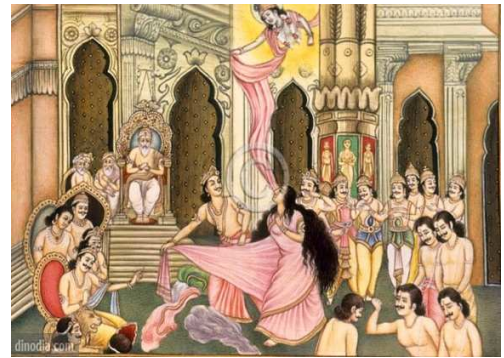


Some learn and some never – Itihasa shows the way

- **A.Sathyarayanan**

Being adamantly wrong is sure recipe for disaster. We see this trait in Duryodhana. He tortured himself to such hatred for the Pandavas that he did not enjoy his own life. Dhritarashtra advised: "Son, sorrow and death will be the sole result of hatred of kith and kin, especially when they are blameless." The son rode roughshod by slamming it down.

The virtuous Vidura was more forthright when Dushasana was asked to drag Panchali to the royal assembly," Duryodhana, are you mad that you rush to certain destruction? You are hanging by a slender thread over a bottomless abyss!!" Duryodhana reacted with a counter-charge that would do a modern day Indian politician proud," Vidura is jealous of us and afraid of Pandavas."



Even the guru Drona observed," I believe that the Pandavas are of divine birth and unconquerable. Duryodhana, make peace with Yudhishtira." This fell on deaf ears.



Sanjaya observed at the time the Pandavas took to exile," The victim of adverse fate will become perverted, utterly losing his sense of right and wrong. Time, the all destroyer, does not take a club and break a man's head but by destroying his judgment, make his act madly to his own ruin." Duryodhana sneered and was too contemptuous to react.

Lord Krishna gave Duryodhana a final chance at peace," You are a descendant of a noble line. Pursue the path of dharma. Your present thoughts are unworthy and befit only men of low birth. On account of you, the entire race is in danger of being wiped out." Duryodhana responded," I will not give the Pandavas an inch of land, not even a needlepoint of it!!

A man advised by Dhritarashtra, Vidura, Bhishma, Drona, Sanjaya, and Lord Krishna does not pay heed. Such intransigence and intractability destroyed the entire Kauravas from the root down. Duryodhana could have done with some learning.



Learning is the process of admitting the necessity of changing one self – be it knowledge, emotional state, or even one’s psychological condition. This calls for introspection, guidance, and diligence to adopt new attitudes. Learning is the very purpose of life as it fills us with varied experiences; we learn from moment to moment as the restless mind grows in tranquility and peace. From an impressionable youth to a responsible adult and an old man gaining wisdom is the purpose of life. Duryodhana simply blocked out any stimuli that was aimed at peaceful co-existence with his cousins. He suffered, he chose not to learn, he might as well have gotten a rope himself and hung himself – such was the “blind” fury that it cost the lives of his brothers and his entire tribe.

Learning from Children

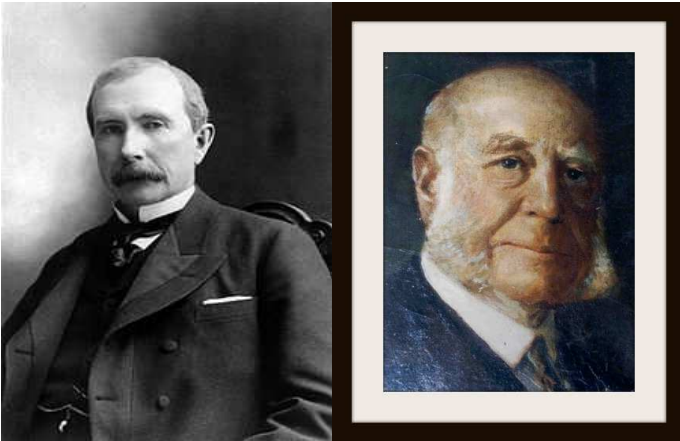


Children are not afraid of failure and that’s why they learn easily. They fail countless times at standing, walking, talking, riding a bicycle, tying shoelaces, and other important tasks. But they are resilient and don’t give up. Even as they learn to speak by imitating others they are not embarrassed even when elders mock at them. This is a stage nature builds in a learning streak

naturally and effortlessly. Be it humans or animals they spend years of tutelage learning to make sense of the world and learn a profession to make a living. Even Duryodhana learnt at Drona’s gurukul!!!!

Fear Dominate Adults

Instead of learning from failure, adults go into a fear psychosis. Their anxieties are understandable: they are paid to succeed, not fail. The errors reflect poorly on their intelligence, chipping away at self-confidence and self-esteem. This inhibits individual and collective growth and leads to paralysis, procrastination, and purposelessness.



