

Tiya - A Parrot's Journey Home

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Samarpan (2009). Tiya - A Parrot's Journey Home (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers), pp.174, Rs. 150, ISBN 978-81-7223-832-2 (Spirituality)

"Tiya, you are much more than what you think you are, and you can achieve much more than what you think you can. You need to realize this through experience, for which you have to get out of this place."

On 30th November 2009, Indian Institute of Management, Indore had an unusual visitor. Swami Samarpananandaji, a monk living at Ramakrishna mission, Belur Math, Kolkata visited the Institute on invitation to give a set of lectures on management thoughts based on oriental literature to the executive PGP course participants of IIM Indore. He presented me a copy of (then) recently published book by him "Tiya - A Parrot's Journey Home".

During the last two years, I have read this book several times and every time I read this book, my admiration for this book has only increased. I have also discussed this book with many friends and several executive course participants (in IIM Indore). This write up is based on these experiences and is aimed to share my own reflections on this book with a wider audience.

This book (of 174 pages) is organized in five sections in a narrative form as experiences told by the main character of the book "Tiya" - the parrot. The other important character of the book is the invisible guide (which the author chooses to call) "Hans". Hans is a guide, philosopher, friend and mentor for Tiya in its evolution.

The book is organized in four parts and an epilogue. Part I provides the setting of Tiya and the environment in which it comes from "The Banyan Tree". It describes vividly the environment in which Tiya - the parrot was living and

the day today life of Tiya at the banyan tree. The second part of the book describes (eleven) lands, that Tiya visited in its journey to experience life. Part three of the book describes the journey of Tiya with Hans and its observations on half a dozen experiences. Part four describes the desire, effort and the experience of Tiya in liberating itself from the bondage of experience, expression, action and reaction. The epilogue summarizes the return of Tiya to the banyan tree with a changed mind set. The primary theme of this work is to describe how Tiya undergoes the process of experiences action, reaction, observation, maturity, liberation and salvation.

Before we get into details of the book, I would like to record that the style, narration and the witty nature of the book is admirable.

There are several paragraphs in the book, which are filled with pun. There are numerous interesting one liners (in the book) reproduced in Appendix I, which would motivate an individual to think deeper. Also, several conversations between Tiya and Hans, recorded in the book are worthwhile to reflect on their own. Few such representative conversations are presented in Appendix 2. In two separate tables, a brief description of the lands visited by Tiya along with its experiences are recorded. To provide a feel, the two experiences are described in detail below.

Land of Revolutionary Birds: Tiya visited a land where the birds instead of flying were walking. However, the birds themselves do not feel anything unnatural about their behavior. They have their leader a "big bird", who had terrified them and made them to obey his orders without any discussion or thinking. The big bird had conditioned the minds of other birds by fear to not to think independently or question his orders. Even Tiya started following the order of the big bird when he visited the land for a short while.

While the description of the land is simple, it provides significant insights to managers. The leader decides the destiny of the organization. The benevolence of the leader would provide for an eco-system for discussion, retrospection and course correction. An adamant leader would condition the society based on his wishes and eventually destroy the society. The subjects may or may not be able to contribute. In addition, they may not also benefit from the actions of the leader.

The Garden of Weeds: Tiya visits a land where the land owner is a demon who controls (somewhat cruelly) labourers in his farm. These labourers have been taken as slaves by the demon under the condition that if they clear the area allotted to them from weeds, they will get a pot of gold and he would set them free. The labourers work hard. Unfortunately, they are not able to clear the land from weeds. When the weeds are uprooted, they multiply and hence produce more weeds. The demon knows that the weeds have therapeutic value and healing power and hence they can be sold in the market for a consideration. By cruel methods of whipping the labourers routinely, the demon is forcing them to do more work. The labourers continue to work hard, driven by the greed of pot of Gold and fear of getting whipped by the demon, produce more weeds

and continue to be in slavery. The demon only stands to gain more and more.

This is a wonderful depiction of exploitation of the disadvantaged by a set of powerful people by false promises. The disadvantaged group usually neither has the courage nor the knowledge to break the vicious cycle.

