having given me a chance to share with you the thoughts that I have on the subject of Sanskrit and its relevance for contemporary society. At the outset the choice of this topic may appear to be contradicting to many of you. This is simply because there is a popular thinking that there is very little in Sanskrit that is of great relevance in today's scheme of things. We are witness to great revolutions in the field of science and technology especially in the last 50 years. The culmination of all these is the role of Internet in shaping today's society. On the one hand we are very happy that these technological advancements have greatly improved the standard of living in a country like ours. However, we're not sure if the quality of life has indeed improved in this process. We have so many problems confronting us on a day-to-day basis. The quality of leadership is bad in our country. We do not seem to find credible alternatives to our lives, education, governance and society at large. Our youngsters are not motivated enough, they don't seem to exhibit skills of creativity, innovation and demonstrate extraordinary performances in the chosen fields.

Given this state of affairs what do we expect from a language called Sanskrit, which has apparently ideas dated several thousand years, the syntax that is hard to comprehend for a normal person and an infrastructure that is next to nothing. Naturally, we have our own doubt that Sanskrit has anything to offer to solve or address these problems. There is this dominant perception that Sanskrit indeed has a lot to offer in terms of religious pursuits, philosophical discourses and to think about higher forms of life. Of what relevance are these in solving the kind of problems that we face today? I'll be happy to answer this question by showcasing the usefulness of Sanskrit in secular settings.

## **Management: A context for contemporary relevance**

It is in this context that we need to understand what is the contemporary relevance of Sanskrit. By this what I mean is not just the language but also various Scriptures, ancestral works and wisdom, which are largely preserved in this language. I need to clarify on one important issue even before we discuss the topic for the day. We need to clearly define what we mean by contemporary relevance? To me it appears that there are two important principles behind defining something as contemporary. First, we should be able to relate ideas to current day living. Secondly, we should see evidences of some of the principles being put to practice for solving today's problems. Therefore, I propose to

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approach today's topic with this perspective and will try to show you that Sanskrit is indeed relevant.

Management is not a specialized subject to be used only by a handful of people. Every person who is part of any social system has to utilise management principles and practices. A householder plays the role of the head of a family and needs to understand some of the management principles. A teacher in educational system requires a good understanding of management. Similarly a professional working in any public system or even in a nonprofit organization needs sound principles of management in order to ensure that his/her efforts get fructified into useful benefits to the society at large.

If you look at developing countries like India we find that most of the problems related to our poor state of affairs can be traced to bad management practices that our administrators follow. Therefore, what better context do I need for arguing the contemporary relevance of Sanskrit than the domain of management? Moreover, it also suits me as a professor in the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore.

This is not to mention that Sanskrit has no more applications other than management. Indeed several speakers have in the past made attempts to show how Sanskrit has a rich repository of knowledge that could be gainfully exploited in the area of classical science including mathematics, astronomy, health and so on. I'll be happy to leave an impression at the end of the day that Sanskrit literature has considerable opportunities to draw useful lessons for our day-to-day living.

### **Guiding principles of management**

I have been teaching students of management for the last 15 years and based on the experience I can list down a few important attributes that constitute good management. In today's lecture I would like to explore if there is anything in our ancient literature, which are written in Sanskrit that illuminates us about these principles. Amongst several principles of good management I would like to list down five. The first and foremost requirement is the ability to visualize a big picture and an ability to be creative in addressing various issues that we confront. When a manager develops skills of being creative and visualizing a big picture then he or she realizes the need for systematic approaches to problem solving. This would include a sense of keen observation, empirical understanding of events, classification, coding, generalization and verification. This in my opinion is the second important attribute of a management. Developing these skills invariably leads one to perform exceptionally well, develop great insights about problems and solutions.

How do you develop these systematic approaches to problem solving? The third attribute that I would like to introduce is an attitude towards learning as a way of life, which prepares the person and his peers to develop systematic approaches. In the last 10 years, several management schools world over are struggling to impart these attributes amongst managers. The fourth attribute that I consider important is an ability to manage conflicts that arise between long-term and short-term. In every situation of management, resolving

long-term versus short-term issues is an important skill and managers need to know how to imbibe this quality. The last attribute of good management in my opinion is having leadership traits. Great performances and great advancements are invariably linked to having credible leadership.

We shall inquire if knowledge of Sanskrit is relevant to understand these guiding principles of good management. Let me take up each guiding principle of management and for each of those try to show how we find wonderful expressions in our ancient work.

### **Creativity promotes alternative view points**

The first and the foremost requirement of a good manager or a leader is his or her ability to think creatively and to paint a big picture for the task or the organization, which he or she leads. One of the serious deficiencies that we have noticed amongst Indian managers through our numerous interactions is that they are not adequately creative. No wonder we find that the quality of management is far from satisfactory amongst the Indian managers today. Why is it that we do not exhibit adequate creativity in discharging our duties? What is it that we are missing? Where should we look for nurturing our creative skills?

