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Exile as Epistemology: What the Araṇyakāṇḍa of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa Reveals About the Blind Spots of Western Change Management Theory

Kshama B N [1]

ABSTRACT

Over seven decades, Western change management theory— encompassing the force-field analysis of Lewin, the eight-step model of Kotter, and the ADKAR framework of Hiatt— has produced an elaborate vocabulary for the external architecture of organisational transformation. What it has consistently declined to theorise with equal rigour is the interior condition of the human being living through the change: what coercion does to the person compelled to comply; what catastrophic and irreversible loss does for the leader who must act in its aftermath; and what form of commitment is inaccessible, by its very nature, to any framework of incentive or design. This paper argues that the Araṇyakāṇḍa— the Forest Book of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa, spanning seventy-five sargas of Rāma's forest exile in Daṇḍakāraṇya— illuminates each of these blind spots with a precision and honesty that the Western theoretical tradition has not yet achieved. Through close textual reading of key sargas, etymological analysis of Sanskrit terms including māyā, viṣāda, and bhakti, and reference to the documented organisational histories of Nokia Corporation (2010–2013) and the Amul dairy cooperative (1946–1955), this paper proposes a diagnostic supplement to, rather than a wholesale replacement of, existing change management frameworks.

Keywords: Araṇyakāṇḍa, change management, viṣāda, bhakti, coercive compliance.

Introduction: The Real Character of the Vedic Gods

The study of change in organisations has, since at least the foundational contributions of Kurt Lewin in the immediate postwar period, proceeded from a broadly shared and rarely examined assumption: that the most analytically productive level of description is the structural one. Change, on this view, is best understood as a movement between equilibrium states, a sequence of stages through which collective behaviour passes under the influence of driving and restraining forces, a process whose outcomes can be predicted, shaped, and evaluated with reference to a body of replicable prescriptions. It would be difficult to overstate the practical and institutional influence of this assumption, which underlies not only Lewin's own three-stage model (1947) but the entire tradition of processual change theory that flows from it: Kotter's eight-step model (1996), Hiatt's ADKAR framework (2006), the transition-phase analysis of Bridges (2009), and the complexity-inflected approaches of Snowden and Boone (2007), among many others. These are not, taken individually or collectively, trivial contributions; they have generated genuine insight, guided real interventions in real organisations, and shaped the formation of management practitioners across several generations.

And yet, the question that motivates the present paper is not whether these frameworks are useful — they evidently are — but whether there is a category of human experience, directly relevant to the success or failure of change initiatives, that they do not merely underemphasise but structurally cannot see. The argument that follows is that there is, and that it may be described, with reasonable precision, as the interior of the human being under pressure: the psychological, ethical, and relational condition of the individual who is not merely subject to the change process but is, in some irreducibly personal sense, living it. What does it mean to comply with a directive one knows to be wrong? What does it mean to lead through loss that cannot be undone? What form does commitment take when it has been detached, entirely and permanently, from any rational expectation of outcome? Western change management theory has, by and large, treated these as peripheral questions — matters for psychology or philosophy rather than for management science. The Araṇyakāṇḍa of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa treats them as central.

The methodological implications of this framing deserve to be stated with some care at the outset, since they distinguish this paper from the broader tradition of scholarship — to which it is, in other respects, indebted — that has sought to identify management principles in classical Indian texts. The present paper does not claim that the Araṇyakāṇḍa encodes, anticipates, or validates Western change management theory; it claims, rather,

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that the Araṇyakāṇḍa reveals, by virtue of its radically different theoretical object, what that theory has omitted. The text functions, in the analysis that follows, as an epistemological instrument: its value lies in what it makes legible about Western theory's constitutive omissions — the categories of experience that the theory's foundational choices rendered invisible. This distinction has substantive consequences for the kind of claims the paper is in a position to make and, equally, for the kind of claims it must decline to make.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section II establishes the methodological position and introduces the Sanskrit analytical vocabulary deployed in the subsequent analysis. Sections III, IV, and V develop the three central arguments — concerning, respectively, the downstream consequences of coercion, the epistemological function of grief, and the category of commitment that design cannot produce — each grounded in specific textual episodes and illustrated with reference to documented contemporary cases. Section VI offers a synthetic diagnostic framework and a brief account of the paper's place within existing scholarship. A full Works Cited list in MLA 9th Edition format concludes the paper.