Nowadays there are more and more organizations that promote a learning culture. Failures are considered opportunities to learn, not recrimination. There is an increased tolerance of failure, better feedback mechanisms, and an environment that fosters creativity and innovation.

One of John D. Rockefeller's partners, Edward T. Bedford, lost the firm a million dollars from a bad investment in South America. John had every reason to rant and even fire Bedford but he knew his partner had done his best. Rockefeller, ever the magnanimous, threw his arms on his shoulder and comforted him.

Let's explore stances of learning in the Itihasa -

Gautama and his wife Ahalya spent their days in peace and holy rituals. Indra, besotted by the rishi's wife's beauty approached the lady in the guise of the sage. Ahalya was not deceived by the impersonation, she yielded to his desire. She was vain of her beauty and proud that even the Lord of the celestials had come down to seek her.



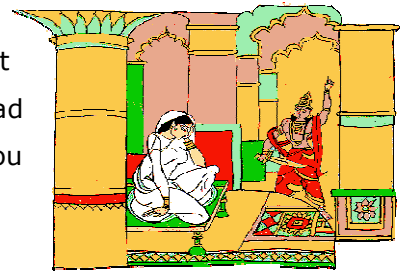
The sage cursed them both. He condemned her into a stone, unseen by anyone and still living on air. She was advised to serve a long penance till Rama set foot on the stone. And just as Gautama predicted, Ahalya was redeemed as there was a shower of flowers from the skies. She shone like a goddess cleansed of their sin and taint. Gautama returned to the ashrama and received his repentant and purified wife back to his affection.

A simple tale of transgression, forgiveness, repentance and learning. No longer was she vain about her beauty or flirted with anyone. She was a model wife from then on. The scripture shows that there is a second chance for everyone.



Kaikeyi is another instance of a woman gone rogue and berserk as she drove a bargain that cost her Dasaratha's life. She reminded about the two vows the king had promised and how he must honour it," The sun, the moon, and the planets were the holy witness. So were the five elements. And no one from the Ishvaku race had ever gone back on their words." Kaikeyi was heartless when she demanded that Rama be banished and Bharata be crowned. She watched her husband implore her even catching her feet. She watched him die in agony in front of her; yet the stone heart never moved or budged even a little.

And when Bharata arrived and berated her in the strongest terms, "You, murderess of your husband! I would rather be dead than be the son of this murderess. What a flood of sorrow you have unloosened on earth?"



After that Valmiki only portrays Kaikeyi has a repenting soul. She totally effaces herself from the rest of the tale so much there is hardly a mention. It was true that she accompanied Bharata's army into the forest in search of Rama. She was guilt ridden that Bharata describes," All the good my mother has got from her evil plan has been that she has become a sinner and a widow and in deep sorrow." She also requested Rama to return to Ayodhya as a king now that she no longer insisted or had any desire.

If all wrongdoers can be as contrite as Ahalya and Kaikeyi; both knew the nature of their crimes. They repented over long periods of time. And after that did not stray; they learnt. They revisited their value systems and built it on a sounder basis.

In contrast, Ravana and Duryodhana never bothered to learn. *Vinasha Kale Viparita buddhi* syndrome.



When Ravana broached the idea of kidnapping Sita, his uncle Mareecha said, "What plan is this? Some enemy determined to destroy you, but pretending to be your friend. It is like advising you to put your hand into the mouth of a sleeping cobra and pull out its fangs. To hanker after Rama's wife would only lead to annihilation of the Rakshasa's race." Ravana did not heed this advice. *Vinasha Kale Viparita buddhi*

Then Hanuman came as an envoy and asked Ravana to return Sita with honour, "You know well enough that the sin of desiring another's wife will consume utterly the merits earned by you in tapas. Do not mistake poison for food." Again went unheeded. *Vinasha Kale Viparita buddhi*



Vibheeshana counseled despite everyone throttling it down, "It was not right to seize Rama's wife in deceit. What harm did Rama do to us? We had some taste of Hanuman's strength and skill. Ever since you brought Sita to Lanka, we only see evil omens; we find snakes in places of worship, the cows don't yield milk, elephants and horses fall sick and reject food. Crows make hideous noises, vultures circles overhead and foxes enter our city and howl at unusual hours. Please return Sita and spare us the impending doom." Again went unheeded. *Vinasha Kale Viparita buddhi*

Later Angada and even Kumbarkana felt that Ravana was hasty in abducting Sita and therefore violated dharma. Ravana never heeded their advices. He plunged into the war as a man determined to sink his race; a hurry to commit suicide. What started as infatuation had now become a matter of false prestige and ego.

Duryodhana and Ravana were both stubborn and insisted on their point of view even when it was not dharmic. It seemed like a death-wish and a masochistic streak. Kaikeyi and Ahalya, no doubt, blundered but they had the courage to repent and compensate. Learning implies humility; own up the mistake and compensate.

- **A.Sathyanarayanan**

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