

## **Persuasive Power of Ancient Spiritual Discourse for Modern Business Leaders- A Study with Reference to Shiridi Sai Baba and Jesus Christ**

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**Abstract:** This paper studies the art of persuasion as an essential prerequisite for the success of today's business leaders. Persuasion forms a major portion of the daily communicative activities of any business organisation, irrespective of the type of communication and the channel used for it. This paper focuses on the incredible power of persuasion of Shri Shiridi Sai Baba and Jesus Christ, two of the greatest spiritual leaders ever born on earth. It was owing to their persuasive power that they could inspire millions of people to follow them. And they have set examples by their actions. This paper exemplifies how leaders of contemporary business world can imbibe the fine art of positive persuasion from the techniques of two great masters.

**Keywords:** Persuasion, Spirituality, Communication, Reciprocity, Compliance-gaining strategy

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Persuasion predominates our life worlds. In every field of human existence, people partake in and are required to use persuasion. Persuasion pervades human communication in all its forms: in intrapersonal, dyadic, small-group, public and mass communication. It assumes still greater significance when related to the world of business. Communication in the business world encompasses persuasion in a large way. Business, for its success, requires the recipient of the communication to be persuaded and to agree to the communicator's proposals. Particularly in the present age, when erosion of traditional hierarchy is significantly visible with command and control culture steadily declining, persuasion has become all the more important. The ancient spiritual leaders had very efficiently mastered this art.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Good persuasive communication skills enable, foster, and create the understanding and trust necessary to encourage others to follow a leader. In fact, no leader can succeed without mastering the art of persuasion. Researchers seldom agree on how best to define leadership, but most would agree that leaders are individuals who guide, motivate, direct and inspire others. They command others' attention. They persuade others to follow them or pursue goals they define [1]. The business leaders of today need to learn this art as everyday they have to figure out how to motivate and direct a highly individualistic workforce. Playing the

“Because I'm the boss” card is out. In a world where joint ventures and inter-company partnerships have blurred the lines of authority, persuasion skills exert far greater influence than formal power structures do [2]. Today, businesses are run largely by cross-functional teams of peers who show little tolerance for unquestioned authority. Electronic communication and globalisation have eroded the traditional hierarchy, as ideas and people flow more freely than ever in organisations and as decisions get made closer to the markets. These fundamental changes essentially come down to the fact that work today gets done through effective persuasion[3].

Persuasion is an art that the ancient spiritual leaders had mastered quite effectively. It is particularly the persuasive communication of Shiridi Sai Baba and Jesus that had tremendous impact over their disciples. Baba could tame wild animals with his soothing words and could persuade the most difficult persons to abandon the path of evil. His wit and humour endeared him to his disciples [4]. Jesus used his own style to communicate and is one of the greatest communicators on earth [5]. Nothing is more persuasive and an effective way in swaying others to one's viewpoints than to lead by example and be a role model. Jesus not only taught the notion, mind and attitude of how to be great, but also He acted and lived it [6].

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present paper attempts to study

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1. The concept of persuasion,
  2. The relevance of persuasion in today's business world,
  3. The persuasive power of the ancient spiritual leaders, Jesus Christ and Shirdi Sai Baba, and
  4. The persuasive power of the spiritual leaders as a lesson for today's business leaders.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept Of Persuasion**

The formal study of persuasion is over 2,000 years old. Within this long history, there are countless proposed definitions and views of persuasion. In formal terms, it is defined as a process of communication in which a communicator voluntarily forms, sustains, reinforces or changes the attitudes or behaviour of the recipient in accordance with what the communicator intends by his or her message[7].

Persuasion is not the act of coaxing or encouraging individuals to accept or do something that they do not want to. It demands understanding of the concerns, positions and objectives of the audience; it is the process of finding meaningful benefits and creative solutions

Persuasion is most often goal-directed communication. The goals a persuader desires to achieve are the effects he expects the audience to demonstrate. The concept of goal, in turn, implies that persuasion is purposive intentional communication. It depends on the persuader how well he understands the need of the audience and frames his message in such a way that his persuasive goal is achieved.

Persuasion has a durable structure, which consists of the source that is the persuader, the receiver, the message and the persuasive setting. These form the major components of a persuasive transaction. Most often persuasion is taken to be an art that some people are gifted with but if the intricacies involved in the process are systematically analysed, it is no less than a science.

