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CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FROM
ANCIENT INDIAN WISDOM

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Lieutenant General Ajai Kumar Singh, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM, an alumnus of National Defence Academy Khadakwasla and Indian Military Academy Dehradun was commissioned into the Seventh Battalion of the Eleventh Gorkha Rifles in December 1984. He has done his M.Sc (Defence Studies) from Madras University, M.Phil (Defence and Strategic Studies) from Indore University and attended the prestigious National Defence College, New Delhi. In an illustrious career spanning over three and half decades, the General Officer has had vast Operational experience in Counter Insurgency,



High Altitude, Glaciated and Desert Operations. He commanded the First Battalion of the Eleventh Gorkha Rifles in Counter Insurgency environment in the Valley, an Independent Brigade Group along Western Front, the Counter Insurgency Force in J&K and a Corps deployed in a highly sensitive area on Northern Borders. The General Officer has had varied Regimental, Instructional and Staff exposures which includes Director at Military Operations Directorate, Deputy Director General (Discipline & Vigilance), Additional Director General Military Operations (A) and Director General Operational Logistics in Army Headquarters. The General Officer has also tenanted a foreign assignment with the Military Wing at the Embassy of India in Nepal. He is a recipient of Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, Yudh Seva Medal, Sena Medal, Vishisht Seva Medal, two Chief of the Army Staff Commendation Cards and a General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (Central Command) Commendation Card. An alumnus of Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling the General Officer is a keen Trekker and Mountaineer. He is a keen sportsman with interest in cycling & Yoga and an ardent reader with interest in geopolitics, spirituality, mythology, history and nature. The General officer is presently tenanted appt of GOC-in-C, Southern Command.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary leadership is dynamic & constantly evolving which seeks to explore and understand the principles and practices that are necessary for effective leadership in today's rapidly changing world. Present day leadership models and theories have emerged to meet the demands of a complex and unpredictable global environment. In recent years, military and civil landscape across the world has undergone significant transformation. Contemporary leadership requires wide range of approaches, from the traditional leadership styles to the more collaborative, networked approach that emphasises on innovation, out of box thinking, flexibility & adaption. Leadership remains the corner stone and bedrock for all organisations today and it is more pronounced for military. Hence contemporary leadership will play an increasingly important role in driving success and achieving growth of organisation.

AIM

To understand requirements of contemporary leadership and apply leadership principles from ancient Indian wisdom to lead in contemporary environment.

SCOPE

This article is covered in three parts as under: -

- a. Part 1–Organisation Culture: Environment of Leader & Contemporary Challenges.
- b. Part 2 - Leadership Lessons from Spirituality and Ancient Indian Wisdom.
- c. Part 3 –Preparing leaders for 21st century.

PART 1

ORGANISATION CULTURE: ENVIRONMENT OF LEADERS & CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Organisation culture and leaders have a dynamic and reciprocal relationship. Leaders can shape and influence the culture of an organisation, while the culture of the organisation can also influence the actions and behaviours of its leaders. Relationship between organisation culture and leaders is complex and interdependent. Effective leaders recognise the important of understanding and working within the culture of their organisation, while also taking steps to shape and influence the culture in positive ways. This part covers how any organisation culture is shaped with special emphasis on military organisation and its interaction with leadership.

