SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND THE ETHICAL DIMENSION IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

As William Crittenden Frederick, author of the book "Corporation Be Good! The Story of CSR", argues, this search for meaning and purpose appears to be a constant in human affairs and underlines the widespread presence of religious activities and beliefs throughout human societies past and present., The faith of business leaders and investors consciously and unconsciously shapes and informs their value system, ethics and decision making. The integration of their religious beliefs can enormously influence business decisions and shape a more socially responsible business conduct. The concept of Social responsibility among businessmen, particularly in India, is not new and can be easily seen in the form of magnificent temples, high mosques, large dharamsalas and great educational institutions. However, this paper wants to re visit the possible link that might exist between the deeper spiritual and religious values shared by an innovative leader and the work field environment to an extent that this meaning quest in the one for self-identity may also spiritualise in turn an otherwise dehumanized work environment that usually houses only a team of machine like workers.

KEY WORDS: business, ethics, corporate, social responsibility,

INTRODUCING SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS IN THE WORKPLACE

As William Crittenden

The question often is; can an element of our human side, the human dimension, be retained in an otherwise machine-like existence in a work place. This question is more relevant to workers where the tasks at hand are mechanized and do not involve a modicum of creativity or what can be termed as 'thinking'. This thinking, on the other hand, which is an essential element of all creativity, makes us touch that barrier which transcends the machine to the humane. Let us call that barrier 'spirituality'. Spirituality at the workplace has had popular adherents who have capably argued for its implementation. Kent Rhodes states that, 'Workplace spirituality has continued to gain acceptance as a topic of study in business schools across the country, presumably with application to practice within organizations. Though initially the topic of spirituality in the workplace may have been viewed

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as a passing fad, it now seems to have reached trend status. Management textbooks routinely include sections about "workplace spirituality," and professional organizations such as the Academy of Management offer membership in special interest groups emphasizing spirituality."[i]   The argument here is not one of the needs or the popularity of workplace spirituality. It is a foregone conclusion that the fad created by the adherents and supporters of spirituality at the workplace have managed to make themselves heard only because it is a truth. In the aftermath of business fiascos like Enron, ethics in business had come to play a prominent role. The question of ethics in business, or at the 'work place', for that matter, has come to be an issue of great deliberation and animated discussion.

SCHOOLS OF ETHICAL THOUGHT

There are two schools of ethical thought in any platform. The first school is that of 'religion'. Ethics, here, is merged with deep religious expectations from the 'adherents' of this school. The two: religion and ethics are so radically entwined that there is no scope for the existence of one without the other. As long as one stays within the domains of one's religious dogmas, one is safe from repercussions arising from that community. This school of ethics is more apparent in countries like India, where religion binds the society more strongly than any other force. Thus, questions of ethics in even minor issues like food and dressing turn out to be a matter of choice between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong'. As long as one plays safe, one is considered acceptable! This finds tinges in the workplace too, where workers generally tend to associate and identify with the 'acceptable' lot. The second, more secular sect of ethics, is the general ethical group of adherents where the norms of 'right' and 'wrong' are universal in nature and do not depend upon religious background. This group is slowly finding acceptance and followers even in India, where religion holds so important a role! Here, ethics are dependent on values, norms set by humanity, laws and parameters of general rules and regulations. There is a narrow line of differentiation between the two and this line is the line of acceptance. The second school is all inclusive and universal in nature, more accepting and easily defined.

DO ETHICS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY WITH SPIRITUALITY?

Now that the two schools have found definition, the question put up at the outset of this paper is delved upon again. The question is; does 'ethics' have a role to play with spirituality? The answer is an emphatic yes! To prove this, we will first look up the phenomenon called 'whistle-blowing'. Whistle-blowing occurs when an employee realizes the fact that his employer is engaged in unethical practices and he decides to come clean and expose the practice. In other words, he blows the 'whistle' on his employer. Now, this is no easy job and requires great mental strength as well as a

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brave outlook towards life. What does a whistle—blower gets in return? Usually, a bad reputation as unloyal and also loses the job. Then why does he do it? The answer lies in the two words which have become the core of this discussion, 'spirituality' and 'ethics'. He feels spiritually enhanced and ethically strong. He feels good about himself, that when the matter came to a point of no return, he took the right decision. Whatever the outcome, whatever the loss, his general feeling of himself as an entity would find reward for this action.

