

Gajendra Mokca: A New Perspective

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Introduction

The story of Gajendramokca is narrated in the Bhâgavata Purâna for the very first time. The story then is referred by some other Purânas like Vâmana PurâGa and Skanda Purâna. The story of Gajendramokca ,according to Bhagavatapurâna is directly related to Devotion. The prayer done by the gajendra is called, GajendramokcaGastotra and is recited by devotees of VicGu as one of the prayers to Visnu. Various benefits of the recitation of this prayer are mentioned by Purânas. This incidence of Gajendramokca is so popular in Indian mythology that it is reflected in different art forms like Paintings and sculptures¹ .



These are some of the famous paintings found where this myth is reflected. Different artists have depicted this story differently. Artist's perception of the story is different in each case and it is reflected in the positions of the animals, force in their actions, colour schemes etc. In the same way, different sculptures are found on this myth and they can also be analysed similarly. I intend to do that elsewhere. The present paper focuses on the management aspect of this story.



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In the modern context, this story can be reinterpreted with the help of management principles. An attempt is done in this paper to highlight the management morals identified in this popular story.

The basic Story

There was once an elephant named Gajendra who lived in a garden called Ztumat which was created by Varuna. This garden was located on Mountain Trikuma, the “Three-Peaked Mountain.” Gajendra ruled over all the other elephants in the herd. On a hot day, he proceeded with his herd to a lake to cool off in its fresh waters. While the elephant was playing in water with his family, with the power of illusion created by Visnu², he couldn’t foresee the future incidences and suddenly a crocodile living in the lake attacked Gajendra and caught him by the leg. Gajendra tried for a long time to escape from the crocodile’s clutches. All his family, relatives and friends gathered around to help him, but in vain. The crocodile simply wouldn’t let go. When they realised that ‘death’ had come close to Gajendra, they left him alone. He trumpeted in pain and helplessness. As the struggle was seemingly endless (it is believed that the crocodile held Gajendra’s foot for over a thousand years³), and when he had spent his last drop of energy, Gajendra called god Visnu to save him, holding a lotus up in the air as an offering. Hearing his devotee’s call and prayer, Lord Visnu rushed to the scene. As Gajendra noticed the Lord coming, he lifted the lotus with his trunk. Seeing this, the Lord was pleased and with his Sudarœana Chakra, Visnu separated the crocodile’s head from its body, and Gajendra prostrated himself before the Lord.

The prayer made by Gajendra on this occasion became a famous hymn in praise of Visnu called the Gajendra Stuti.

Two versions of this prayer are found. One in Bhâgavata Purâna and other in VâmanaPurâna. Prayer in Bhâgavata Purâna starts with the verse

ओम नमो भगवते तस्मैयत्एतत्त्रिदात्मकम्।
पुरूषायादिबीजायपरेशायाभिधीमही।।BhagP.viii.3.2

and continues for 27 verses up to Viii.3.29.

In VâmanaPurâna, the prayer starts with

शुक्लांबरधरंविष्णुंशशिवर्णचतुर्भुजं ।
प्रसन्नवदनंध्यायेतसर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये॥ VamaP. 85.32

and continues till 85.60

¹ Gajendramiksha Sculpture at Halebeedu, Karnataka.,Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh, Lalitpur, UP.

गी करेणुः कलभान्ध दुर्मदो नाचष्ट कृच्छ्रं कृपयोऽजमायया।

तो गजेन्द्रस्य मनोबलौजसां कालेन दीर्घेण महानभूद्वयः।।BhagP.viii.3.30 ; (गजग्राहयोः) दिव्यं महायुद्धं जातं वर्षसहस्रकम्

⁴ कीर्तयिष्यन्ति भक्त्या च श्रोष्यन्ती च शुचिव्रताः । दुःस्वप्नो नश्यते तेषां सुस्वप्नश्च भविष्यति।।

After Bhâgavat Purâna the story is referred by, Skanda Purâna and narrated again by Vâmana Purâna. These PurâGas talk about effects of the recitation of the prayer made by the elephant to god Visnu ‘Gajendramokcastotra’. VâmanaP. 85.72ff⁵ mentions that a person who recites this prayer never gets a bad dream and always gets a good dream. It is also believed that the recitation of this hymn can give, freedom from sins, debt etc .