Who are the most creative people on the earth? Did our ancestors believe in thinking big? You ask an average young person in this country the answer would be in the negative. Somehow we have not been able to get convinced of ourselves that we indeed had a glorious past and our ancestors were masters in these principles of management. Let me show you some examples.

As far as I know, the essence of the Vedic thought and Hinduism promotes diversity as a way of life. Don't you think this virtue is a good indicator of the creative talent of a society? Let us take the simple idea of how to reach salvation. If you look at our yogic sciences four alternative methods have been proposed; Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Gnana Yoga. We were told that each individual is unique and therefore requires unique methods of reaching salvation.

For time immemorial, the human race has constantly engaged in trying to understand the relationship between God, man and the universe. If I carefully look at our ancient literature, there are six schools of Indian philosophy that seeks to address this important issue in its own way. These are *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Purva Mimamsa*, *Uttara Mimamsa*. Each of these alternative schools of thought has elaborately addressed this issue.

Look at the greatest contributions from our Rishis and ancestors in the form of Eighteen *Mahapuranas*. We have exactly six each covering *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. We also have the greatest possible creative narration of the two *Ithihasas*: *Ramayana* and *Mahabhratha*. Of course we also have a legacy of rich mythological stories. Don't you think that there could be no better expression of one's creativity than those expressed in these great works of our ancestors? What more evidence do you need to agree that we as a society believed in the value of being creative, understanding reality by approaching it

in different ways, expressing the idea in different ways, recognizing the need for communicating ideas differently for different sets of people? Don't you think these are the very values that a good practitioner of management requires today?

All that I have is shown so far is just to encourage you to think that perhaps our ancestors have cherished these values of creativity. There are better ways of understanding how creativity in fact manifested in our culture, society and thinking. Take any of the ancient works such as Upanishads or Gita. One thing that is strikingly different is our ability to provide unique mechanisms of knowledge representation. Let me give you some examples.

Look at the following verse from the Mundako Upanishad:

अग्निर्मूर्धा चक्षुषी चन्द्रसूर्यौ  
 दिशः श्रोत्रे वाग् विवृताश्च वेदाः ।  
 वायुः प्राणो हृदयं विश्वमस्य  
 पद्भ्यां पृथिवी ह्येष सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा ॥

You have a similar passage in Laghunyasa too:

अग्निं मे वाचि श्रितः ...  
 सूर्यो मे चक्षुषि श्रितः ...  
 चन्द्रमा मे मनसि श्रितः ...  
 दिशो मे श्रोत्रे श्रिताः ...  
 पृथिवी मे शरीरे श्रिता ...

If we try to translate these works we may sometimes end up with strange and confusing ideas. For instance why do we say the presiding deity of the pair of ears is space (directions) or for that matter the presiding deity of the pair of eyes is Sun or *Agni*? On the face of it such a description of the sense organs and their masters may sound

nonsensical if we do not understand the basic element of creativity that drives such unique knowledge representations.

Think for a moment what will happen if there is no light in this whole world? Let us assume that it is pitch dark everywhere. Of what avail is the power of vision when there is no light around us? Similarly, if there is no ether around us we know very well that sound waves cannot travel from one place to another. Therefore, the above description of sense organs is not only creative, but very efficient in communicating some of the ideas of its functioning and enabling mechanisms required. There are several examples like this, which I can keep on quoting for the rest of the lecture. Another great example is the beautiful descriptions in Purusha Sukta. For want of time, I would like to move to the other issue of thinking big as an important attribute of management.

### **Thinking big helps achieve great things**

Why is it important that managers should think big? Great achievements, great performances and greater level of satisfaction first require an ability to visualize big things in life. Ability to think big brings along with that an intense desire to achieve the dream and motivates the person to carry forward his vision along with his peers in achieving such a goal. This is true not only for a manager but for any visionary. Unfortunately, we do not find today's youngsters exhibiting this attribute. Is there anything to learn from our past as far as thinking big is concerned? The first thing that comes to my mind about how to think big is chapter 11 of *Bhagavad Gita*, wherein, there is a beautiful description of *Vishwaroopa Darshan* of Lord Krishna. Let me first recite the *slokas* before I bring to your attention some interesting things that I have come across about this.