Organisation Culture and Values

Understanding Organisation Culture¹

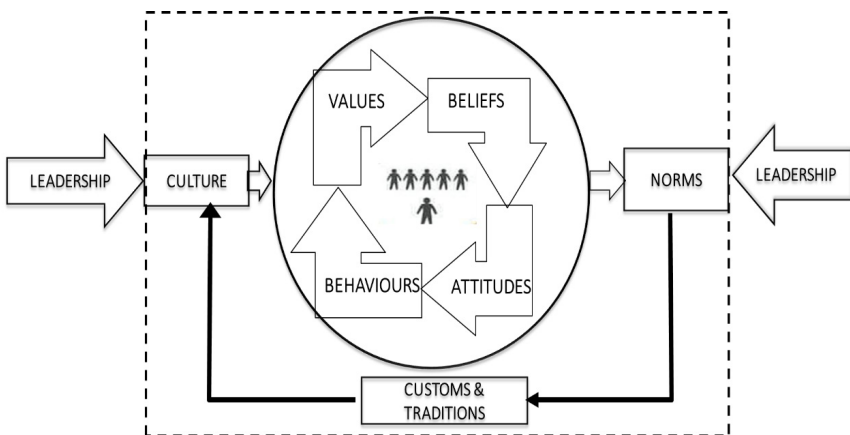


Fig 1 : Leadership and Organisation Culture

1 Culture, Value and Attitudes, College of Defence Management Precis on Org Behaviour.

- a. What is Organisation Culture?** Organisation culture is generally understood as all of organisation's beliefs, values and attitudes and how these influence the behaviour of its members. Culture affects how people experience an organisation. Culture is very important for the growth of individuals as well as organisation. It helps promoting emotional and social cohesion, understanding and prediction of human behaviour and national Integration. For any large organisation, this culture has been shaped over the years. For military, customs and traditions which have evolved over a pd also form part of organisation culture. Fig 1 above gives out interaction between this organisation culture and leadership. As culture, values, beliefs and attitude are inter related, it is important to understand relationship between them before realising their interaction with leadership.
- b. Beliefs².** Beliefs represent the way people view their environment. They are characterised by a true-false continuum and a probability scale (e.g. Ghosts). They represent what you agree with and what you usually think is true; some things you believe to be absolutely true, some to be probably. You cannot observe a belief. You can only observe a person's behaviour and assume that it came about because of a particular belief. Beliefs are not necessarily logical but are determined by what you want to believe, what you are able to believe and by basic needs which may influence you to have certain beliefs. For example, individual beliefs such as 'All religions are equal', 'God created world' and 'Its dishonourable to show fear' will vary from person to person or organisation to organisation.
- c. Values.** A value is an enduring belief that guides a person about what is wrong or right and accordingly leads to his behaviour. A value system is collection of such beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existences. The examples of values include Integrity, Respect, Honesty, Courage etc.

2 Khanna, Sandeep. "Human Resource Management : Need for Holistic Blend of Culture Value and Attitudes ." IRJMS Vol 5, Issue11 (2014). https://www.academia.edu/11317158/HUMAN_RESOURCE_MANAGEMENT_NEED_FOR.

- d. **Attitudes & Behaviours.** Attitude is organisation of several beliefs around a specific object or a situation. Unlike a value, attitude is situation specific and is not a standard. Attitudes are lasting organisation of beliefs that make a person tend to respond to things in particular way. Thus, the attitude of individuals in an organisation determines their behaviour for different situations and circumstances.
- e. **Norms, Customs and Traditions.** The overall behaviour of organisation members over a period of time gives rise to norms in an organisation. Similarly, generational norms give rise to customs and traditions. Norms aid group members interpret and assess different events and establish expectations about appropriate conduct whereas traditions and customs provide a sense of permanency across generations, sustain morale and inculcate pride amongst its members. In organisation like military, these help new recruits adjust to unfamiliar surroundings.

Interaction between Leadership & Organisation Culture. Figure 1 above as explained in previous para is a cyclic process in which culture and organisation values, beliefs, norms and traditions reinforce each other. This whole system interacts with the leader very closely at times. It may happen that if the organisation culture is weak, the leader overpowers the organisation giving birth to toxic leadership. Hence, if the leadership has to flourish, we need to have and maintain strong organisation culture and values.

Strong Military Cultural Values. Military culture is a unique collection of values that govern behaviour and decision-making of individuals and groups within the military. Here are some of these military cultural values:-

- a. **Mission Oriented.** A sense of duty and responsibility to the mission and the organisation is a core value in military culture. Military personnel are expected to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities to the best of their abilities.
- b. **Honour, Integrity & Moral Courage.** Military culture places a high value on honour, integrity and moral courage. This means

doing what is right, even when it is difficult or unpopular.

- c. **Loyalty & Ownership to Organisation.** Loyalty to the mission, the organisation and fellow military personnel is also a key value in military culture. Military persons are expected to put the needs of the team ahead of their own personal interests.
- d. **Chain of Command.** Respect for authority, rank and seniority is another important value in military culture. Military personnel are expected to show respect for those in positions of leadership.
- e. **Selfless Service/ Professionalism.** Military culture emphasises selfless service and sacrifice for the greater good.
- f. **Discipline.** Military culture places a high value on discipline and adherence to rules and regulations.

Contemporary Challenges for Leaders across Different Organisations³

In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, contemporary leaders face a wide range of challenges. Some of the key challenges are as under: -

- a. **Adaptation to Change.** Leaders must navigate and respond to an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. They need to be agile and adaptable to effectively address evolving technological advancements, market disruptions and societal shifts.
- b. **Globalisation and Cultural Diversity.** Leaders often work with diverse teams spread across different regions and cultures. Managing cultural differences, fostering inclusivity and building cohesive teams can be a significant challenge.
- c. **Technological Advancements.** Rapid advancements in technology, such as Artificial Intelligence, automation and digital transformation require leaders to understand and leverage these tools effectively. They must also consider the ethical implications and potential impact on the workforce.

3 "How to Deal with These 17 Common Leadership Challenges," n.d. <https://www.betterup.com/blog/leadership-challenges>.

- d. **Workforce Dynamics.** Today's workforce is multi-generational comprising individuals with different expectations, work styles and motivations. Leaders must create an inclusive and engaging work environment that can attract, retain and develop talent across generations.
- e. **Ethical Decision Making.** Leaders face ethical dilemmas and are expected to make decisions that prioritise long-term sustainability, social responsibility and the well-being of stakeholders. Balancing profitability with ethical considerations can be challenging.
- f. **Geopolitical and Socio-Economic Factors.** Leaders need to consider geopolitical shifts, trade policies, economic trends and social issues that impact their organisations. Navigating through political uncertainties, economic downturns and social unrest requires strategic acumen and resilience.
- g. **Innovation and Disruption.** Leaders must foster a culture of innovation and drive organisational change to stay ahead in competitive markets. They need to identify emerging opportunities, embrace new business models and encourage creativity while managing risks associated with disruption.
- h. **Mental Health and Well-Being.** Leaders need to prioritise their own well-being and that of their teams. Addressing issues such as burnout, stress and mental health requires creating a supportive culture, promoting work-life balance and providing resources for well-being.