Previous birth

To study all the aspects of the story, the information about the previous birth of the elephant and the crocodile is very important. In one of his previous births, Gajendra had been the celebrated King Indradyumna, a devotee of VicGu⁵, but due to his disrespect to the great Sage Agastya, he had been cursed to be reborn as an elephant. One day, Agastya, a great sage came to visit the king, but Indradyumna remained sitting on his seat, refusing to rise up to receive the sage with the respect. Agastya was upset and noticed that the mighty king, despite the greatness of his good deeds, still had traces of egoism (Ahamkara), and he revealed to the king that, in his next birth, he would be born as an elephant and in that form he would learn the hard way that the self must be renounced and surrendered to the Lord.

The crocodile in its previous birth had been a Gandharva king called Huhu⁶. The sage Devala came to visit the king, and when the two of them were bathing and Devala was offering prayers to Surya (the Sun god), the king pulled the sage’s leg for fun. The sage was furious and cursed the king to become a crocodile in his next life. The repentant king begged the sage’s pardon. Devala explained that, while he could not reverse the curse, the crocodile would be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. when Visnu himself will visit the earth in his full form, answering the prayer of a pious soul Indradyumna . Indradyumna could attain Mokca finally when he (as Gajendra) left all his pride and doubt and totally surrendered himself to Visnu.

The tale of Gajendra is an integral theme in Vaishnavism and has great symbolic value: The story is also interpreted popularly as Gajendra is the man, the crocodile is sin, and the muddy water of the lake is Samsâra.

Because Indradyumna had been devoted to the God, Lord Visnu had him born as Gajendra and made him realize that there is something called Kaivalya which is beyond Svarga and Urdhva Loka, the realm of the gods. Indradyumna could attain Mokca finally when he (as Gajendra) left all his pride and doubt and totally surrendered himself to Visnu.

A number of minute details in the narration of this story help us to bring out the timeless, eternal principles of management from this story. Some of the important references are discussed below along with the famous management principles:

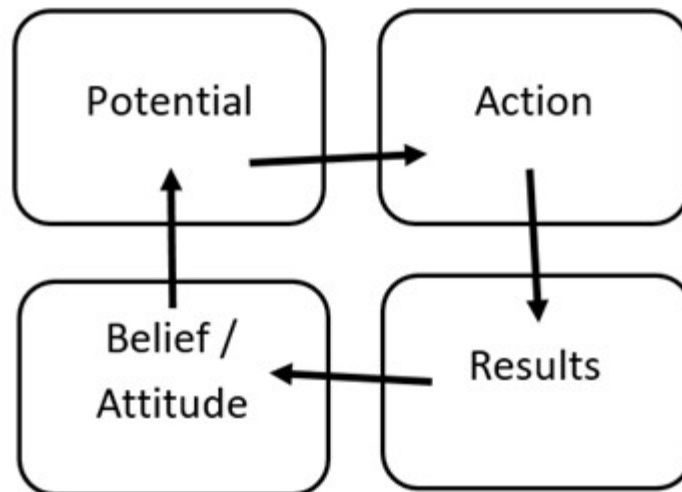
⁵BhagP.8.4.

⁶ BhagP.8.4.3ff

⁷ Naradabhaktisutra 10.

The story starts with the effect of ego on a person's life. Indradyumna and Huhu both are under the effect of their ego, their belief about themselves. As an effect of that, Indradyumna insulted the sage i.e. the knowledge. Gandharva King Huhu insulted the devotion. As an effect of this they both had to face a difficult situation. Ego of a person becomes hurdle in the way of his progress. ego is what a person believes about himself. After considering the previous life story of both the animals we get to know that : the crocodile and the elephant both were the kings and they had misbehaved with the influence of their ego. Both got cursed and got rebirth where they came across each other. Ultimately when they gave up their pride and surrendered to Visnu, they got liberated. The purpose of the story which comes in BhagP. is to emphasis the importance of Devotion. The basic principle on which devotion depends is belief⁷. Antony Robbins in his book 'unlimited power' states 'your potential starts with your beliefs. Your beliefs can limit or unleash your potential thus choose your beliefs carefully'

Antony Robbins shares a simple mental model for the relationship between beliefs, potential, action, and results⁸:



Your beliefs shape your potential. Your potential determines your actions. Your actions determine your results. Your results shape your beliefs. The elephant and the crocodile both had beliefs which were against knowledge and devotion. Thus their actions got influenced by their beliefs and as a result of that they got the rebirth.