एवमुक्त्वा ततो राजन् महायोगेश्वरो हरिः ।

दर्शयामास पार्थाय परमं रूपमैश्वरम् ॥ ११.९ ॥

अनेकवक्त्रनयनं अनेकाद्भुतदर्शनम् ।

अनेकदिव्याभरणं दिव्यानेकोद्यतायुधम् ॥ ११.१० ॥

दिव्यमाल्याम्बरधरं दिव्यगन्धानुलेपनम् ।

सर्वाश्चर्यमयं देवं अनन्तं विश्वतोमुखम् ॥ ११.११ ॥

दिवि सूर्यसहस्रस्य भवेद्युगपदुत्थिता ।

यदि भाः सदृशी सा स्यात् भासस्तस्य महात्मनः ॥ ११.१२ ॥

Look at the above stanza where there is a beautiful description of the radiance of Lord Krishna. It is equated to the light emerging out of thousand sunrises at the same time. Here is an example of not only creativity but also the ability to think big. We all know that the atom bomb was first exploded by Robert Oppenheimer and his team. But what we do not know is that he uttered these very verses from *Bhagavad Gita*. He said the light that emerged out of the explosion reminded him of the thousand rising Suns as described in these verses. How many Indians would have related some of their unprecedented experiences in life to such beautiful expressions found in many of our ancient Scriptures and *Vedantic* texts? Why is it that we never think about the work done by our ancestors? Perhaps one reason for this could be that we are not even aware of what we have in our Sanskrit Scriptures.

Our ancestors went to the extent of saying that to think of smaller things in life is equivalent to pursuing mortal issues. To them anything big and thinking big is indeed an expression of immortality. The following verse beautifully brings this concept:

नाल्पे सुखमस्ति भूमैव सुखम् यो वै

भूमा तदमृतमथ यदल्पं तन्मर्त्यम् ॥

"In the Little there lies no happiness  
The vast alone is the happiness  
The vast is the immortality  
The little is the mortality"

Perhaps there is no evidence to our ancestors ability to think big better than their approaches towards mathematics and the number system in particular. If you look at the second chapter of *Lilavati* of Bhaskaracharya, there is the description of numbers from  $10^0$  to  $10^{17}$ . Here is that description of the numbers by Bhaskaracharya:

एकदशशतसहस्रायुतलक्षप्रयुतकोटयः क्रमशः ।

अर्बुधमब्जं खर्वनिखर्वमहापद्मशंकवस्तस्मात् ॥

जलधिश्चान्त्यं मध्यं परार्धमिति दशगुणोत्तरं संज्ञाः

संख्यायाः स्थानानां व्यवहारार्थं कृताः पूर्वेः ॥

एक – 1	अब्जं - $10^9$ (Billion)
दश – $10^1$	खर्व – $10^{10}$
शत – $10^2$	निखर्व – $10^{11}$
सहस्र – $10^3$	महापद्म – $10^{12}$ (Trillion)
अयुत – $10^4$	शंकु – $10^{13}$
लक्ष – $10^5$	जलधि – $10^{14}$
प्रयुत – $10^6$ (Million)	अन्त्य - $10^{15}$ (Zillion)
कोटि – $10^7$	मध्य – $10^{16}$
अर्बुधं - $10^8$	परार्ध – $10^{17}$

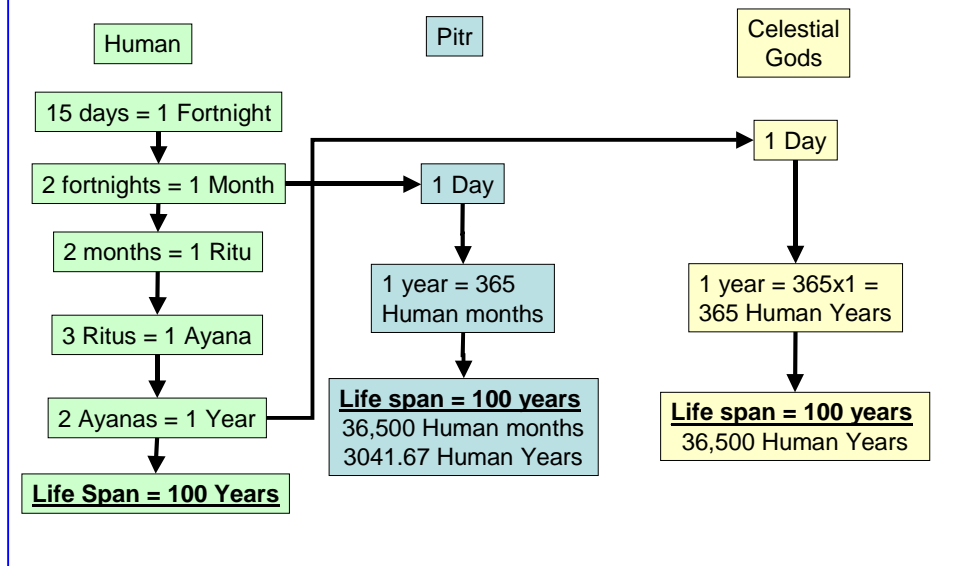
Our ancestors felt the need for a much larger numbers than this. I am given to understand that there are terms for numbers up to  $10^{140}$  in Sanskrit.