### **The relevance of persuasion in the contemporary business world**

Persuasion is used in all major communicative activities of a business organisation, ranging from routine requests, apologies and presentations to advertisements and negotiations. By far the most common kind of persuasive document is writing a routine request in which the tone and style of writing should be such that the sender's persuasive goal is achieved. A business professional will also need to write feasibility reports that will present his proposals formally. A feasibility report contains two parts: the first gives the details of the project, and the second urges adopting it. It is this second part that demands efficient persuasive skills. Apologies are equally

persuasive as these can maintain and improve business relationships.

A business professional will often face the need to write sales and marketing letters, where persuasion plays a crucial role. These letters are intended to solve the recipient's problems, while offering an immediate solution. So, the writing should be such that it builds the trust of the reader and persuades to act accordingly. Presentations are intended to be persuasive. When a presentation is made, it is done with the objective of presenting the speaker's ideas and persuading the audience to appreciate and accept these ideas.

No business organisation can survive without advertisement, which can be defined as a communication process, a marketing process or a public relation process. However, it is, above all, a persuasion process. It intends to draw the attention of the customer, generate his interest in the product or service, create a desire to purchase it and provide a call to action. That is what is popularly known as the AIDA model on which an advertisement is based. Every step of it demands persuasion.

Persuasion is probably most visible in case of negotiations. The two parties involved in the negotiation process try their level best to persuade each other about the benefits of their proposals so that the opposite party agrees to their terms and conditions and act accordingly. Negotiation is, in fact, all about persuasion.

If a business professional has to be successful in the contemporary business world and accomplish his desired objectives, mastering persuasive communication skills is an essential pre-requisite for him. An early Havard Business School study says that the individual who gets ahead in business is the person who is able to communicate, to make sound decisions, and to persuade others to get things done [8].

### **The persuasive power of Shirdi Sai Baba and Jesus Christ**

Shirdi Sai Baba has been one of the greatest spiritual gurus who ever appeared on this earth. Transcending all the confines of religion, caste, sect and creed, Baba remained engaged in the spiritual uplift of humanity and operated on both the physical and metaphysical planes. What was most astounding about him was his amazing persuasive power by virtue of which he could change the hearts and minds of extremely difficult persons.

Sai Baba was an apostle of love, benevolence and sacrifice. He alleviated the suffering of his disciples, sometimes even at the cost of his own wellbeing. The stories of Bhimji Patil, Ganpat Sinpi,

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Bapu Saheb Butti, all of whom were cured of fatal diseases by the blessings of Baba, are well known [9]. When Baba attained his 'mahasamadhi', he actually undertook the suffering of his favourite disciple, Tatiya, who was destined to die that day. Baba's bountiful love, caring and generosity endeared him to all. It is this desire to serve people that made him an outstanding leader.

Baba rewarded people according to their deeds. Be it Balaji Patil Nawaskar, Shreemati Gokhale or Laxmi Chand [9], all were showered with Baba's blessings and they attained spiritual bliss. At the same time, Baba also reminded people of internalised norms when they seemed to behave in immoral ways. For instance, he stopped Megha from entering the divine abode of Dwarakamayee as this staunch Brahmin initially considered coming to Dwarakamayee as belittling his status since Baba was believed to be a Muslim by many people [9]. Sai Baba, thus, used the 'Rewarding strategy' and the strategy of 'Activating internalised commitments', which are the widely accepted compliance-gaining strategies of Marwell and Schmitt [10].

Baba also believed that if one wanted to receive something, he should first learn to give it because people repay in kind. It is a universal human tendency that people treat others the way they are treated. This is what he taught his devotees. Baba's thought coincides with Cialdini's Principle of Reciprocity. It is for the leaders of today to make the best possible use of this theory. Leaders can get the desired behaviour from co-workers and employees by displaying it first. Whether it is a sense of trust, a spirit of cooperation, or a pleasant demeanour, leaders should model the behaviour they want to see from others.

Nothing is more persuasive than to lead by example. Sai Baba not only inspired his devotees to serve humanity and taught them how to be great, but also he acted it and lived it. With his endless desire to serve the needy and his incredible generosity, Baba has set an example.