Method, Framing, and Sanskrit Analytical Vocabulary

a. The Methodological Stakes of the Epistemological Framing

The tradition of scholarship that this paper enters — known variously as Indian Ethos in Management, Bharatiya Management, or, in its more textually focused variants, classical Indian management thought — has produced, over the past four decades, a substantial and heterogeneous body of work. At its most credible and influential, as exemplified by the programme of S. K. Chakraborty at IIM Calcutta, whose

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The present paper's methodological departure from this confirmatory mode is a consequence of the argument itself. If the thesis is that Western change management theory is blind to certain dimensions of human experience, then to proceed by identifying Western concepts already present in the Araṇyakāṇḍa would be to assume, in the methodology, precisely what is being questioned in the argument. The appropriate procedure is to attend carefully to those moments in the text where the narrative behaves in ways that existing frameworks cannot account for — where a character does something that no motivational theory predicts, or where the sequence of events follows a logic that no stage model can accommodate — and to ask what conceptual resources would be required to describe what is happening. It is in the gaps between text and theory that the analysis proceeds.

Three such gaps are identified and argued in this paper. The paper does not claim that they are the only gaps; it claims only that these three are sufficiently well grounded in the text, sufficiently specific in their theoretical implications, and sufficiently consequential in their practical manifestations to constitute a worthwhile contribution to existing scholarship. The paper is explicitly diagnostic in orientation: it identifies conditions and questions rather than prescribing interventions. The Araṇyakāṇḍa is not, and is not here treated as, a management manual.

b. Primary Text and the Question of Textual Authority

The primary textual source for the present analysis is the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa Araṇyakāṇḍa in Sanskrit, read principally in the Gita Press, Gorakhpur edition (1969), with reference to the Princeton critical translation by Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (Vol. III, 1996). Ślokas cited are rendered in Devanāgarī with IAST transliteration following the conventions of the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration; English translations are the author's own unless otherwise indicated. All sarga and verse citations follow the Gita Press numbering, which differs marginally from the BORI Critical Edition; verification against the latter is recommended before final publication.

c. Sanskrit Conceptual Vocabulary

Five Sanskrit terms are deployed as analytical concepts throughout this paper. Rather than using these terms as decorative or illustrative additions to an argument already complete in English, the analysis treats them as

irreplaceable: each names a distinction or a condition that the English analytical vocabulary does not have adequate resources to express. A brief etymological account of each is provided in the table below; their full theoretical import is developed in the sections that follow.

Term (IAST)	Root / Etymology	Operational Sense in This Paper
Vikāra (विकार)	vi + √kṛ: to make in a different mode; to disturb the constitutive arrangement	Externally imposed, reactive modification — change proceeding without the interior consent of those who must enact it
Pariṇāma (परिणाम)	pari (completely) + √nam (to bend, to bow): a complete bending around	Total, integrated transformation in which the interior and exterior of the subject change together
Māyā (माया)	√mā (to measure, to fabricate, to construct an appearance)	Surface behaviour concealing an unchanged interior; institutional illusion produced when compliance is coerced rather than earned
Viṣāda (विषाद)	vi (intensifying) + √sad (to sit down into, to settle, to sink): a complete sinking into	The active, structured inhabitation of loss — grief as a discipline of orientation rather than a state to be managed through
Bhakti (भक्ति)	√bhaj (to share in, to partake of, to belong to): participation beyond personal interest	Non-transactional commitment whose persistence is independent of outcome, incentive, or any expectation of completion

Table 1: Sanskrit Analytical Vocabulary

Argument One: What Coercion Does to the Person Who Complies — The Mārīca Problem

a. The Silence of Western Theory

It is a matter of some theoretical interest that the most influential models of change management share a common and largely unexamined assumption about the relationship between coercion and compliance. On the view implicit in Lewin's force-field model, resistance is a structural phenomenon: it arises from the weight of restraining forces and may be reduced through systematic intervention. On Kotter's account, resistance is a communication problem— arising from insufficient urgency, inadequate coalition, or poorly articulated vision— and may be addressed by attending more carefully to each of these elements. On ADKAR's account, resistance reflects an individual's position on a readiness scale that may be advanced by targeted interventions at whatever point the individual currently stands.