I would like to bring your attention another evidence of how our ancestors have thought about the number system and the need for very large numbers. If you look at *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Canto three, Chapter 11, there is a beautiful description of the concept of time. If you go through that chapter you find the description of time **ranging from  $10^6$  seconds to  $10^{17}$  years**. Let me show you the broad schema with which they have defined time and how they have extended the idea of time up to one half of the life of Brahma, which is known as *Parardha*.

## Unit of time – How elaborate can we think? श्रीमद् भागवत महापुराण – Canto 3, Chapter 11

	Paramanu	(1)	1 Paramanu = $2.634 \times 10^{-5}$ seconds
X 2	Anu	(2)	1 Nimesha = 0.4267 seconds
X 3	Trasrenu	(6)	
X 3	Truti	(18)	
X 100	Vedha	(1,800)	
X 3	Lava	(5,400)	
X 3	Nimesha	(16,200)	
X 3	Kshana	(48,600)	
X 5	Kashta	(243,000)	
X 15	Laghu	(3,645,000)	
X 15	Nadhika	(54,675,000)	
X 7.5	Prahara	(328,050,000)	(1/4 of day time = 3 hrs)

## Unit of time – How elaborate can we think? श्रीमद् भागवत महापुराण – Canto 3, Chapter 11



Unit of time – How elaborate can we think?  
श्रीमद् भागवत महापुराण – Canto 3, Chapter 11

Four Yugas	Celestial Years			Human Years
	Duration	Sandhi	Total	Total
Krta Yuga	4,000	800	4,800	175,200,000
Satya Yuga	3,000	600	3,600	131,400,000
Dwapara Yuga	2,000	400	2,400	87,600,000
Kali Yuga	1,000	200	1,200	43,800,000
<b>Total of 4 yugas</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>12,000</b>	<b>438,000,000</b>
<b>1 Cycle of 4 Yugas</b>				<b>438,000,000</b>
Day time of Brahma	1000 Yuga Cycles			438,000,000,000
Night time of Brahma	1000 Yuga Cycles			438,000,000,000
One day of Brahma	Kalpa			876,000,000,000
Day time of Brahma	14 manus			
Life of Each Manu				31,285,714,286
100 Years of Brahma	100x365x876,000,000,000			31,974,000,000,000,000
One half of Brahma's Life	Parardha			15,987,000,000,000,000

There are many more examples that I can quote as evidences of our ancestors ability to think big. Let me show you another example before I take up the next attribute for good management. Here is a famous *mantra* from *Mundako Upansihad*. I am sure many of you know this.

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं नेमा

विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।

तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्यभासा

सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

Look at the mantra. Can you think of a source of light, which makes the sun or the moon a non-entity? Can you think of a situation in which Sun and the moon no longer shine? Clearly such an expression of radiance and light is orders of magnitude higher than our understanding of light in a normal sense.

It is therefore amply clear that by being aware of these great works, we will definitely get inspired to think big. Reading these great works of our ancestors, understanding the beauty of these values will breed in us a desire and an attitude to think big.

## **Spirit of inquiry**

Another important attribute in management is the ability of an individual to imbibe a spirit of inquiry. Throughout our ancient Scriptures we find that our ancestors have not been wanting at all when it comes to the spirit of inquiry.

Look at the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* and count for yourself how many questions were asked during the discourses. In *Prashno Upanishad*, *Pippalada* and the six disciples discuss some of the toughest ideas about life, nature, God and the universe with their teacher. The entire discussion is in a question-and-answer mode as you all know. If we look at *Katho Upanishad* we find that there is a discussion between *Nachiketas* and *Yama*. Despite very tempting rewards, *Nachiketas* does not seem to succumb to the temptations. Similarly, in the *Mundako Upanishad* there is a basic question about *Para* and *Apara Vidya* raised by the great householder *Shaunaka*:

शैनको ह वै महाशालो अङ्गिरसं प्रपच्छ कस्मिन् विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं  
विज्ञातं भवतीति

It is clear from the above sloka that *Shaunaka* was a satisfied person in materialistic aspects of life (महाशालः). Despite this there was the spirit of inquiry, which induces him to raise the question with the teacher. Needless to say the extent to which we see *Arjuna* exhibiting his spirit of inquiry while in conversation with Lord Krishna amidst the battlefield. How many questions and how many interceptions are there while Krishna was giving the divine knowledge to *Arjuna*?

