

Management Principles in The Organisation of Sacrifices

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Sacrifice was a complex institution in ancient India going back to remote antiquity which assumed enormous intricacy in the later times, especially in the Brahmanical period. The importance of sacrifice in Indian tradition can be gauged from the fact that it is often regarded as synonymous with religion.¹ But what is not well understood is the importance it enjoyed in the Indian psyche, as the model for any group activity involving lot of individuals, or for that matter, as a complex formula involving the inter-relation of various constituent elements. The sacrifice model is reinforced in the famous statement of Kaalidaasa equating Naatya with it. The image is carried further to the field of warfare by Bhattanaaraayana who likens the great Mahaabhaarata war to a sacrifice. The present paper is an attempt to look at the sacrifice as a group activity aimed at securing some end, involving the committed function of all the concerned individuals. Such an approach, it is earnestly believed, will be of immense help not only in the exploration of the dynamics of the ritual, but also in the identification of the cultural dimensions of the institution of management in ancient India which could be pressed into service in evolving an Indian way of approaching the problems of modern management.

It has been well-recognised that management is a complex process involving planning, organising, co-ordinating, motivating and controlling the work of a team by a competent person. Planning is “the determination of a course of action to achieve a desired result”.² Described as “thinking that precedes the actual performance of work”, it involves thinking of “the steps required to accomplish the goals, once they have been established”. It consists of “forecasts, objectives, policies, programmes, procedures, schedules and budgets”.³ Forecasting is a systematic attempt to probe the future by inference from known facts. Objectives are the goals established, and may be economic, social and other minor ones. Policies are continuing decisions applicable to repetitive situations and may be spelt out like maintaining of working capital at a fixed percent of sales or a conservative dividend policy. Programme consists of a sequence of activities designed to implement policies and accomplish objectives, some sort of step-by-step approach to guide the action necessary to reach a predetermined goal. Finally, “the budget is an appraisal of expected expenses projected against anticipated income for a future period”⁴. It can be stated in terms of time, money or materials.

It is interesting to note that most of these components of planning are identifiable in the sacrificial tradition in a latent form; of course there are obvious basic differences between both types of activities that cannot be lightly brushed aside. Thus there cannot be much scope for forecasting in the sacrificial programme which is more or less of a fixed structure and which does not envisage unexpected contingencies. Nevertheless, the prescription of proper time like the lunar day, the season and the particular month of the sacrifice, precautions to be taken for possible lapses, steps ensuring medical care of the participants etc., can be subsumed under the item.

The objectives of the sacrificial act are spelt out in the relevant Vedic injunctions like *Yajeta*

svargakaamaha where the objectives like the attainment of heaven, progeny, emperorship and the like are actually mentioned as the results accruing from the relevant sacrifice. Such objectives can be distinguished as material or religious ones. The Braahmanas record that various types of sacrifices were practiced by the gods themselves and hence they exhort man to practice them in just the same way to achieve similar results, which, as pointed out by Devasthali, “cover up all possible things that can possibly form the object of human desire”.⁵

The programmes and schedules of the sacrifice are described in detail in the Braahmanas and the *Shrautasootras* where we get detailed step-by-step account of each and every aspect of the sacrifice. We find an organic concept of sacrifice in the innumerable personifications and metaphors recurring in the Braahmanas. In the Meemamsaa tradition, the procedural details of the sacrifice, are understood through Aartheebhaavanaa, wherein we get answers to the questions, (1) what is to be accomplished? (2) by means of which is it to be accomplished? and (3) how is it to be accomplished? In the case of an injunction like “one should sacrifice if one is desirous of heaven,” the aim to be accomplished is heaven, the means, the sacrifice and the procedure, the performance of its various ancillaries like Prayaaja.