Tiya is a story of a bird (symbolic) as it experiences the world and at times with certain degree of detachment and maturity. The reflections on this book may happen on three distinct dimensions.

- Reflect on individual experiences of the lands visited by Tiya in detail at the micro level.
- Reflect and deal with emotions arising out of experiences at an individual level. The two sets of land visited by Tiya provides an opportunity to experience various emotions in life, and deal with them.
- Reflect on the process by which the experiences are interfaced and dealt with. The action, reaction, involvement, participation, observation and detachment related to the emotions and experiences leading to a strong will power to deal with the order of nature (in terms of Karma and Dharma) is perhaps the journey mentioned in this book.

My own experience in discussing the book with various groups is varied. There is no standard uniform response from the audience. I have given a copy of this book to several visitors to the institute. All (of them) appreciated the book but the reactions, responses are not the same.

When the book was discussed with a senior management group, the discussion was non-stoppable. Everybody was enthusiastic to contribute. They invariably related the book back to their own personal experiences, connected

to other books they have read etc. At the end of the discussion, everyone had a different understanding and appreciation of the book. In some sense, this book provides a frame of reference to reflect on evolution of life and the intellectual maturity in one's own life.

The book does not provide any prescription to problems nor give any advise. There is no pontification in this book. It is an outstanding exercise in providing an opportunity in understanding one's self. This book is a unique piece of literature. It is also a philosophical book, but more importantly for a practicing manager it is a guiding reference for action and managing the consequences of an action. Actually, it provides a frame of reference for an individual to reflect one's own life and experiences. This I think is the invaluable contribution of this book.

The underlying plot of this book is the evolution process of attaining intellectual maturity by experience, engagement and disengagement. The philosophical connotations of this book leads to a path to liberation as described in ancient Hindu scriptures.

To summarise, this book is a journey of summary of experiences by Tiya (a symbolic bird) which represents each one of us in transforming from aimless action to participation, enjoyment and enrichment of life with maturity and detachment. Essentially Tiya went through the following stages.

- It had a great social life. It was happy. It was indulging and interacting with the fellow birds in the Banyan tree without any purpose.
- It was reminded by his friend (Mr. Owl) and its mentor (Mr. Hans) that it must leave the existing frame of comfort and sense of belongingness to discover and rediscover itself.

- With great hesitation and curiosity, Tiya adheres to the advise of Hans and moves to various lands.
- In the first part of the journey, Tiya visits different lands, observes experiences and reacts to these experiences. It also faces the consequences of such experiences and interactions. But for the timely intervention of Mr. Hans and its own introspection Tiya might have got strangled in the experiences of life.
- In the second part of the journey, Tiya slowly and surely learns to reduce its involvement with experiences. It successfully navigates itself to observe the experiences and not to participate in them.
- At the next level, Tiya learns to be a part of the experiences without the attachment and the consequences arising out of that. In some sense, Tiya becomes integrated with nature experiencing and enjoying what comes in its way without getting attached to it. In some sense, Tiya has transformed itself to perform worldly Karma with an attitude of a eternal Dharma.
- In essence the entire story of the book and subsequent reflection is summarized in the first page of the book itself which is reproduced here.

"Upon the same tree there are two birds of beautiful plumage, most friendly to each other, one eating the fruits, the other sitting there calm and silent without eating - the one on the lower branch eating sweet and bitter fruits in turn and becoming happy and unhappy, but the other one on the top, calm and majestic; he eats neither sweet nor bitter fruits, cares neither for happiness nor misery, immersed in his own glory."

Swami Vivekananda

Appendix I: Powerful Statements from the book

- A lonely traveler has only thoughts for company.
- Anger is not a sign of intelligence.
- Best arguments are those which convince not only others, but also oneself.
- Empathy is the key to survival.
- Enthusiasm born out of overconfidence can be fatal.
- Fear is the noose of the weak, courage is the ornament of the strong.
- Involvement kills, indifference frees.
- Morality is born only when values are practiced in adversity.
- Popularity came for a price.
- Sermons are normally resented, and more so, if the receiving party is guilty.
- The best way to make a person bow his head is to praise him.
- The weak make laws, while the strong interpret them.
- To become great one had to be humble.
- Values practiced in favourable conditions are not values.
- When frustration combines with aversion, the result is complete detachment.
- When you are too eager, your troubles get bigger.
- Words give birth to words, and action gives birth to action - the cycle continues.
- Wrong ideas in immature minds is a recipe for disaster.

