



Ambarisha

Ambarisha was a noble king who combined fair rule with unflinching devotion to God and a blemish less record of following the dictums of the scriptures. Talk of a Karma Yogi, one who does all his duties with utmost devotion and completely devoid of pride, ego and expectation, here is a perfect example of “Nirmamo, Nir-ahankaro...” (a phrase repeatedly used in Bhagwad Geetha)

Ambarisha was a quiet achiever. He never trumpeted about his virtues or achievements. Normally, in an organization, such people may simply go unnoticed and unrewarded! But God, in all his fairness and infinite wisdom, decided to recognize Ambarisha even if he did not brag about his own accomplishments. As a mark of recognition of Ambarisha’s purity and devotion, God decided to **empower** him. On His own accord, God rewarded Ambarisha with the Sudarsana Chakra, the all powerful discus of God, which in a sense is God’s proxy. Ambarisha can thus be viewed as **empowered** while the Sudarsana is the **empowerment**. Since the mandate for Sudarsana Chakra was to do what it takes to protect Ambarisha. alternatively, Sudarsana Itself can be viewed as the empowered, authorized to help Ambarisha in whatever form is required.

To visit this empowered, enlightened soul, came the ever-angry, ever-ready-to-curse Durvasa. Despite this notorious short-temper, Durvasa was no mean person in terms of his power or stature. He was considered as an incarnation of Shiva Himself. Durvasa happened to visit Ambarisha on Dwadasi. The day before, Ekadasi, Ambarisha observed total fast (as he normally did on every Ekadasi). Scriptures require that the parana be done before a particular hour on Dwadasi for the punya of Ekadasi to be realized. In fact, the purpose of the scriptures was more than just ritualism. Our ancestors had perhaps made calculations about the flow of the digestive enzymes in our body and had reckoned the right hour to break the fast. Durvasa consciously delayed coming back in time for the Dwadasi parana.

It is not that Durvasa was not aware of the stipulations of the scriptures. It was just that he wanted to be a “Bad Guest”. We always talk about “Bad Hosts”, but don’t we find “Bad Guests” equally often? Consider people visiting India from abroad for holidays to visit their families back home. These folks would have grown up in the very houses before they left for abroad. But when they come back, they will behave as if they dropped from the sky! “Oh my son would only eat corn flakes!” “By the way can you please get me Coke for my daughter? She can never have a meal without Coke”. “Yikes! These Indian toilets are no good!” Mind you, it is not that these people are not used to the eating habits or the toilets of the families they are visiting (much as it is not as if Durvasa did not know the rules laid down by the scriptures for Ekadasi and Dwadasi). It is just that they want to exploit or torment the poor hosts! Thirukural also talks a lot of “virundombal” (or being a good host), but let us not forget, it is equally important to be a good guest as well!

When Durvasa did not come in time for the Dwadasi parana, Ambarisha was in a fix. Should he wait for Durvasa and miss the correct time for breaking the fast or should he go ahead true to the dictum “time and tide wait for no one”. He (rightly) chose the second option. This demonstrates how vital time is and that timeliness is only next to (or synonymous to) Godliness.

Durvasa not only was a bad guest, not only did he respect punctuality, he went one step further: He refused to accept he was wrong and insisted that Ambarisha was wrong! He initiated an evil spirit to kill Ambarisha. This is typical of the people who willingly commit a sin – they will use attack to add to the wrongs they do to justify their actions! Have you not seen the typical scenes in Indian roads that after any minor accident, the one who shouts wins (no matter whose fault it is)?!



Here is where the true value of empowerment and empowered come in: Ambarisha, with all his powers could have returned Durvasa's demon with another equally harmful one. He did not misuse his empowered status. Instead, he left it to the Sudarasana (the power that he is bestowed with it) to do what it takes. Sudarsana, the able servant, took initiative and acted proactively. It first destroyed the evil demon created by Durvasa (putting out the immediate fire, "defect correction" to use a quality terminology). It then went about chasing Durvasa to ensure he does not create another evil demon ("defect prevention"). This brings in a valuable lesson that every empowered one should follow. The empowerment instrument (or person) should take the lead and initiative himself without waiting for micro instructions from the "boss".

Durvasa quickly realized he has misjudged the strength of Ambarisha. Chased by Sudarsana, he went to every nook and corner – Indra, Brahma, Shiva, et al – for shelter. All of them pointed him to approach Lord Vishnu who was the owner of the Sudarasana. Lord Vishnu's reaction was even more interesting: He told Durvasa that what Sudarsana was doing was to do its duty of protecting Ambarisha – stressing the duty of the empowered instrument. The final say of what Sudarsana can and cannot do lies only with Ambarisha – the empowered one.

Now, Lord Vishnu is all powerful. He is after all the eventual owner of the Sudardsana, Ambarisha and in fact the entire cosmos. There is nothing that Hari Sarvothama cannot do. Why could He not have taken a decision as to what Sudasana should do? Well, Vishnu set the example for what a CEO should do after empowering his management team (or trusted lieutenants). He should simply get out of their way! Lord Vishnu did not do the common mistake senior people do after "empowering" their management team – to undermine the power of the empowered and dampen their confidence and make them lose ownership of the problem. Vishnu let Ambarisha do what he thought was best. Perhaps if Ambarisha had done something absolutely immoral or stupid (like going to fight with Durvasa misusing the Sudarasana Chakra), Lord Vishnu might have intervened and withdrawn his empowerment... but the key point was that Lord Vishnu was not only a fair CEO but also a very astute one. He empowered only someone like Ambarisha in whom He (Lord Vishnu) had the fullest confidence that the empowerment would not ever be misused.

If we take the alternative view proposed earlier that Sudarsana is the empowered one, with the charter to protect Ambarisha, then too, the proactivity that Sudarsana showed in killing the evil spirit and chasing Durvasa (even without commands from Ambarisha, the Boss), shows clearly how an empowered individual should act: Never wait for micro-instructions: Do what it takes in your best judgment and take **ownership** of the problem. The duty of the empowered one is not only to be reactive and put the immediate fire (defect prevention) but also be proactive and attack the root cause of the problem (defect prevention).

Ambarisha sticking to his principles and accomplishing a rare mixture of austerity and humaneness is a great example for all of us in being a hospitable and yet firm host.

Ambarisha's lessons in management

- Adapt to the culture of the environment you are in – don't enforce your culture on your hosts
- Time is God! There is nothing more sanct than keeping up time
- Empower the right ones in the organization
- Once the right ones are empowered, (as the CEO), respect that empowerment and don't interfere / undermine the importance of the empowered
- The empowered ones use discretion and be proactive in using the empowerment and take the initiative without waiting for micro instructions