What all three frameworks assume, and what none of them adequately questions, is that once resistance has been overcome — by whatever means — the resulting compliance is functionally equivalent to genuine adoption. The person who was resistant and is now compliant is, on these accounts, a person who has changed. The possibility that the resistance may not have been overcome at all — that it may, rather, have been driven underground, preserved in its entirety beneath the surface of performed behaviour, and repositioned within the implementation process itself — is not a possibility that any of these frameworks is equipped to theorise. It is, however, a possibility that the Araṇyakāṇḍa explores with considerable precision and with consequences that the text then traces to their catastrophic conclusion.

b. The Advisor Who Is Right: Mārīca in Sargas 29–37

> **Etymological Note: Mārīca (मारीच)**
>
> From mārīci (a ray of light; a mirage; related to māra, death and obstacle): the one who carries the light of accurate knowledge but is compelled to fabricate its opposite.
>
> The etymology anticipates the epistemological condition that coercion reliably produces. Mārīca bears accurate knowledge — he has encountered Rāma directly and survived only by flight — and will shortly be compelled to embody the precise opposite of that knowledge in the form of the golden deer. His name is, on this reading, not merely a character identifier but a structural description of what institutionalised silence does to the person who holds the truth.

To understand the full analytical force of the Mārīca episode, it is necessary to begin not with the moment of compliance — which has attracted the greater share of scholarly attention — but with the prior scene in which Mārīca functions as what contemporary management theory would call an internal risk assessor. He has encountered Rāma personally; he possesses direct experiential knowledge of Rāma's capability that no other actor in the episode can claim. When Rāvaṇa approaches him with the plan to abduct Sītā, Mārīca's response is not emotional or personal — it is methodical. He enumerates Rāma's martial attributes, traces the probable cascade of consequences should the plan proceed, assesses the realistic prospects for Laṅkā's survival, and advises, without equivocation, against the course of action.

न तस्य सदृशं कर्म कर्तुमर्हसि राक्षस । हितं च ते श्रृणुष्वेदं यद्यात्मा ते प्रियो भवेत् ॥

na tasya sadṛśaṃ karma kartumarhasi rākṣasa | hitaṃ ca te śṛṇuṣvedaṃ yadyātmā te priyo bhavet ||

"O demon, you should not commit an act of this kind. Listen to this counsel, which is offered for your benefit — if your own life is, indeed, dear to you."

— Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sarga 37 (Mārīca to Rāvaṇa)

What follows is the failure mode that Western frameworks have not, to the present author's knowledge, theorised as a distinct category: Rāvaṇa dismisses the assessment and departs. The critical question is not whether Rāvaṇa was wrong to dismiss it — he was, demonstrably and catastrophically — but what the dismissal does to the organisational system as a whole. Mārīca's knowledge does not disappear when it is overridden. It remains, structurally intact, in the person who holds it. The question of what happens when that person is subsequently required to implement the very plan his knowledge condemns is the question the Araṇyakāṇḍa proceeds to answer.

c. The Coerced Complier: Sargas 37–42 and the Production of Māyā

When Rāvaṇa returns in Sarga 37, the terms of engagement have shifted entirely. The first visit was an appeal — to experience, to reason, to self-interest. The second visit is an ultimatum: compliance or death. Mārīca's internal deliberation at this moment is narrated with a psychological specificity that marks it as analytically significant. He does not waver in his assessment of the plan. He does not revise his prediction of the outcome. He does not discover, in Rāvaṇa's authority or persistence, a reason to believe that what he knows to be wrong has somehow become right. He complies because the alternative is immediate destruction — a calculation whose rationality is impeccable and whose implications for the change initiative are, as the text demonstrates, fatal.

वरं रामशरैर्हन्तुं न रावणवशे स्थितम् । तं राघवशरैर्हन्तुं श्रेयः पश्यामि मारिच ॥

varaṃ rāmaśarairhantum na rāvaṇavaśe sthitam | taṃ rāghavaśarairhantum śreyaḥ paśyāmi mārica ||

"Better, I consider, to be slain by Rāma's arrows than to remain subject to Rāvaṇa's command. To be killed by that son of Raghu — this I take to be the greater good."

— Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sarga 38 (Mārīca's internal resolve)

The māyā condition — understood here in its etymological sense as a fabricated surface that conceals an unchanged reality — is now structurally in place. Mārīca implements the plan with considerable technical competence: the golden deer is sufficiently convincing to deceive not only Sītā but, eventually, even Lakṣmaṇa's trained scepticism. And yet the implementation is, from the first moment, animated by a knowledge of wrongness that coercion has not removed but merely relocated. It would be a mistake, analytically, to read this as sabotage; Mārīca does not act against the plan. He implements it correctly, and his correct implementation is what makes the abduction possible. The māyā does not disrupt the mechanism; it is the mechanism.