Jesus Christ is considered as one of the most effective communicators that the world has ever seen. He successfully persuaded his disciples to believe in the Almighty and serve the humanity as it is then that one can be truly spiritual. The first lesson about communicating to persuade is the importance of faith. The first step in a persuasion process is analysing the purpose and the audience. Too often, we only view people in terms of our needs and hidden agendas. We should view people in terms of their needs. The emphasis is on consistently showing understanding and extending help. A good persuader is a good collaborator. And this is exactly what Jesus did. He collaborated and shared [11]. He understood the needs

of his disciples and accordingly preached. But He not only preached. He practised what he preached. He said things that he really believed in. Nothing is more persuasive and an effective way in swaying others to one's viewpoints than to lead by example and be a role model. Jesus not only taught the notion, mind and attitude of how to be great, but also He acted and lived it. Leaders, in fact set the examples by what they do. They just do not talk the ethical way, they walk the talk. And Jesus did this.

Jesus most often used parables and stories to bridge the gap between what his audience already accepted, and what he was trying to persuade them to accept. This is also true of the other spiritual masters like Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who explained to their disciples using simple language, metaphors, analogies and stories. The practitioners of persuasive communication also believe in the same thing. They too advise that using simple language makes persuasion more effective.

It might apparently seem that the two worlds of spiritualism and business run parallel and that the spiritual leaders are infallible who do not have to put in much effort to prove themselves. But it is actually not so. Both these great masters were initially criticised by many and had to undergo illimitable pain and suffering to persuade people to tread the path of spirituality, honesty and goodness. It was years after their death that they were treated as deities.

Both these great masters preached universal love. And it is this bountiful love that can operate as the most powerful persuasive technique in the present day business world. In business, it is love for the customers, subordinates and colleagues that can make the workplace much more comfortable. Most often, we only view people in terms of our needs and hidden agendas. In fact, we should view people in terms of their needs. As Low argues we need to have a "TLC: think like the customer heart" [11]. It is a great lesson for the marketing people who have to sell products and services. Prioritising the needs of the customers saves a lot of time and effort. The key thrust is to show understanding, extend help whenever needed and be compassionate.

Nowadays, people are least tolerant of unquestioned authority and bossism seems out of place. An arrogant and authoritative leader is usually unwelcomed. On the contrary, humility builds trust and goodwill. Both Jesus and Sai Baba were epitomes of humility and gentleness. And it is this characteristic that endeared them to their disciples.

Jesus and Baba were both charismatic leaders who had their goals and vision clearly set before them. They guided their followers in the toughest situations,

and in turn, the followers showed incredible faith in the potential of their leaders. It is this credibility of the leader that is most needed in a crisis situation in business. To develop credibility, one needs to project a positive ethos. Ethos, as identified by Aristotle, is an appeal based on the perceived character of the speaker. For Aristotle, ethos is the most important persuasive device. One can display a positive ethos by developing greater emotional intelligence, building a positive reputation, learning to communicate more effectively and most importantly, act and sound ethical. As Kouzes and Posner [12] put it, "If people are going to follow someone willingly, whether it be battle or into the boardroom, they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust. They want to know that the leader is truthful and ethical." Since effective leadership depends heavily on a positive ethos, business leaders need to develop strong inner character and high ethical standards.

In the present contemporary business world, when 30-something CEOs and VPs no longer surprise us and paradigms are busted each day, holding one's own at the workplace is a challenging job. Years after the departure of these two great spiritual leaders, we need to evoke their vision and focus on the fact that life at the workplace can be much simpler and more fulfilling. They may not have been students of management theory, but the fundamental truths that they taught are invaluable in today's globalised workplace.

## CONCLUSION

If there was a time for leaders to learn the fine art of persuasion, it is now. The command-and-control days are things of the past. The only way to get things done is to persuade. Persuasion is not just selling or negotiating. It is a continuous learning process that finally leads to solution to problems. It does not refer to changing someone's opinion or attitude through coercing or cajoling. It is rather analysing the purpose, understanding the needs of the receiver, framing an appropriate message and finding correct emotional match with the receiver. It is a powerful art form that can move mountains as shown by the ancient spiritual masters.

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