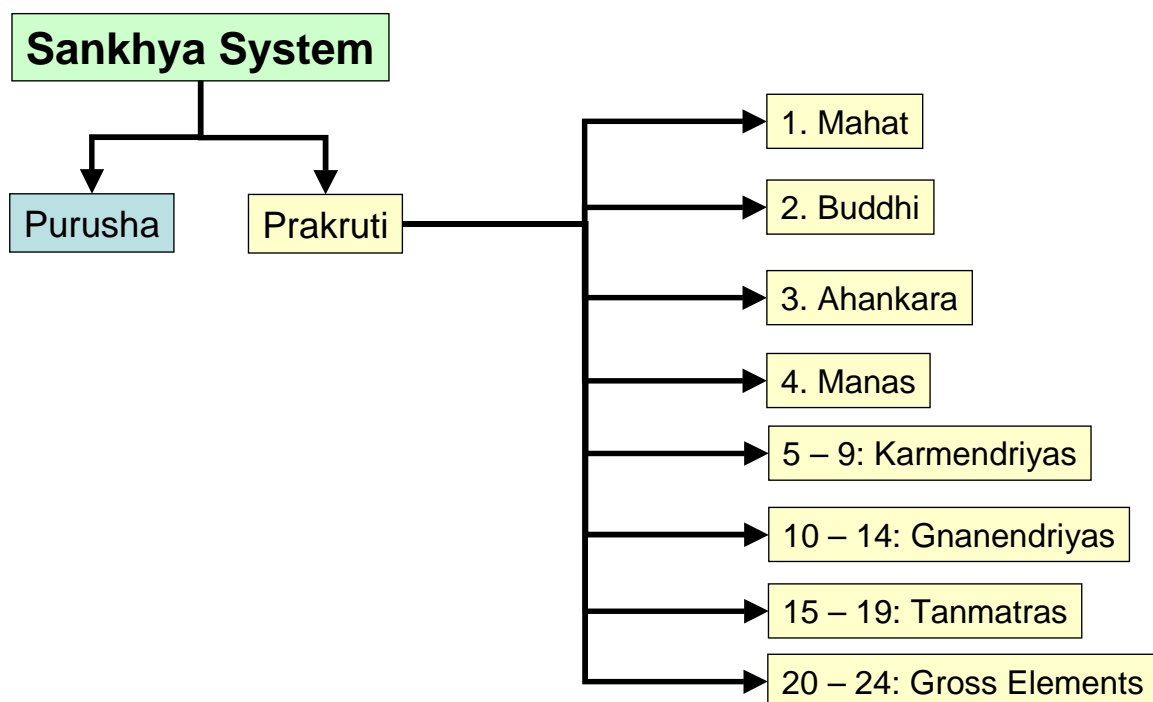
You might be wondering how our ancestors were able to develop superior knowledge, unique knowledge representation systems, diversified and alternative theories and the perfect language called Sanskrit. Let me tell you as a researcher that the prerequisite for such things to develop is the basic spirit of inquiry. Therefore it's only natural that we see evidences of the spirit of inquiry in several of the ancient works.

## **Developing systematic knowledge**

Spirit of inquiry is just one part of the story. The other important requirement is an ability to keenly observe events, systematically develop classification methodologies, empirical generalization of observed phenomena and finally leading to theory building. As a management researcher I find these are very valuable requirements for developing

superior principles of management. Let me take some time and show you some evidences of how our ancestors have always believed in systematic classification coding and empirical generalization of observed phenomena that I was talking about.

What happens when you have a systematic approach to developing knowledge? One immediate benefit that we will get is to develop better understanding of seemingly complex ideas. We will also be in a position to classify things better and use the classification framework to explain a variety of observed phenomenon. I see evidences of these in several of the ancient works. For example, look at the *Sankhya* system that seeks to explain the complex idea of the relationship between man and the God. Using a system of 24 components, the *Sankhya* system brings out this relationship in the manner that we can understand and relate to.



Another example that I can give you is a description of substance and their properties in *Vulluka's Vaiseshika*. A brief description of that is given below.

द्रव्य – Substance (9 categories)

गुण – Quality

कर्म – Motion

सामान्य – General Category

विशेष - Enables to perceive things differently from others

समवाय – Relating substance to its qualities

अभाव – Negation of false knowledge

The system suggests that there are nine categories of substances and each of the substance can be further characterized using its quality, properties of motion, general category, ability to pursue things differently from others, relating substance to its qualities and an understanding of properties that don't get associated with the substance. Using this framework one can develop a good understanding of substance and the characteristics.

Let us look at another example again from *Mundako Upanishad*, where there is a description of seven types of flames. I was informally talking to one of my friend who suggested to me that flame that a layman knows is indeed made of several zones. Our ancestors identified several different types of flames as suggested by the following verses:

काली कराली च मनोजवा च

सुलोहिता च सुधूम्रवर्णा ।

स्पुलिङ्गिनी विश्वरुची च देवी

लेलायमाना इति सप्त जिह्वाः ॥

<p>Kali – Black  Karali – Terrific one  Manojava – Swift one  Sulohita – Deep red  Su dhumravarna – Smoke coloured  Sphulingini – Sparkling  Vishwaruchi – Bright all shining</p>
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Perhaps, there is no better evidence of our ancestors' ability to develop systematic knowledge than what you see in Canto 3, chapter 11 of *Bhagavata Maha Purana*. In this chapter, I already showed you how the concept of time has been described vividly. Also contained in this chapter is a precise definition for time. You realise that this is important prerequisite before you really defined alternative scales of time. See below the description pertaining to the definition of time.

