

## RETELLING AND INTERPRETING: A STUDY OF DEVDUTT'S *TALENT SUTRA*

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### **Abstract:**

*Myth plays a vital role in the new millennium literary works in India encompassing a wide range of literary texts in the form of books, films and television serials. The renowned mythologist and eminent writer of modern Indian Literature, Devdutt Pattanaik has written many books that reflect mythical and socio-political concepts which can be related to the present era. He has recapitulated many mythical characters from various religious scriptures in his works. Talent Sutra – An Indian Approach to Learning focuses on many learning techniques related to workplace management and creative talents. It also focuses on the importance of teamwork and the achievement of leadership qualities. Although he has derived the lessons from Indian mythology, those lessons are applicable to the entire human community as they draw attention to the human prosperity. This work focuses on mythical sutras that enable people to work with talent, build strong relationships in the workplace and nurture them to face the crises with patience and faith. This paper explores how great Indian epics such as Ramayana and Mahabhratha help the writer recapitulate their characters to derive the sutras for human success. Talent Sutra analyses the third book of the management series from the perspective of mythical retelling. Devdutt retells and interprets the mythical tales from Hindu and Buddhist epics and contextualizes them in a view of achieving the real talent of a human being. This paper investigates the mythological interpretations of the renowned Indian epics that have been done by Devdutt on the perspective of present life in the Indian society without breaking away from the framework of the original text.*

**Keywords:** Mythology, Mythical and Socio-Political ethos, Isolation, Reflection, Expansion, Inclusion

### **Introduction**

Devdutt Pattanaik is a popular mythologist from India who is well-known all over the universe for his writings that relate mythical concepts to the present era. His attempt to recapitulate the mythical characters from the great epics of Indian mythology is really laudable. The popular works of Devdutt put forth the major themes such as caste system, feminism, social issues and political issues which act as eye-openers to the present generation. However, in the series of books namely Business Sutra, Success Sutra, and Talent Sutra, the writer tries to derive valuable lessons from Indian mythology in order to make the current generation achieve their dreams. When he tries to derive lessons from the epic characters, he hopes that the readers of all ages would be

inspired when they read them. Mythology plays a vital role in the socio-political and cultural changes of a society. Hence, it plays a significant role in the growth and development of a person.

In the renowned work of Devdutt Pattanaik *Talent Sutra*, the writer implies the various ways to sustain our identity. He interprets that the identity is our own imagination and it can be changed at any point of time in our life. This changing nature of our imagination leads to an uncertain fear where the individual starts to seek his own identity in every pause of his life. When others begin to see one person in the same way that he dreams about himself, those people are attracted to that person because he starts to adore them. In other words, the interpretation by the writer proves that one has to take a break for achieving a great change.

The transformation happens only when the imaginations are controlled by a person. This learning lesson is derived from the myth by the writer. Saravati is knowledge that begins to flow when the person is ready to rise from *tamas* through *rajas* and hence he attains *Sattva*. At the same time the external voice *smriti* changes to *shruti*, the inner voice of the mind. The transformation is complete at this point. Pattanaik also proves that the gaze can be appreciated when one discovers one's inner talents and use every resource to develop those talents. The resources can be found everywhere around us by exploring isolation, reflection, expansion and inclusion. These major resources are explained by the author by using the elements found in ancient Indian mythology.

### **Self-actualization**

Devdutt delineates the situations when a person feels lonely or isolated. Devdutt gives an illustration of the great epic *Mahabharatha*. Duryodhan feels ignored, lonely and unloved though he is a powerful villain. In *Ramayan*, Kaikeyi, the wife of King Dasharath is unable to see Kubija whereas she can hear only the voice of Mantra. This can be related to the present state of market. The market is a frightening place where the people are always afraid of being cheated. Kubijas in the market make the employees insecure and the only way to secure the job is to be trustworthy by poisoning the ears against other voices. The writer remark, "Duryodhan feels uncared for. He has to fend for himself ... aggression, territoriality and domination, he sees Pandavas as predators" (TS 14).

Devdutt illustrates the same concept with a contrary example of Krishna in *Mahabharata*. Krishna who gets full of love from others in his childhood never felt isolated and alone. He writes, "He did not see the world of humans ... full of predators and prey as Duryodhan did" (14).

Isolation happens in the business when an employee is left without recognition from his boss or higher authority. When the hard work gets ignored, the worker gets the feeling of becoming a fool among other employees, in worse case he feels invisible. Devdutt explains the concept of caring gaze that everyone expects from their co-workers. A cruel gaze focuses on our amenability rather than our capability. He illustrates this notion using the mythical imagery derived from *Ramayana*. The narration of Hanuman's story is, "Hanuman narrates the entire tale to his mother Anjani, ... Why did you simply flick your tail and sweep the rakshasa-king and his army away?" ... Hanuman replies, "Because no one asked me to do" (20,21).

In a business or market, an employee always expects the attention of his boss on his potential. No one likes to see himself as a villain. Everyone likes to see as a capable person from others' perspectives. Indra is always in need of Krishna's help whereas he is unwilling to part with even a tree. In the same manner, people approach the market only when they want something from the company. Valmiki gets depressed when he listens to the words of Hanuman in *Ramayana*. Hence, we get depressed when we hear negative comments from others. In the market, an employee needs to understand that his official work is to be recognized by the employer and to be satisfied by the customers. "It is important to remind ourselves of who it is we work for. While the official purpose of work is to satisfy customers, employers ... is to satisfy ourselves, feel noticed and alive" (27).