The elephant and the crocodile are originally from different habitats and very powerful in their own environment. The elephant was very powerful in his own habitat and that too he was in pink of his life. BhagP. 2.20-24 describes the way he entered the place, and how other animals were threatened by his existence and appearance there.

⁸ Unlimited Power, the New Science of Personal Achievement, Antony Robbins, Free Press, Newyork,2003,ISBN-0-671-61088-0, 0-684-84577-6(Pbk)

तत्रैकदातद्विरिकाननाश्रयःकरेणुभिर्वारणयूथपश्वरन्।
सकण्टकान्कीचकवेणुवेत्रवद्विशालगुल्मंप्ररुजन्वनस्पतिम्।।
यद्वन्धमात्राद्धरयोगजेन्द्राव्याघ्राद्योव्यालमृगाःसखङ्गाः।

Surrounded by the company of female elephants breaking and treading down thorny shrubs and clusters of various types of bamboos and canes on their way. Other animals were threatened by his arrival. The elephant was exuding the temporal fluid. But once the elephant steps out of its habitat , he can't be as powerful as he is in his own environment. However, the crocodile is in its own habitat and thus can use all its power. But if the supreme god Visnu helps its enemy, in spite of being in its own habitat, crocodile gets defeated. Thus, leaving your own habitat can cause you problems.

A floating verse known popularly mentions the moral of this story of elephant and crocodile

नक्रंस्वस्थानमासाद्यगजेन्द्रमपिकर्षति।
सएवप्रच्युतःस्थानात्शुनापिपरिभूयते।।

Chânakya : Chânakya in his Chanakyaniti says, A person should always think about following things (before he takes any adventures action or decision) what is the time , who are his colleagues, what is the place and what are the things to his credit and what is the deficit, what are the powers he has got

कः कालः कानि मित्राणि कोदेशःकौव्ययागमे।
कस्याहं का च मे शक्तिःइति चिन्त्य मुहुर्मुहुः।।⁹

If a person is not in his natural habitat, he must think about these things before taking any step. In the book, [Strengths Finder 2.0](#)¹⁰, Tom Rath writes:

- *Talent X Investment = Strength*
- *Talent is a natural way of thinking, feeling or behaving.*
- *Investment is time spent practicing, developing your skills and building your knowledge base.*
- *Strength is the ability consistently provide near perfect performance.*

There is a simple formula for strength. It is talent times investment. When you sharpen and enhance your talent, you build your strengths. These are your authentic strengths. They are at

⁹ Cânakyaniti 4.18.

¹⁰Strengths Finder 2.0, Tom Rath, Gallup Press, ISBN-10-159562015x, 13-978-1595620156

your core and reflect your greatest gifts. In the context of the story of Gajendramokca, Both the animals had natural talent and power .Gajendra’s prayer was an attempt to sharpen, enhance his talent and while working in different habitats and that helped him to escape from the difficult situation. Another important point discussed by Tom Rath is Strengths help You to be a lot more of who you already are. ‘Be your Best’. That’s the key. First take inventory of what your core strengths really are. From there, pick and choose where to play your best game.

In the book, Strengths Finder 2.0, Tom Rath writes:

- *The American myth – be whatever you want.*
- *A person who has always struggled with numbers is unlikely to be a great accountant or statistician.*
- *The person without much natural empathy will never be able to comfort an agitated customer in the warm and sincere way that the great empathizers can.*
- *Each person has great potential for success in specific areas*
- *The key to human development is building on who you already are*
- *You cannot be anything you want to be but you can be a lot more of who you already are.*

Conclusion

With study of this elephant and crocodile story from different perspectives, and comparing the story of Gajendramokca with different management theories, we can say that,

Along with the devotion the story talks about the success a person gets depends upon the beliefs of the person, his natural talent and hard work.

The rich mythic traditions that have empowered millions of human beings for centuries needs to be decoded. These old scriptures contain a lot of material which talks about the eternal , timeless principles of management useful in many walks of life. These stories can be reinterpreted and used while teaching modern management courses.

References

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