The destruction chain that follows — Rāma's pursuit of the deer overriding Lakṣmaṇa's well-founded objections; Mārīca's death-cry in Rāma's voice; the separation of the brothers from Sītā; the abduction — traces, in narrative form, the precise failure mode that coerced compliance produces: not resistance that becomes visible and can therefore be managed, but a preserved knowledge of wrongness that enters implementation invisibly and shapes failure from within. The change initiative succeeds in its proximate goal, and in so doing destroys everything.

d. Case Illustration: Nokia Corporation, 2010–2013

Case Study 1 — Nokia Corporation: The Symbian-to-Windows Phone Transition

In February 2011, Nokia's Chief Executive Officer Stephen Elop distributed an internal memorandum — widely known in management scholarship as the 'burning platform' memo — whose argument was structurally Lewin-ian: the existing equilibrium must be destabilised so that the urgency required for transformational change could be generated. The declared crisis was real; Nokia's position in the smartphone market had deteriorated sharply following the 2007 introduction of the iPhone, and the Symbian operating system was technically behind its major competitors by 2010. The strategic decision that followed — discontinuation of Symbian development and a full platform pivot to Windows Phone — was, however, taken over the documented objections of engineers and senior technical staff who possessed direct, operational knowledge of the transition's risks.

The structure of this objection, and the manner in which it was overridden, has been examined by Vuori and Huy, whose analysis in the Administrative Science Quarterly (2016) identified what they termed 'fear-based social dynamics' as the primary

organisational pathology: the institutional climate created by the burning platform framing was one in which the expression of serious doubt was coded, implicitly but effectively, as disloyalty to the change initiative. Engineers who held accurate assessments of the developer ecosystem's thinness, the transition timeline's inadequacy, and the platform's market viability complied with the implementation programme. Their compliance was genuine in form; their assessment was unchanged in substance.

The devices that reached the market confirmed, in their commercially relevant respects, the risks that had been accurately identified and institutionally silenced. By 2013, Nokia's mobile division had been acquired by Microsoft for a fraction of its peak valuation. Vuori and Huy identify the suppression of upward information flow as the decisive organisational failure — evidence, it may be suggested, that the Mārīca problem is not merely an ancient narrative device but a failure mode with a well-documented contemporary record.

Argument Two: What Grief Does for the Leader — The Epistemology of Viṣāda

a. The Status of Loss in Western Change Management Theory

It is not accurate to say that Western change management theory ignores the emotional dimension of transformation; it is more precisely accurate to say that it treats this dimension as a management problem — something to be acknowledged, calibrated, and, where possible, accelerated through. Kübler-Ross's stage model of grief (1969), which has exerted considerable influence on change management frameworks through the concept of the change curve, maps the emotional arc of loss toward acceptance and recovery. Kotter's model prescribes the generation of urgency at the earliest possible stage, partly on the grounds that urgency provides a psychological counterweight to the grief and nostalgia that tend to resist change. Among the major frameworks, Bridges' Transition Model (2009) comes closest to the position this paper is developing, in its insistence that every genuine transition begins with an Ending — a real, acknowledged loss of the previous state — and that leaders who bypass this phase tend to generate precisely the disengagement they sought to prevent.

The specific extension that the Araṇyakāṇḍa offers beyond Bridges concerns not the necessity of the Ending phase, on which Bridges is substantially correct, but its character and its function. Bridges treats the Ending as a prerequisite: something that must occur before the Neutral Zone can be productively inhabited. The Araṇyakāṇḍa treats viṣāda as something more: as a practice that produces, in the course of its performance, a specific form of environmental intelligence that is not available through any other means. Grief, on the Araṇyakāṇḍa's account, is not merely what must be endured before action can resume; it is a mode of knowing whose products are indispensable for the quality of the action that follows.

b. The Viṣāda Sequence in the Araṇyakāṇḍa (Sargas 58–75)

Etymological Note: Viṣāda (विषाद)

vi (intensifying prefix: fully, without reserve) + √sad (to sit, to settle, to sink into, to subside): the act of sinking completely into a situation — not collapsing under it but settling into its full weight.

The term recurs with deliberate resonance across the Sanskrit literary tradition. The Bhagavad Gītā names its first chapter Arjuna-Viṣāda-Yoga — viṣāda as a form of yoga, a disciplined practice — precisely because the complete inhabitation of the condition of loss and irresolution is, in that text as in the Araṇyakāṇḍa, the structural prerequisite for the clarity that makes right action possible. The use of yoga in compound with viṣāda signals that this is not passive suffering but active engagement.