द्वादशार्धपलोन्मानं चतुर्भिश्चतुरङ्गुलैः ।

स्वर्णमाषैः कृतच्छिद्रं यावत् प्रस्थजलप्लुतम् ॥

Essentially, the description of time is as follows. Take a pot of copper weighing six *Palas*, which can hold one *Prastha* of water and pierce the bottom of the pot using a gold needle weighing four *Mahsas* and four *angulas* long. If you leave the part in the water surface, the time taken by such a part to be filled with water and consequently submerged is known as one *Nadhika*. Don't you see a scientific rigour in this definition of time?

Who computed the velocity of light as we know it today? If you referred to any modern textbook of physics, you get references dating back to 400 years. For example in 1676 AD, Olaf Roemer a Danish astronomer computed the velocity of light to be  $2.1 \times 10^8$  m/sec. In 1728 AD, Bradley, an English astronomer computer another value which was closer to the current value that we know. However how many of you know that there are references in the *Rig Veda* that point to the velocity of light as accurate as what we do today? I give below a partial quotation and explanation.

योजनानां सहस्रद्वे द्वेशते द्वेच ... एकेन निमिक्षषार्धेन

क्रमेण... नमोस्तु ते

Half Nimesha = 0.21333333 seconds

1 British Yard = 0.9144 meters

1 Kose = 8000 British Yard

1 Yojana = 4 Kose

2202 Yojanas =  $2202 \times 4 \times 8000 \times 0.9144 = 64,432,281.60$  metres

Velocity of Light =  $3.020263 \times 10^8$  m/sec

The earliest living example of what is called decentralisation and delegation is vividly available in *Prashnopanishad*. that has a clear reference that 'one person cannot handle it and so I am dividing it' – the idea of decentralization and delegation. In the third chapter the guru (in response to the question raised by *Kausalya*) talks about '*Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udhana, and Samana*' Let us look at the definition of *Vyana* in *Prashno Upanishad*.

हृदि ह्येष आत्मा ॥ अत्रैतत् एकशतं नाडिनां  
तासां शतं शतमेकैकस्यां द्वासप्तर्तिं द्वासपततिः  
प्रतिशाखा नाडि सहस्राणि भवन्ति  
असु व्यानः चरन्ति ॥

Look at this particular phrase – it says, ‘हृदि ह्येष आत्मा ’. The atma is the heart; it is also the seat of the nervous system, actually. The ultimate spirit sits here. How does it branch out? It says, ‘अत्रैतत् एकशतं नाडिनां – there are a hundred and one nerves, ‘*nadis*’, which are emerging out of it. Then it goes on, ‘तासां शतं शतमेकैकस्यां द्वासप्तर्तिं ’ – out of each one of these *nadis* you get hundred, and from each one of them seventy two thousand. When the teacher discusses about vyana, this is the description, and if you multiply all that, you realize that this the nervous system that they were talking about, and now it is closely verified by studies using modern gadgets such as microscopes. We are talking about 72 crores; 72 lakhs *nadis*, which are entirely spread in the body – that is what the guru says.

How are they trying to make such observations? That means there was some systematic way of looking at things; there was a spirit of scientific inquiry; there was a way of documenting all that - that is what I am trying to show you.

Another example of our ability to systematically develop knowledge is clear from the stark contrast between modern approaches to health and our ancestral approaches. This is apparent from the differences in the definitions pertaining to being healthy. Let me contrast our ancestors’ definitions with that of WHO.

### WHO definition of health<sup>2</sup>

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

The correct bibliographic citation for the definition is:

Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/>

by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

The Definition has not been amended since 1948.

### Ancient definitions for health

In contrast to this definition, our definitions were much more holistic. It emphasizes the need for including issues much more than mere physical aspects. Given below are two alternative definitions:

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियाः ।

प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्याभिधीयते ॥ (Shushru Samhita)

स्वस्मिन् स्थाने स्वस्मिन् कर्मणि स्वस्वरूपेण स्थीयते इति

स्वस्थः (Charaka Samhita)

In the definition from Shushru Samhita the latter part of the definition clearly states that being healthy also means having healthy soul, mind, sensory organs (suggesting healthy thinking and action). Similarly, Charaka emphasizes on being one's own self as the fit definition for being healthy. Such broader viewpoint of things and robust definitions are nothing but the outcome of spirit of inquiry and a systematic approach to observation and knowledge creation.

In its simplest form the word "health" means the absence of disease. In 1940, the World Health Organization (WHO) described health as the "state of complete physical, emotional, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This widely accepted definition was expanded in the 1970's and 1980's as other components were included: intellectual, environmental, and spiritual health. The balance of all these components is based on the principle of self-responsibility.

