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HINDU PHILOSOPHY, MYTHOLOGY AND BUSINESS: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH BY DEVDUTT PATTANAİK

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***Abstract.** This article aims to examine the contributions of the contemporary Indian mythologist, Devdutt Pattanaik. We focus on his examination of the convergence of Hindu traditional mythology with modern societal domains, notably encompassing business, leadership, and management. Devdutt Pattanaik's analyses of ancient myths resonate significantly in the spheres of business and leadership. Within these contexts, mythological narratives and symbolic motifs are recognized as influential mechanisms for shaping corporate culture and organizational dynamics.*

***Key words:** mythology, culture, cultural memory, multiculturalism, cognition, society, interpretation, spirituality, values.*

Introduction

Myths serve as powerful architects of our perception, essential for both preserving cultural heritage and nurturing its evolution. Within ancient texts lie timeless verities, unwavering in their relevance across epochs. Furthermore, myths provide a rich arsenal of symbols and images, igniting the fires of creativity and innovation. Thus, myths stand as enduring beacons, guiding not only the past but also shaping the contours of our contemporary landscape, including the realm of business.

The ideas of modern Indian mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik deserve special attention. Within his works, discernible are dual functions: one about the preservation of traditional and cultural memory, while the other underscores innovation and creativity. Devdutt Pattanaik intricately examines the infusion of Hindu philosophical tenets into diverse facets of modern society, notably encompassing realms such as business, leadership, and management.

Main text

The “Mahabharata” stands as a cornerstone text within Indian mythology, characterized by its intricate portrayal of moral dilemmas and philosophical deliberations. Similarly significant is the “Ramayana,” wherein themes of virtue, loyalty, duty, and devotion are profoundly explored.

With the advent of globalization and multiculturalism, Indian mythology transcends its role as a mere artifact of India's cultural legacy, emerging as a fount of wisdom and inspiration with global resonance. Within India, a new wave of authors has arisen, creating works that we term “new Indian myth-making.” Prominent among these figures are Amish Tripathi, Kavita Kane, and Devdutt Pattanaik. While the first two authors craft fictional narratives rooted in mythological themes, Devdutt Pattanaik distinguishes himself by reimagining mythology within contemporary contexts. In particular, his works exploring the connection between Hinduism and business warrant closer examination.

The book “Leader: 50 Ideas from Mythology” [1] by Devdutt Pattanaik delves into the rich reservoir of mythological stories to extract valuable lessons applicable to the modern realms of business and leadership. Through narratives drawn from ancient Indian epics such as the “Mahabharata” and “Ramayana,” Devdutt Pattanaik endeavors to draw parallels between the behavior of renowned characters from these sagas and the conduct of individuals within the context of business communication. By exploring these correlations, readers can glean insights into timeless principles and ethical frameworks that hold relevance in contemporary business environments.

In the chapter titled “Strategic Intent of Ravana,” Devdutt Pattanaik delves into the contrasting leadership qualities embodied by the two central figures of the Ramayana: the charming and sagacious prince Rama and the tyrannical demon Ravana. Devdutt Pattanaik acknowledges that both characters are brilliant personalities who are capable of leading the masses. However, in their social qualities, they differ radically. As Devdutt Pattanaik writes, Ravana is “flamboyant and commanding” and Rama is “boring and task-oriented” [1, Chapter 17].

Ravana and Rama represent opposed leadership archetypes. Ravana, driven by his pursuit of power, often overlooks ethical and moral considerations, ultimately leading to his death. Conversely, Rama's steadfast commitment to justice, wisdom, and devotion renders him a paragon of leadership. While Rama's actions may appear predictable, they are anything but mundane; rather, they epitomize virtuous conduct and principled decision-making.

In the modern corporate landscape, the leadership qualities exemplified by Ravana, marked by arrogance and disregard for ethical principles, are decidedly undesirable. The attributes embodied by Rama – integrity, fairness, and a sense of duty – serve as a blueprint for effective and ethical leadership, guiding leaders toward sustainable success and organizational well-being.

In “Business Sutra: A Very Indian Approach to Management,” Devdutt Pattanaik presents a compelling perspective on business that draws heavily from Indian mythology and philosophy. Through the lens of mythological narratives and symbols, Devdutt Pattanaik constructs innovative concepts of management and leadership.

Devdutt Pattanaik advocates for examining business dynamics through the 3B framework, asserting that “As is belief, so is behaviour, so is business. This is Business Sutra” [2, Chapter I]. This framework underscores the pivotal role of beliefs and values in shaping business strategies. Our faith influences our mindset, ultimately shaping the outcomes of any action.

The correlation between Indian deities and specific concepts warrants significant consideration and is part of cognition, as it reflects deeply ingrained cultural and philosophical associations. Devdutt Pattanaik associates the goddess Lakshmi with “wealth” in the context of business while attributing to the goddess Durga the essence of “power that grants security and authority,” and to Saraswati, “human imagination.” [2, Vocabulary] Throughout the book, a recurring theme emphasizes the importance of not pursuing external symbols of wealth and power represented by “Lakshmi” and “Durga,” but rather cultivating the inner qualities embodied by “Saraswati.” These allegories encapsulate a profound philosophical notion – genuine prosperity and

influence emanate from within. Nurturing internal potential, fostering imagination, and embracing innovative thinking constitute the crux of success in the contemporary business landscape.

Conclusions

Devdutt Pattanaik's interpretation of old myths resonates strongly with contemporary societal needs in India and abroad. Mythological narratives and symbols serve as potent instruments for shaping corporate culture, particularly in the realms of business and leadership. By associating certain gods with specific traits or attributes, individuals and organizations can gain a deeper understanding of ideal leadership qualities and ethical standards.

The question of whether such works represent the evolution or decline of Contemporary Hinduism continues to be a topic of debate and scholarly inquiry. On one hand, these works foster interest in Hinduism among contemporary audiences and adapt the religion to contemporary contexts. On the other hand, they may distort traditional spiritual values and misinterpret sacred knowledge.

References:

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