The detailed procedure of a typical *Soma* sacrifice can be distinguished into five steps. The first step consists of all the preliminaries, done by the sacrificer, who prepares himself for the performance and enters the sacrificial hall. The second step called Deekshaa consists of rites like Hotrhoma. The third section is called Upaasaddina where-in rituals called Poorvaahnika and Aparaaahnika, also called Pravargya and Upasat, are to be performed. On the last day the rite of *Aupavasathya* is also to be performed, which mainly consists of *Udvasana*, the ceremonial arrangements of the materials used in *Pravargya*, *Agnipranayana*, the transfer of a burning firewood from the eastern fire to the eastern part of the altar. The next item is *Sutya*, the main part of which consists of two oblations made with the help of two containers called Upaamshu and *Antarama*. The last part, called the *Yajnapuccha*, (the tail of the sacrifice) consists of items like Anuyaaaja, *Hariyojana*, Patneesaamyaaaja, Avabhrita Udayaneeyeshti, Maitraavaruni, Saktuhoma, Agnyaaropana, Pratyaaagamana, and Udavaasaneeya,

The programme element in management is linked with the objective and combined with budgets, and are prepared in a narrative or tabular form. In the sacrifice tradition, it is pre-set, inviolable and involves the preparation of the expertise and material, as well as the determination of the specific time for the performance of each activity. Eventhough the ritualistic character of the sacrifice precludes its identification with innovative techniques necessary in management, structurally it resembles the programme in the latter in a very striking manner.

Schedule is “the process of establishing a time sequence for the work to be done”.⁶ In a sacrifice, the time schedule is very important and each and every item is assigned to a specific time. The nomenclature of sacrifices as Ekaaha (to be performed in one day), Aheena (sacrifices lasting for two to twelve days) and *Satras* (sacrifices lasting from twelve days to indefinite time) itself suggests the duration of the sacrifice. The time element is implicit in the nomenclature such as Praatassavana and Maadhyandinasavana. No sacrificial rite is performed in a random, or *ad hoc* basis.

The next item of planning is procedure, which prescribes the manner or method by which the work is to be performed. The procedure is prepared explaining how a specific work is to be done, eliminating the possibilities of overlap and duplication. Constituting a useful outline for human resources management, procedure helps to “reduce the time and expenses of job training and minimizes errors resulting from lack of information or the wrong information”.⁷ Reducing the burden of decision making, it helps to

improve efficiency and co-ordination, eventhough pre-planned procedure discourages initiative and innovation to a certain extent.

The detailed procedure of the sacrificial act is laid down in various Braahmanas and Shrautasootras, which assign definite roles to each individual and explain the sequence of the events to be performed every day. In Meemaamsaa tradition, the procedure is known as itikartavyataa, which consists of the aggregate of the components of the sacrifice, beginning with the rite of initiation (*deekshaa*) and ending with the ceremonial bath.

Budget, the appraisal of expected expense projected against anticipatory income of a future period, is supposed to cover all the aspects of business. In the sacrificial tradition great importance is assigned to the financial aspect. In fact Dakshinaa (fee) and *Yajnaa* (sacrifice) are regarded as a couple, as is vouchsafed by statements like the following. “No oblation, they say, should be without Dakshinaa”.⁸ It is said to be fourfold, comprising gold, cow, cloth and horse.⁹ It is the officiating priests who are the recipients of Dakshinaa and the extent of Dakshinaa differs from sacrifice to sacrifice and also from priest to priest. The number and the extent of the Dakshinaa are mentioned on some occasions though the general rule is “give as much as you can”.¹⁰ Kautilya (VIII.206-210) lays down rules about the distribution of fees among the priests at a sacrifice and remarks that the same principles are to be applied in all co-operative ventures where different people work together. Kautilya (III.14) has prescribed rules for the receipt of fees by priests when they leave off at different stages in sacrifices like Agnishtoma.¹¹ Thus, eventhough the preparation of a formal budget was not envisaged, the sacrificial tradition had a mechanism to ensure suitable payment to each person engaged in the ritual.

Organisation is regarded as the “foundation upon which the whole structure of the management is built”.¹² It is based on the principles of the division of labour, source of authority, and relationships. Division of labour ensures that the work of one member of the group does not duplicate or overlap the work being done by others. Authority is necessary to secure compliance of individual members of the group in contributing their efforts to the common goal. Relationship is a vital aspect of organisation which addresses itself to questions like the inter-relatedness of various individuals and groups in a team work.

