

Career of Ram

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Ram's career is unique not just because it is distinctively his; it is unique because he was able to arrest his descent into despair and reinvent himself through introspection. His is the story of many men who overcome insurmountable odds through sheer grit and perseverance. Many of them are fortunate enough to leave this world before professional and personal decline sets in; many swallow the bitter potion of ignominy, and still others are put out to pasture, as old race horses are. Ram is exemplary because he took stock of his own life and personality, demonstrated remarkable resilience and started anew in the autumn of his career.

Many successful individuals (and this is particularly true of men even today, for in a predominantly patriarchal society, men are defined by their work) find themselves at crossroads in midlife, witnessing with bewildering helplessness the daily erosion of a persona they have carefully crafted for themselves at their workplace. With the passage of time the organizational culture they flourished in gives way to a newer one, and the dynamics of their interactions with their colleagues mutate imperceptibly... yet these inexorable changes are noticed by all but the ones who are blindsided.

Ram is supposedly a victim of the Bonsai trap, wherein a person's strengths become his weaknesses and inhibit his growth; in other words, his own personality becomes a stumbling block to progress. Significantly, research has established that CEOs who have had an unbeaten track record are often hobbled by the very characteristics responsible for their success. There is a shadow side to every winning trait and our strengths are often the mirror image of our flaws: for instance, beyond a point the lines of demarcation between supreme confidence and arrogance are blurred (Corkindale, 2009). In Ram's case the very qualities that helped him rise above his circumstances are also the ones that hamstrung him in later life. His propensity to question established norms had been viewed indulgently when he was a youth; in a middle-aged man that very trait was considered

officious and disruptive. Not for nothing has it been said, 'What is playful in a kitten, is cruel in a cat!' It is noteworthy that Ram's extroverted personality burgeoned in sales related environments. Notwithstanding his numerical ability, persuasion was his metier. It is scarcely surprising that later in life, chastened, and with new insights into his own self, he found his groove in a pharmaceutical sales organization.

Yet another aspect of Ram's story is worthy of reflection. Not blessed with 'social luck', Ram had battled all odds to climb up the social and corporate ladder; however, he was at a loss as to how he should battle the demons within his own head. Our strength is often composed of the weaknesses we struggle to combat and conceal. When juxtaposed against fellow Indians drawn from the affluent strata of society, his deep seated sense of inadequacy came to the fore. In all probability, the subtle forms of discrimination practised in his organisation affected him subliminally and denuded his self worth. Indian society does valorise social superiority and even today 'our mental model is of slotting people by virtue of who they are rather than what they have done' (Desai, 2010, p.90). When the chasm of inequality cannot be bridged by human effort it rankles far more! Conversely his lack of paper qualifications and the resultant complexes may have led him perceive slights where there were none. The imagined ill-treatment would have been all the more pernicious because it ferreted out his deepest vulnerabilities.

Adverse circumstances often obscure awareness of other possibilities. It was not so with Ram. He was able to submerge his ego to gain what his ego truly desired; therein lay the uniqueness of his personality. He had always been a fighter; but he had also been singularly fortunate that his personal warmth had endeared him to his peers and superiors alike. When the context changed, Ram's exuberance was transmuted into a mellowness that comes from hard won wisdom. He thus exemplifies the dictum, 'Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape.'

References:

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