Appendix 2: Reflections of Tiya in its journey

- Experience gives knowledge, and knowledge is strength. Strength is peace, and I (Tiya) was at peace.
- If one delayed one's reactions just for a moment, a lot of calamities could be avoided.

- If you take life lightly, you remain a dud, if you take it too seriously, you are doomed.
- Momentary sadness, yes - copious tears, no.
- One has to face the situation, but one also has to learn not to take a plunge. The unending journey takes one from situation to situation.
- Reaction causes involvement, which in turn makes you smile and cry, which in turn makes you react further, and entangles you more in its affairs. Stay indifferent.
- The dangerous ones rarely look dangerous; it is the innocent-looking ones who can be lethal.
- The ignorant ones are genuinely interested in what they hear, the sophisticated ones cleverly show interest; and the rest stay indifferent to the tales of others.
- The more neutral you stay to them, the better the chance of your coming out successfully.
- The ordinary must pose to look extraordinary - to feel and appear important is the biggest thrill.
- We encounter what we create, and we create what we want. No experience is waste in life.
- We get what we do not want, and we lose what we want. We are here to realize that we are more than what meets our eyes, so let's move forward.
- Words will draw you into action, and action will lead you to involvement. You may not be as lucky as you were in the past every time.
- You first place someone in a problem, and then drive in to save him.

Appendix 3

Conversations with itself by `Tiya' when it meets the invisible `Hans'

Let me (Tiya) speak to this voice
 Mind your own business
 That is what I wish to do
 You better ignore him
 Ignoring leads to ignorance
 Ignorance is bliss. Be firm
 My will power has always been leaky
 Persuade yourself not to speak
 Persuading others is easy
 You are a disgusting fool

Conversation between Tiya and Hans

What about your form, sir?
 What is there in a form?
 What do you want from me, sir?
 What is there in action?
 What brings you here, sir?
 What is there in a goal?
 Where are you from, sir?
 Judging by the trend of the answers, it was a useless question
 Home is where I am

Here I was - proud of my melodious name Tiya; proud of my plumage, my species, my banyan tree, my skills and my thinking. And there he was - nameless, formless, actionless, goalless and homeless! How dare he blast away my greatness, my ideas, my opinions and my philosophy?

Tiya on Profound Reflection

May be, but let me discover it the hard way
 You might be chasing a lie
 It is better than chasing birds
 You won't get a thing
 Even otherwise I wasn't getting much

One always hopes that each experience will be different from the previous one, and one survives on the belief that this time one won't get hit

Appendix 4

1.	The playground	Introduction to the world
2.	The Fays	Love and its consequences
3.	The Zarys	Anger, Fear and Ignorance
4.	The Revolutionary Birds	Management based on fear
5.	The Leaktons	Foolishness, Sorrow, Self Pity
6.	Ambiger	Ego, Selfishness and Hypocrisy
7.	The Lozos	Misguided Pride of Tiya
8.	The Lollys	Stupidity / Ignorance
9.	The Dingdings	Self Inflated Ego
10.	The Skazo	Ego (arising out of inferiority complex)
11.	Iceberg Riders	Exposure to undue risk
12.	Invisible tower	Futile action and ignorance
13.	Tails Aflame	Vicious cycle of problem creation, resolution and creation
14.	The Donkeys on the Run	Action without purpose
15.	The land of Shadow Chasers	Unrealistic Goals
16.	The Garden of Weeds	Exploitation and Ignorance
17.	The Wise Ones	Arrogance of knowledge leading to no consensus

Author's Profile

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decades at IIM Ahmedabad in the Production and Quantitative Methods Area and in the Business Policy Area.