Principles of organisation are implicit in the manifold descriptions contained in Brahmanical literature about the nature of sacrifice. Sacrifice is often compared to or identified with the human body. In Shatapatha Braahmana (III.5.3) the *Soma* cart is regarded as the head, the *Aahavaneeya* the mouth, the Purodaasha the crest-lock, the *Agnidhriya* and the *Marjaaleeya* the arms, the *sadas* the belly and the two fires at the back as the feet of the sacrifice. An integrated approach is seen in other metaphors also, which liken a sacrifice to an arrow, ship, cart and the like.¹³

Sacrificial literature is replete with the hierarchical and functional details of various individuals involved in the act, who are given specific designations. The centre of the structure was the Yajmaana, who, along with his wife, was to undergo Deekshaa ceremony which was a psychological and purificatory initiation to the ceremony ensuring unflinching commitment to the work being done. During the Brahmanical age, there were “not less than sixteen priests at a sacrifice, each one with his duties well defined”.¹⁴ The four chief priests were Hotri, Adhvaryu, Udgaatr and Brahman. According to Yaaska, the Rgvedic Mantra Ricamtvaaha etc. explains the application of the duties of the priests.¹⁵ Accordingly, *Hotr*, the priest of Rgveda puts together the various hymns which occur in various parts of the Rgveda. The Udgaatr, the priest of Saamaveda is to sing the Gaayatra hymn in Rik verses called Shakvaree. The priest *Adhvaryu*,

belonging to Yajurveda is to construct the very form of the sacrifice. The priest *Brahman*, knows everything connected with all the Vedas and is supposed to set things right if anything is amiss. The fee due to each priest also varies in accordance with his duty.

The other aspects of management consist of co-ordination, control and motivation. Co-ordination of the work is to be accomplished by balancing, timing and integrating it properly. Motivation is the strategy aimed at ensuring the optimum productivity and efficiency of the work team. Control involves the determination of the course undertaken, the progress achieved and the corrective measures necessary.

In the sacrificial tradition, co-ordination is an inbuilt mechanism implicit in the structure of the ritual which needs to be addressed to as a separate problem. So also is the case with control, since corrective measures are envisaged in praayashcitta ceremony. On the other hand, the motivation element, has been dealt with exhaustively in Meemamsaa tradition, where the Praabhaakaras and Bhaattas differ as to the nature of motivation. For the former, sacrifices and other prescribed activities are to be performed for themselves, as a duty and no motive element is necessary in the case of a virtuous person. According to them injunctions like, “He who is desirous of heaven should perform a sacrifice” do not exhort one to do a sacrifice with a promise of heaven; on the other hand, desire of heaven simply denotes the eligibility of a person to perform a sacrifice. The Bhaattas, by contrast, believe that the result is the motivating factor. The reward given to individuals associated with the performance of a sacrifice can also be regarded as the motivating factor.

The foregoing survey reveals that the structure of a sacrifice is remarkably similar to the management organisation in several aspects, despite obvious surface differences. The most salient feature about the sacrifice is the availability of the trained human resources and the necessary materials. All the events are predetermined, and their proper time selected on the basis of factors like the year, season and the lunar day. The functions of priests and their subordinates are codified, and schedule also preset. Management organisation becomes effective if it involves similar structuration, delegation and hierarchisation. Needless to say, it is at the conceptual level that the abstract structure of the sacrifice provides an excellent format and model for the institution of management.

References and Notes

- 1 G.V. Devasthali, *Religion and Mythology of the Brahmanas*, p. 109.
- 2 Louis A. Allen, *Management and Organisation*, p. 725.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.26.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.38.
- 5 Devasthali, *op.cit.*, p. 132.
- 6 Louis Allen, *op.cit.*, p.37.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.38.
- 8 Shatapatha Braahmana, i.1.3.7
- 9 Devasthali, *op.cit.*, p.127.

- 10 *Ibid.*, p.128.
- 11 See also, Kane, *History of Dharmasastras*, Vol. III, p. 469.
- 12 Louis Allen, *op.cit.*, p.51.
- 13 Devasthali, *op.cit.*, p.114-116.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p.124.
- 15 Saayana's Preface to Rigvedabhaashya, p.3.