The analytical case for viṣāda as epistemological discipline rests on the structure of the narrative sequence rather than on any single passage. Following the abduction of Sītā, Rāma does not proceed immediately to strategic planning. He does not create urgency, build a new coalition, or articulate a new vision. He enters, across Sargas 58 to 62, a sustained period of what the text itself denominates as viṣāda: an acute, total, and structurally organised inhabitation of loss. The behaviour that constitutes this inhabitation is, however, far from passive. Rāma addresses, in sequence, the trees, the river, the earth, the sky, and the animals of the forest — interrogating each concerning what it may have witnessed. This is, on a close reading, not random emotional expression but a systematic environmental witness-survey conducted through the medium of intense relational engagement.

हा सीते हा महाभागे हा प्रिये दर्शनं गते । त्वामपश्यन् महारण्ये किमहं करवाण्यहम् ॥

hā sīte hā mahābhāge hā priye darśanaṃ gate | tvāmapaśyan mahāraṇye kimahṃ karavāṇyaham ||

"Alas, Sītā — alas, the most blessed one — alas, beloved, gone from sight. Not seeing you in this great forest: what shall I do, what shall I do?"

— Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sarga 60

The iterative kimahṃ karavāṇi — 'what shall I do?' — deserves more analytical attention than the conventional reading as rhetorical distress affords it. It is, this paper suggests, an honest epistemic statement: the change leader's genuine and undefended acknowledgment that his previous framework of action has been rendered inadequate by the event, and that no new framework is yet available. Western change management prescriptions — from Kotter's urgency to ADKAR's Desire — are, in a significant sense, designed to prevent this moment from occurring, or to pass through it as rapidly as possible. The Araṇyakāṇḍa treats the full inhabitation of this moment as constitutive of the capacity for subsequent action.

The evidence for this claim is the sequence itself. Rāma inhabits the viṣāda condition fully, without evasion or premature closure, through Sargas 58 to 62. In Sarga 64, he encounters the dying Jatāyu — the aged eagle king who fought Rāvaṇa alone and was fatally wounded — and performs the funeral rites with complete attentiveness. The act of honouring the loss, rather than bypassing it in pursuit of the next strategic objective, is not incidental to the narrative; it is the moment at which the intelligence produced by full inhabitation of viṣāda becomes available. Jatāyu's testimony — delivered in dying — establishes Rāvaṇa's identity and the direction of the abduction: information whose operational significance is total. By Sarga 69, Rāma encounters Kabandha and is for the first time capable of asking a forward-looking, strategically precise question: not 'where has Sītā gone?' in the mode of general lament, but 'where should I go?' in the mode of purposive orientation. The intelligence that makes this question possible was gathered during the viṣāda phase.

Figure 1 — The Viṣāda Sequence as Epistemological Process (Sargas 58–75)

1. Catastrophic Loss Event: the abduction of Sītā (Sarga 46)

Complete disruption of existing strategic framework; no new orientation yet available — the authentic kimahṃ karavāṇi condition.

2. Full Inhabitation of Viṣāda (Sargas 58–62)

Systematic environmental witness-survey through relational engagement; refusal to foreclose loss prematurely; acknowledgment of the full reality of what has occurred.

3. Honouring the Loss: Jatāyu's funeral rites (Sarga 64)

The act of full recognition of what has been sacrificed; preservation of loyalty's record; moral grounding for subsequent action.

4. Intelligence Produced by the Grief Phase

Jatāyu's dying testimony establishes Rāvaṇa's identity and the direction of the abduction — information accessible only through complete relational presence.

5. Forward Orientation Becomes Possible: Kabandha (Sarga 69)

The question shifts from general lament to strategic precision: 'where should I go?' — diagnostic inquiry in place of unfocused grief.

6. Confirmation and New Beginning: Śabarī and Pampā (Sargas 70–75)

Environmental orientation complete; coalition-building with Sugrīva can now proceed from an accurate and fully inhabited reality assessment.

Figure 1: The Viṣāda Sequence as Epistemological Process

The structural implication of this reading is one that Western change management theory is not, on the whole, equipped to acknowledge: the grief phase produces environmental intelligence that is not otherwise available. A change leader who generates urgency before inhabiting the loss, or who articulates a new vision before completing the witness-survey of what has actually happened, will be acting from an incomplete and therefore distorted reality assessment. The distortion may not be immediately apparent; it will, however, be structural, and it will shape the quality of every subsequent decision.

Argument Three: What Design Cannot Produce — The Bhakti Structure

a. The Completeness Claim of Western Motivational Theory

Among the most sophisticated contributions of twentieth-century psychology to the study of organisational behaviour is Self-Determination Theory, developed over several decades by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, which holds that genuine, durable, intrinsic motivation — as distinct from the compliance-based behaviour produced by extrinsic rewards or coercive pressure — may be reliably cultivated when three fundamental psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This is a substantial and empirically well-supported claim, and the present paper does not challenge its validity within the domain in which it operates. What the paper does challenge is the implicit completeness claim that accompanies it: the assumption that intrinsic motivation, as theorised by Self-Determination Theory and related frameworks, exhausts the analytically relevant categories of durable organisational commitment.