### **Learning as a way of life**

We saw so many examples of creating superior knowledge that led our ancestors to develop frameworks to understand complex ideas in life, develop deeper insights into observed phenomena and lay down several governing principles in science, mathematics and astronomy. How do you think this was possible? What infrastructure do we need to develop these skills? We find answers to this question by understanding the concept of learning as our ancestors practiced.

I teach a very interesting concept called creating a learning organisation, because it is the “in thing” for business organisations. Being in the institute of management I am supposed to impart new ideas in management to our students. I always use the following couplet, which beautifully summarises the concept of learning as practiced by our ancestors perhaps about 1000 years ago:

आचार्यात् पादमादत्ते पादं शिष्यः स्वमेधया ।

पादं सब्रह्मचारिभ्यो पादं कालक्रमेण च ॥

The idea is that there are four quarters of learning – ‘आचार्यात् पादम्’, that is, teacher can teach only one fourth of your knowledge ‘पादम् शिष्यः स्वमेधया’, there is enormous emphasis on self-reflection and thinking. If people refuse to think, and internalize and do some reflection on the ideas they have discussed, then 25% learning is gone. With so much emphasis in the last 10 years in the business schools and corporate entities on what is called small group activities, on team effort – there are potential opportunities for learning during the team exercises. Interestingly, the *sloka* says that पादम् सब्रह्मचारिभ्यो In a gurukula, the *brahmacharis* sit together and collectively discuss the subject matter and they get 25% learning. So there is a likelihood that 25% learning improves because they are a team – learning in a team, understanding the dynamics of it.

After considerable research, during the 1990s management researchers concluded that learning is a continuous process. On the other hand, our ancestors reached the same conclusion 1000 years ago. They proclaimed, ‘पादम् कालक्रमेण च’, that is, learning will happen in a continuous fashion, and even quantified its contribution to be roughly one fourth. We have been teaching this in the past 10 years, and that learning is a continuous process. ‘*Kaala kramena* ----’, you don’t get it just like that; there is no short cut. There is a way of learning, which has its own time and experience and so on. I find that nothing can communicate the idea better in my lectures on learning than this *sloka*.

I am using this couplet in my learning organisations lecture simply because I stumbled on it accidentally. I am sure other professionals have such experiences of discovering the treasures in Sanskrit rather accidentally. Of what avail if we systematically dig our literature with specific focus. We may end up uncovering many more similar to the above *sloka*?

Clearly, such a paradigm to learning will foster a culture of promoting the spirit of inquiry, encouraging students to keep discussions alive by asking questions, facilitating

the learning process, which emphasized self-reflection and thinking. All these will result in a superior learning infrastructure. No wonder, Nalanda and Pataliputra were well-known centers of learning and we had visitors from all over the world to some of the greatest centers of learning that when India in ancient times.

### **Resolving Short term Vs Long term conflicts**

Management is all about resolving short-term versus long-term conflicts. In the last 20 years the success of Japan is management was attributed to the inability to resolve this conflict very well. On the other hand, firms in the Western countries could not effectively resolve short-term versus long-term conflicts. What have our ancestors has to say on this issue? Before we take up this question let me take a minute or two to introduce to you a modern concept in accounting called going concern. What it literally means is when the judge the performance of a company typically at the end of every year we make an important assumption that we are not going to wind of the company. In other words the same is a going concern that has hopes of continuing in the future. This is precisely why we have a profit and loss account and the balance sheet to judge the performance of the company.

Where do you find a parallel to this idea? Indeed the answer is at the core of Hindu way of living, and the doctrine of reincarnation. As Hindus, we are told how we are governed by the law of Karma. In Hindu way of living, every individual during every lifetime performs several good and bad deeds. We are told that at the end of the useful life what we carry along with *Linga Sarira* is nothing but a net of these effects. We carry these to one more reincarnation and the journey goes on like this until we're liberated. Don't you see an exact parallel of this thinking is that of the modern concept of a going concern?

The challenging part however is the ability to manage life during this sojourn and finding a way of ultimately getting liberated. This is a classical problem of resolving short-term versus long-term conflict. If you look at our ancient literature, there is plenty of discussions on how one should handle this conflict. Understanding the methodologies and the manner in which these arguments are made may go along way in shaping our own understanding and applying the same idea to management. Let me just take one or two examples and point you to those with richer that these ideas are indeed discussed.

Mundako Upanishad centrally brings this issue to focus by talking about Para & Apra Vidya. Chapter 1 talks about अपरा विद्या and Chapter 2 talks about परा विद्या.

द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद्

ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति पराचैवापरा च ॥

Similarly, chapter 13 of Bhagavat Gita on क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञविभागयोगः has the same idea

In chapter 13, verse 13 this is what Krishna says when he talks about the eternal goal.