Robert Bellah sums it up this way, "The way 'spirituality' is often used suggests that we exist solely as a collection of individuals, not as members of a religious community, and that religious life is merely a private journey." He goes on to suggest critically that religious expression in Western societies has been boiled down to deeply held cultural beliefs about free markets and free choice. "It is the religious expression of the ideology of free-market economics and of the radical 'disencumbered' individualism that idolized the choice-making individual as the prime reality in the world. [ii]

SOME INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

That was the more or less the western outlook on issues such as CSR, public work, corporations, ethics and spirituality etc.. In India, even more work has been left to be done where loyalty to ones work plays a more than prominent role, more even than loyalty to religion sometimes. Thus, for an Indian worker, questions of whistle-blowing are not as easy as one might find in the west. Here, a worker considers his employer on a pedestal almost equaling worship. Here, the decision to blow the whistle has repercussion beyond mere personal feelings of spiritual enhancement. Here, the question is one of a life changing role and mutiny against ones highest redeemer. Thus, the question of spirituality from the Indian perspective has to be reworked to fit the mould. The mould that is essentially Indian.

Does this mean Whistle Blowing is looked down upon in India? Does it mean it is a practice not encouraged? From certain evidence this does not seem to be the picture. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2011, of the IPC was a step where workers choosing to blow the whistle on their employers would find protection by law. This seemed to have rubbed off the right way as seen from the following case:

In 2013, generic pharmaceutical company Ranbaxy pleaded guilty to seven criminal felonies for drug manufacturing fraud and agreed to cough up an unprecedented $500 million in fines.

The case against Ranbaxy was significant not only for being a successful prosecution of a powerful India corporation. It also marked the triumph of Dinesh Thakur, who took on the pharmaceutical

giant by tapping into United States' whistle-blower protection laws that incentivize and protect people who expose unethical business practices.

Mr. Thakur was a Director at Ranbaxy after joining the business in 2003. He brought to the company's notice certain fraudulent practices with regard to drug development, manufacturing, and testing data. In 2005 he was compelled to resign after exposing the fraud internally.

Thereafter working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Department of Justice, he exposed widespread "false, fictitious, and fraudulent statements" made to regulators resulting in substandard and unapproved drugs.

The footprints left by Mr. Thakur are large. The FDA increased the number of inspectors allocated to India and China from four in 2009 to nearly 15 at present.

Increased resources have aided in the identification of other problems at other Indian companies. Even today, the FDA continues to exert pressure on Ranbaxy to adhere to current Good Manufacturing Practices. It has imposed import alerts against three additional facilities in India tracing back to Mr. Thakur's whistle-blowing. (Andrew M. Beato, Narayan Lakhsman, the Hindu, April 16, 2014)

Here, we see hope that things would balance out to a more secular paradigm where old adages would give way to ethical and spiritually enhancing decisions by people at workplaces. This can only be done by fostering a cocoon of law and policies where employees feel safe to speak out against the system when required, if they are. A country with such a diverse and spiritually rich heritage as India has would and can, successfully do so, if the need of the hour calls for it.

Kent Rhodes suggests a working model of workplace spirituality which is based on six parameters. The first, of this six, is the importance of encouraging sustainability by 'Emphasizing Sustainability'. The awareness created of the firm's limited resources and the best-fit ways to utilize them. This also thinks up the long term liabilities and the action required in handling them. Long term negative results of actions and ways to handle them would also find importance in this factor. The next point emphasized was the contribution of 'Value' where firms would understand that their most important goal was making the world a better place by providing better services and goods. This is about creating a 'vision' with which employees easily associate themselves, it is about giving back to society what the firm takes from it.

The third is that the firm prizes creativity where the creative input of individuals and groups is encouraged and welcomed. The artistic industries have long held a practice of rewarding creative efforts and have realized the spiritual nature of these endeavors. The fourth is that it cultivates inclusion where the life experiences of inviduals and the lessons they have learnt are included and

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respected. This factor also brings about an inclusion of people who have been left out of business work places in the past because of circumstances which they did not create. This is especially true of a country like India where caste and religion barriers have secluded and divided people for long with the kind of work they are associated with. This is also true to the ethical dimension that people be chosen based on their talents and not their circumstances. The fifth is that a business community develops principles and encourages their implementation in individuals and groups. They are encouraged to gauge the impact they have on people and the impact people make on them. The last parameter given here by Rhodes, is that it encourages vocation, where people at work places are made aware that their spiritual quest does not have to be kept away from the work place and are given the freedom to engage in their quest at even work. These basic parameters have been given as a model for spirituality at the work place. [iii]