Kotter's coalition-building presupposes that commitment can be generated through the right

combination of urgency, shared vision, and sustained communication. ADKAR's Desire element presupposes that commitment is a psychological state that may be produced by attending to individual readiness and alignment. Even Self-Determination Theory, in its most generous formulation, presupposes that commitment is a function of design: that if the right conditions are established, the right form of commitment will follow. What none of these frameworks theorises is a form of commitment that is, by its very nature, prior to design — commitment detached, fully and permanently, from any rational expectation of outcome, incentive, or timeline, and that persists not because the right conditions have been created but because it has become, for the person who holds it, constitutive of their sense of what they are.

Etymological Note: Bhakti (भक्ति)

√bhaj (to share in, to partake of, to distribute among, to belong to): participation in something larger than oneself as a form of being rather than as a form of doing.

The crucial analytical distinction from intrinsic motivation is the directionality of the relationship. Intrinsic motivation is goal-directed: it seeks completion, fulfilment, resolution. Bhakti, in the precise sense the term carries in Sanskrit philosophical discourse, is not goal-directed in this way. It is identity-constitutive: the commitment does not persist because it expects to be fulfilled but because, without it, the person who holds it would not know what they are. Śabarī's commitment would not have dissolved had Rāma never arrived. This is the datum that Self-Determination Theory cannot accommodate.

b. Jatāyu: The Commitment That Has No Rational Ground (Sargas 45–46)

The episode of Jatāyu's intervention is brief, and its narrative function is, on a conventional reading, transitional: it establishes the circumstances of the abduction and provides the intelligence that Rāma will require in the aftermath. A closer reading, however, reveals an episode of considerable analytical density. Jatāyu is aged; he acknowledges his own diminished capacity before engaging. He has no mandate from Rāma, with whom he has not been in recent communication. He assesses Rāvaṇa's power with apparent accuracy before engaging. He intercepts the chariot anyway, fights until his wings are severed, and survives long enough to deliver his testimony. None of this behaviour is explicable in terms of rational expectation of success; the point is that it does not need to be, because the commitment that animates it is not a function of that expectation.

> गृध्रराजोऽस्मि रामस्य सखा दशरथस्य च । निवर्तय महाबाहो सीतां हृत्वा न गम्यते ॥
>
> gṛdhrarājo'smi rāmasya sakhā daśarathasya ca | nivartaya mahābāho sītāṃ hṛtvā na gamyate ||
>
> "I am the king of vultures, friend of Rāma and of Daśaratha. Turn back, O mighty-armed one — you shall not take Sītā and simply go."
>
> — Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sarga 50 (Jatāyu to Rāvaṇa)

The declaration 'I am the king of vultures, friend of Rāma and of Daśaratha' is not a statement of intention; it is a statement of identity. Jatāyu does not say 'I will defend Sītā because I expect to succeed'; he says 'I am' — and the action follows from the identity as a consequence, not as a calculation. Self-Determination Theory can, with some effort, accommodate the relatedness dimension of this commitment: Jatāyu's sense of belonging to Rāma and Daśaratha satisfies the relatedness need at a high level of intensity. What it cannot accommodate is the indifference to outcome that the episode makes structurally explicit: Jatāyu's commitment is not diminished by the assessment that the outcome will be defeat, because it was never, in its foundations, a function of expected outcome.

c. Śabarī: The Commitment Across an Empty Timeline (Sargas 70–75)

Śabarī's episode tests the bhakti structure along a different axis: not the absence of prospect for success, as in Jatāyu's case, but the absence of timeline — the complete removal of any temporal horizon within which the commitment might be expected to reach its fulfilment. She has waited, in full and active preparation, for decades. Her teacher Mataṅga told her, upon his death, that Rāma would come; she has maintained her āśrama, tasted each fruit to find the sweetest for the expected guest, and preserved her orientation toward a purpose whose arrival she has no means of predicting or confirming. Kotter's coalition requires sustained communication and visible leadership presence to maintain momentum; ADKAR's Reinforcement element presupposes that the change has already occurred and requires embedding. Neither framework imagines a change champion whose commitment persists through decades of institutional solitude, with no external signal of progress, no coalition membership, and no confirmation that the change will arrive at all.