ज्ञेयं यत्तत्प्रवक्ष्यामि यज्ज्ञात्वाऽमृतमश्नुते ।

अनादिमत्परं ब्रह्म न सत्तन्नासदुच्यते ॥ १३.१३ ॥

"I shall now explain the knowable, knowing which you will taste the eternal. This is beginningless, and it is subordinate to Me. It is called Brahman, the spirit, and it lies beyond the cause and effect of this material world."

### Leadership traits

Let me go on to the next attribute of good practices in management. Leadership is an important issue management. How do we create good leaders is a question that bothers many of us in recent years. Let me quote one or two slokas from Bhagavad Gita.

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठः तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।

स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ ३.२१ ॥

The above sloka brings in a nutshell the idea of leading by example. Leaders need to practice what they preach otherwise they lose their credibility. The erosion of leadership traits in today's brand of leaders is primarily due to the absence of this aspect. This is a well known and easier understood dimension of a good leader. Let us look at another example, which brings out even subtler concept of leadership.

समदुःखसुखः स्वस्थः समलोष्टाश्मकांचनः ।

तुल्यप्रियाप्रियो धीरः तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः ॥ १४.२४ ॥

मानापमानयोस्तुल्यः तुल्यो मित्रारिपक्षयोः ।

सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी गुणातीतः स उच्यते ॥ १४.२५ ॥

What is happening in several corporate and other organisations in the world is personal flattery. People do these things to get personal and professional favours. Those succumb to these lose their credibility as the leader. They can be good managers, but they can be

never be a good leader. 'तुल्यनिन्दात्मसंस्तुतिः' – here Krishna says if somebody personally flatters you, 'आत्मसंस्तुतिः', which is like saying, 'you are king; you are the greatest person', etc. and even if somebody talks against you, 'निन्दा', even if they completely disagree with you; even if they foul on you, you should not lose your balance. If somebody personally flatters you or if somebody disagrees with you, take it evenly. I agree, if we can find somebody like that, he would be truly great.

Look at another one. It is even more interesting. He says, 'मानापमानयोस्तुल्यः ---' – this is the greatest requirement for emotional stability? These days, you know, what we call the emotional quotient is being tested. So, who is a good leader? A leader is somebody who is not emotional. 'If you do something great; don't lose your balance. Even if you have lost everything; don't lose your balance. You try to know how to keep your nerves.

Krishna further says, look at people beyond their group affiliations, 'मित्रारिपक्षयोः'. Don't see whether he belongs to the opposition group or my group. Look at the objectivity of the whole discussion – great leaders share these attitudes. Krishna says people have all these – 'गुणातीतः स उच्यते'. Such a person is said to have conquered these weaknesses. So we have a good explanation gleaned from this to identify the leader.

So you know, there is so much, which I can write even for my management articles. I try to see practice of management from these scriptures, and what I have done is, accidentally stumbled upon some of these. One day when I was reading the Bhagawad Gita these parallels struck me, though I have not gone about it systematically.

## The way forward

Ladies and gentlemen, we have covered sufficient ground on this issue of relevance of Sanskrit in the contemporary society by taking the example of management. Today I have chosen to tread along the ground call management. This is more of a convenience and a conscious choice. Perhaps on a different day if we take up an alternative topic of public administration, science, mathematics, or astronomy we may be in a position to argue in a very similar fashion. In fact, the other speakers in this Sanskrit & Science series would probably do this. There is one more issue, which seems to strongly suggest the need for Sanskrit in two days world. Intellectual property rights which increasingly govern world trade requires fundamentally an ability to establish the chronology of events leading to the process or a product or knowledge for which the intellectual property is being claimed.

Where do you think we will have evidence of unique processes and knowledge? Undoubtedly our repository of knowledge is all preserved and buried in the medium

called Sanskrit. Therefore in any case relevance of Sanskrit assumes a significant position today. On the other hand, the existing infrastructure for imparting Sanskrit education is far from what is required to gainfully exploit benefits from ancient wisdom. How are we going to solve this problem? Do you expect the government and the political leaders to take positions on where to place Sanskrit? Do you expect some miracle to happen so that a critical mass learns Sanskrit adequately and begins to benefit from ancient wisdom?

To me it appears that there is a more realistic option of dealing with the language. I see promise only in two categories of our population. The first is the students who are in a position to make a conscious choice to study Sanskrit at the school and the College level. By doing so, they prepare themselves for greater, more meaningful and targeted efforts of putting the language to day-to-day use in the future. The other is the Professionals who have sorted out the major concern of earning a satisfactory livelihood. It is time that they take up to learning Sanskrit more from a point of view of bringing out interesting ideas and ancient wisdom pertaining to the profession into the mainstream. If several of us make a conscious effort to participate in this process slowly the government, the policymakers and the public will see the relevance of the language and a day will come when learning Sanskrit and putting the learning into use will be as attractive as doing that with the foreign language called English.