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN VALUE CENTRIC MANAGEMNT

Let us discuss the effect this has on a work environment. Does it lead to more ethical decisions? Does it lead to spiritual fulfillment? Surely when one is given the freedom to act as one wills and choose their own 'rights' from 'wrongs' they are at a balance of existence where they feel fulfilled and satisfied. Surely their acceptance beyond barriers of birth and caste or creed and colour give them a spiritual uplift. The question posed here now gains form: What role does a leader play in the spiritual well-being of his colleagues, workers and the general ambience of the work place? Let us examine the role of a leader:

A leader by all standards is first an example to his followers. Without these first criteria, it would be difficult to earn the respect of all who consider him a leader. We have examples of such leaders who shone by their brilliant example. Gandhi was one, foremost. Alexander fought at the frontline in every battle. It is natural of the human condition to follow someone who fills up that dreamy picture we all have in our minds of someone we would like to become, someone we would like to emulate. If we find such a person at the helm of affairs in our own workplace, it would be a major fillip to give our best. Why? Because we would find ourselves spiritually enhanced; because we would give our 'best' to look good in that person's eyes. It would also be spiritually redeeming to be in the 'good books' of a leader we respect. Now that the paradigm has been set that a leader can induce spirituality in a work place, a second question confronts us: How does one play the role of a spiritual mentor? The answer, maybe, lies within. Empathy would be the correct word to define the role of such a leader. A leader by virtue of being a person, who empathizes with his workers and followers, makes them kin. He/she places himself/herself on a pedestal where the daily battle for survival becomes a family affair, as he understands the 'other' point of view, by virtue of being placed in the

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other person's shoes. Empathy is a strong weapon in the hands of the willing, it gives one another asset which does not usually come with leadership: love. The workplace under such a leader, who leads from the front and empathizes with his workers, earns the respect of his workers, so much so that the whole 'culture' of work becomes spiritually alive and satisfying. Such is the role of a leader in a workplace vis-à-vis spirituality.

Now the second dimension of this paper which is ethics. A leader's role in ethics and their implementation is a foregone conclusion. An ethical leader begets ethics into the workplace. An ethical leader induces his workers to be ethically strong and morally upright. It would only be an unethical leader who would tolerate excesses from his workers. An ethical leader would ensure, by example, that the followers would be ethical. Fear would play a dominant role here, as much as respect. We have had examples of this in actual practice: leaders in both politics and business tend to reflect this fact. It is often said that a country (presumably a democracy) gets the leaders it deserves. The leaders are, but an example of the people and their aspirations. This though works both ways. The people are often a reflection of the leadership. A morally strong, spiritually rich, effective leader would earn not just the respect of the workers but also the love and admiration. At the workplace, in the business sense, it means good business. How does a spiritually rich and ethically sound leader mean good business? The answer lies in a few words like reputation, brand image, good-will and the list goes on. Now good-will is an asset that we would all agree is a necessity for a business which plans in the long-run. Take the example of brands like 'old-spice' aftershaves or 'Nirma' washing powder, what keeps them alive is the good-will of a few loyal customers and the brand image it has managed to foster.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Talking about strong leadership initiatives in the country, does not the name Tata bring to mind a strong, dynamic leadership? Or, for that matter, the Ambanis?

We do have examples or precedents of the idea behind this paper. A spiritually strong leader and an ethically sound leader combined in a leader of matchless efficiency can do wonders for a business, for its workers, for its clients, for its image and seems to be great business sense. On the other hand I give you a leader who is by nature accommodating of errors, goes for the quick buck, is adept at changing facts to suit situations and expects the same from his workers and followers. It might all look great on paper and is surely the victory of the mind over the heart, but in our deepest core we would 'know' that we serve a falsehood. We would 'know' that the leader in question is efficient on paper but not in reality and we are but reflections of the system. Given a choice, we might have chosen our ideal but we are left with no choice and we do as we are told. When we rebel or find

fault, we are done away with, fired and ostracized. Thus, the system begs a change where the hands of power are given to leaders of the qualities mentioned in this paper. The question is; does the system deserve it?

I leave with a firm belief that it does deserve it. I leave with a firm belief that the time is ripe where the actual assets of a leader are gauged not by his ability to forge accounts but lead, efficiently, spiritually and ethically. A new Dawn beckons!

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