> अद्य प्राप्तास्मि सुकृतान् राम त्वां लोकपूजितम् । सेवितव्यश्च सततं गुरुणाश्रमवासिना ॥

> adya prāptāsmi sukṛtān rāma tvāṃ lokapūjitam |
> sevitavyaśca satataṃ guruṇāśramavāsinā ||
>
> "Today, through merit long accumulated, O Rāma — O one revered throughout all the worlds — I have attained you, whom the teacher's dwelling must always serve."
>
> — Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇyakāṇḍa, Sarga 74 (Śabarī to Rāma)

The phrase sukṛtān — 'through merit long accumulated' — is analytically significant beyond its devotional register. Śabarī attributes the arrival not to fortune or to the institutional provision of reinforcement but to the sustained practice of commitment itself as a form of value creation. The decades of waiting were not an interval in which nothing of organisational consequence occurred; they were a period in which the commitment was actively constituted and reconstituted, day by day, as the practice through which Śabarī's sense of what she was had been maintained. Self-Determination Theory can explain the autonomy and relatedness dimensions of this case with reasonable precision. What it cannot explain — what its architecture is not designed to accommodate — is the indifference to timeline that the text makes explicit: the sense in which Śabarī's commitment would have persisted, without structural diminishment, even had Rāma never come.

d. Case Illustration: The Amul Cooperative, 1946–1955

Case Study 2 — The Amul Dairy Cooperative: Founding Commitment and the Bhakti Structure

The founding history of the Amul dairy cooperative in Anand district, Gujarat — documented in Kurien's memoir (2005) and in scholarly accounts of the cooperative movement — presents a case of organisational commitment whose character is, in at least two analytically significant respects, closer to the bhakti structure outlined above than to anything that intrinsic motivation theory is equipped to describe. In 1946, the milk producers of Anand committed to the formation of a cooperative under Tribhuvandas Patel, against the explicit opposition of the Polson Dairy monopoly, the Bombay provincial government, and the established institutional interests of the colonial dairy industry. The rational calculation of probability would not have supported the commitment.

What the historical record shows is that this founding commitment was not produced by incentive design, communication campaign, urgency creation, or any other mechanism that Western change management theory identifies as the generator of durable organisational commitment. It was produced, so far as the documentary record allows one to infer, by a form of identification: the farmers had come to understand their own dignity — and the dignity of their families and community — as inseparable from the success of the cooperative. This is not the same as intrinsic motivation; it is closer to what the Sanskrit tradition calls bhakti: commitment whose persistence is constituted by identity rather than by expectation.

The two analytically significant characteristics of this founding commitment are, first, its persistence through roughly 1946 to 1950, during which no positive outcome signal was available and the cooperative's survival was genuinely uncertain; and, second, its resistance to rational cost-benefit recalculation that incentive theory would predict in such circumstances. When Verghese Kurien arrived in 1949 with the technical expertise the cooperative required, he found a human organisation whose commitment had been sustained through years of institutional adversity in a manner for which his training had not prepared him. Western change management frameworks, had they been applied at any stage of this founding period, would have assessed the initiative as improbable at each of its decisive junctures.

Synthesis: A Diagnostic Framework and the Place of This Paper in Existing Scholarship

a. What the Three Arguments Share

The three arguments advanced in Sections III, IV, and V are related by a structural feature that deserves to be made explicit. Each argument identifies a specific form of human interior experience — the condition of the person who complies under coercion, the condition of the leader who inhabits loss without evasion, the condition of the person whose commitment is constitutively indifferent to outcome — that Western change management theory renders invisible by virtue of its commitment to a particular level of description. The unit of analysis in Lewin, Kotter, ADKAR, and the majority of their successors is, broadly speaking, the behavioural: what organisations do, what individuals do, what the sequence of actions and reactions looks like from a perspective sufficiently detached to allow its structural regularities to be identified and prescribed. The interior of the human being — the knowing, grieving, and belonging that animate and, in these three cases, determine the behaviour — is not treated as a proper object of management science.

The Araṇyakāṇḍa treats it as the primary object. This is not because the text is philosophically sophisticated in a way that management science is not — though it may be — but because the genre conventions of

the dharma-kāvya require that the interior of the subject be narrated with the same care and consequence as the exterior of the action. When Mārīca complies, the text does not merely record the compliance; it narrates, with considerable precision, the interior state that the compliance does not alter. When Rāma grieves, the text does not merely record the grief; it shows what the grief does, what it produces, what becomes available through it that was not available before. This is a different theoretical object from the one that Western change management has constructed, and the three arguments of this paper are, at their core, an argument about the consequences of that difference.

b. Diagnostic Framework

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, the paper proposes the following diagnostic instrument — not a prescriptive model for how to conduct change, but a set of questions whose answers are diagnostically significant in a way that existing frameworks do not equip practitioners to ask.