Unofficially the purpose of hard work is to be satisfied by others and him as well. One should satisfy oneself and should be noticed by others to be active in the field. In the market, leaders are consumed by their personal values and agenda and accept their followers to be excited about it. "No one looks at the string of disappointed faced and broken hearts ... we are taught to believe that if it is not personal, it is okay to hurt" (30).

### **Reflection – Perception**

The second part of the book entitled Reflection states the general notion of how one's perspective affects one's own thoughts. He stated that when one person sees others in his perception, he realizes that he is often responding to others' views on himself. The author gets the lessons from *Mahabharatha* narrating the incident of Kurukshetra war. After the Kurukshetra war, there was a settlement argument about the greatest warrior. They all turn to the talking head, who said he only saw Vishnu's discus severing heads and the earth goddess drinking their blood. The opines that the real nature of a person depends on how they are seen by others. This notion is explained in the book by narrating mythical tales from *Ramayana*. Ram explains the good actions of Shabri to Lakshman wherein he points out only the positive things. The other example is given by the tale of the Sun god Surya, who realizes about his celestial radiance when his wife ran away and left her shadow Chhaya. In his own perception, he was a victim whereas in the perception of his wife, he was the villain. In the business or at a work place, there are a lot of Lakshmanas who are ready to judge others and to instruct others. "Many leaders insist that their assistant leave a small note about the background of the person ... meeting the impression that they matter, that they have been seen" (42).

In business, people behave according to how they perceive others and how they react to them. Even though a person tries to help others in some way, the impact of that act will be reflected in the perception of others. This concept has been illustrated in *Talent Sutra* by narrating the story of King Virata and Matsya from *Mahabharatha*. Though his son Uttar defeats the Kaurava army in the Kurukshetra, the king doesn't want to acknowledge the truth because he could not contemplate the limits of imagination.

### **Expansion – Transformation**

The journey of a person from being dependent to being dependable is known as growth. The illustration of this concept is done from the great epic Ramayana. Hanuman does not need resources as he tries to realize his potential while Ravana believes that he is perfect and he needs more resources. Growth can happen only when we are ready to give and take. When the mind expands, it can perform great imagination which leads to growth. In *Mahabharatha*, the stealing of clothes happens in two various situations in which Lord Krishna had been involved. In both cases, the intention of stealing cloth is different, in the first situation Krishna takes it so that the women outgrow their fear and in the second situation, Kaurava takes it to instill fear in the mind of Draupadi. Devdutt opines, “In both cases, something is being taken but the bhaav is very different. Krishna takes to enable ... Krishna seeks to generate trust. The Kauravas seeks to establish authority” (65).

Devdutt Pattanaik highlights the path of growth is from insignificant to significant. It is the inclusion of a person who was once excluded. The transformation of Yudhistira in *Mahabharatha* happens when the stepbrother whom he first backed away from was brought back to life during exile in the jungle. Growth is the concept that can be attained when one helps others and realize his exact potential.

### **Inclusion**

In *Talent Sutra*, Devdutt tries to define inclusion in terms of expansion. He opines that it is easier to expand our own mind rather get others to expand their mind. Here the life of a human being is explained with the help of mythical concepts. Life is divided into four phases such as brahmachari, grihastha, vanasprathi and sanyasi. Devdutt describes one's life as a job that starts at his birth and leaves the job when he dies. One should create talent through growth in order to enter into the next level of the job. Talent should be created from someone downstream who will replace him and make himself available to someone upstream. He writes, “We seek new opportunities, different opportunities or greater responsibilities ... we seek growth” (86).

Devdutt Pattanaik teaches about the purpose of our life. Brahma is convinced by his gaze as it is perfect in his perception and it is for domesticating the world with rules. However, every human being has to perform his dharma and it is possible by expanding his gaze. By expanding the gaze, he can domesticate the people around him. Organizations give training to their newly joined employees or promoted employees so that they can expand their gaze or create new talents to domesticate their junior fellow employees.

Learning patience will provoke thoughts and hence every human being can think in different ways. Deriving the example from mythology, Devdutt proves that Shiva provokes thought in different ways from the ways that Vishnu does. Brahma chases his daughter Shatarupa in a different way and acts as a metaphor for human beliefs. “If devata expands his gaze, the yajaman grows in faith ... He does not frighten away investors, talent, or customers who naturally gather ... accommodating being” (112).

### **Conclusion**

The modern world is chasing a target, chasing Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. As per ancient mythology, chasing Lakshmi will end in some conflicts. Instead, one has to create talent

to attract Lakshmi towards him. Human beings are in search of things, not thoughts. The major concept of human hunger is threefold: wealth, power and knowledge. Hence, every performer of a business should intimate knowledge of attracting the goddesses of wealth, power and knowledge, the hunger for whom exists in various proportions to every partner of the business. These notions are proved by the author by deriving the mythological elements from the great ancient epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*. Talent, according to Pattanaik is having the faith and patience to create an environment where the mind can expand and bloom at its own pace. The imagination and creativity of a person help him to invent innovative ideas and visualize them to achieve his talent. Every humanbeing has the power of imagination but the realization of this imaginative power is essential for enabling him to work with talent to face any situation with patience. The real talent lies in keeping a good relationship in the working place and also in the family. It is the key factor for survival in this competitive world. The book is an examination of past myths and how Devdutt glorifies these myths while he picks up the elements from those myths to motivate the readers for achieving talent and leadership qualities.

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