Diagnostic Question	Textual Grounding	Observable Indicator in Practice	Nearest Western Equivalent and Its Limitation
Is the compliance in this initiative genuine adoption, or is it māyā — surface behaviour concealing an unchanged interior?	Mārīca, Araṇyakāṇḍa Sargas 37–42	Implementers who execute with technical competence but show no evidence of revised assessment; failure that originates within implementation rather than from external opposition	Kotter Step 4 (Communicate the Vision): identifies the communication gap but cannot theorise the coercion problem or its downstream consequences
Has the change leader fully inhabited the loss before proceeding to vision-articulation and coalition-building?	Rāma's viṣāda, Sargas 58–62	Leaders who articulate new directions before publicly acknowledging the end of old ones; change narratives in which grief is rhetorically acknowledged but not structurally inhabited	Bridges' Transition Model (Endings): identifies the necessity of acknowledgment but does not theorise the epistemological productivity of the grief phase
Is the commitment sustaining this initiative bhakti-type — identity-constitutive and timeline-independent — or contingent on outcome signals?	Jatāyu (Sargas 45–46); Śabarī (Sargas 70–75)	Change champions whose commitment will dissolve if timelines slip or expected recognition is restructured; absence of any framework for sustaining commitment of the bhakti type	Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan): explains intrinsic motivation but not commitment structurally indifferent to outcome, timeline, and institutional recognition

Table 2: A Diagnostic Framework — Three Questions the Araṇyakāṇḍa Foregrounds

c. Situating This Paper

The Indian Ethos in Management tradition, whose most sustained scholarly articulation remains Chakraborty's Management by Values (1991), provides the primary intellectual context for this paper. Chakraborty's central claim — that values-driven management, grounded in a Vedantic understanding of the self, is functionally superior to the instrumental rationality underlying most Western management frameworks — is not challenged here. The present paper's departure from Chakraborty is methodological rather than substantive: where his work derives positive management principles from classical texts and proposes them as alternatives to their Western equivalents, this paper derives diagnostic questions from the gaps those texts illuminate in existing theory. The two approaches are complementary, and a comprehensive account of what classical Indian scholarship might contribute to management theory would require both.

The paper is also aware of the critical dimension of the existing literature. Pattanaik's Business Sutra (2013), which extended the tradition to a wide popular readership, has been critiqued, with some justification, for reducing classical philosophical texts to a repertoire of business illustrations. The present paper's position is that these concerns apply with full force to the confirmatory mode of analysis — the identification of Western concepts already present in ancient texts — but with rather less force to the critical and diagnostic mode adopted here. A paper that uses the Araṇyakāṇḍa to identify the limits of Western change management theory is using the text as an interlocutor, not as a validation device; and an interlocutor, however ancient, is not in a position to be reduced.

Conclusion

The argument of this paper may be summarised, with some loss of the specificity on which its credibility depends, in a single sentence: Western change management theory, across the range of its most influential contributions, is structurally blind to the interior of the human being under pressure, and the Araṇyakāṇḍa of Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa makes that blindness visible in three specific and consequential ways. The blindness is not a failure of intelligence or intention; it is a consequence of theoretical choices — about the appropriate unit of analysis, the legitimate objects of management science, the boundary between the behavioural and the psychological — that were made, largely implicitly, in the founding contributions of the discipline and have been reproduced, with occasional and partial exceptions, in the work that has followed.

Whether the three diagnostic questions proposed in Section VI constitute a complete or definitive supplement to existing theory is not a claim this paper is in a position to make. The evidence for each argument is textual and illustrative rather than empirical; the case studies are offered as demonstrations of plausibility rather than as proofs of necessity. What the paper does claim — with, it is hoped, a degree of specificity sufficient to constitute a genuinely falsifiable contribution — is that the three failure modes identified here are real, recurring, and consequential; that they are visible in documented organisational history; and that the concepts required to name and analyse them are not currently available in the Western change management vocabulary.

The Araṇyakāṇḍa offers those concepts not because it was composed as a management text — it was not — but because it was composed as an honest account of what it means, in the most demanding circumstances conceivable, to act rightly in relation to others, to loss, and to purpose. That is, as it happens, precisely what change management is about. The forest, in this reading, is not an escape from the concerns of organised human life — it is their most rigorous examination. The question the exile poses is one that the theory has not yet learned to ask.

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