Unique Challenges for Military Leaders⁴. Due to inherent difference in organisation culture, goals and requirements, military leaders face some unique challenges apart from the ones listed above. These are as under:-

- a. **Changing Warfare.** Modern warfare has undergone rapid change in

4 "Challenges of 21st century Military Leadership," n.d. <https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/CHALLENGES%20OF%2021ST%20CENTURY%20MILITARY%20LEADERSHIP%20%20HOW%20DO%20WE%20TRAIN.pdf>.

recent years as evident by various conflicts across the world. Some of the aspects which have undergone change are as under:-

- **Dynamic Character.** Technology is changing the way modern wars are fought. Also, apart from traditional domains of Land, Air and Sea, new age warfare is fought in other emerging domains such as Cyber, Information, Space etc. This has impacted conduct of warfare.
- **High State of Readiness.** Modern wars are short and intense. These will often be initiated at a short notice. Also, due to dependency on each other for war effort, all entities need to be in constant high state of readiness.
- **Blurred Boundaries.** Militaries across the world face unbounded forms of warfare in current security environment. These dynamics include shifting of alliances, emergence of new enemies, infusion of new technologies and unbounded battlefields. The distinct line between War & Peace, Victory & Defeat, Civil & Military Targets has been blurred as witnessed in recent conflicts.
- **Enhanced Visibility.** Modern wars are taking place in full glare of the media. So called 'war in your bedroom' on TV commenced since Iraq War and every action by soldiers and leaders gets scrutinised by people and the government.
- **Primacy of Joint/ Integration Operations.** The old days of services fighting their own wars and having limited impact on each other's operations are gone. Modern day warfare demands multi domain capability with operations being prosecuted across these domains through convergence of capabilities. Such unified approach leads to overwhelming of adversary by presenting it with operational and/ or tactical predicaments. This requires high degree of integration not only amongst services but also with other government/civil/corporate agencies.

b. Evolving Organisation Climate⁵. Our own organisation climate has undergone change in recent years. In context of Indian militaries, this can be broadly covered as following:-

- **Structural Changes.** The various steps initiated to optimise & right size armed forces will throw up new challenges and opportunities to Indian military leadership. Theaterisation will blend service cultures which the leaders will have to adapt to. Forming Integrated Battle Groups or IBGisation will force us to be more agile and mission oriented.
- **Induction of Women into Armed Forces.** With the winds of change in the male-dominated establishment, the gender bias will slowly fade away as we move further in this century. Women officers getting command, entry of women as soldiers and fighter pilots are revolutionary changes. Even NDA (National Defence Academy) and Sainik Schools/ Military Schools have started getting women cadets which will transform our organisational climate.
- **Impact of Social Media⁶.** The age of social media has drastically changed the way of functioning of all. All soldiers and their families are greatly impacted by social media. These can also be used by our adversaries to launch Information Warfare campaigns.
- **Aspirations of New Generation Soldiers.** Modern day soldiers are more educated, aware and ambitious than their predecessors. The old-style motivators may not work due to socio-economic developments of recent years, making the motivational role of military leaders difficult.

c. The changing warfare and organisation climate have thrown up certain challenges to military leadership. In addition, the societal values and climate has undergone change in recent years. The various unique challenges for leadership presented by these changes

5 Singh, Maj Gen CP. "Changing face of leadership in Armed Forces." n.d. <https://taazakhabarnews.com/changing-face-of-leadership-in-armed-forces/>

6 CENJOWS Seminar. "PROCEEDINGS OF SEMINAR ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE ARMED FORCES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES." 12 May 17. <https://cenjows.in/publications/social-media-and-the-armed-forces-opportunities-and-chall>

are as under:-

- **Technology Adaption.** In recent years, the military technology is undergoing change at extremely fast pace. The old styled militaries are becoming irrelevant against militaries that have infused new technologies in warfare. Military leaders need to stay up-to-date with these rapidly advancing tech. Military leaders must understand the potential of these new technologies and their implications for both offensive and defensive operations.
- **Navigate Complex Geopolitical & Societal Dynamics.** Due to rapid rise in social media, the world is becoming more interconnected and interdependent. Military leaders must understand the political, economic and social factors that shape global events and develop strategies that can address them effectively.
- **Manage Diversity.** The military is becoming increasingly diverse with soldiers from different backgrounds, cultures and experiences serving together. Old and new generation soldiers have different way of conduct. Closing gender bias needs military leaders to be able to understand and respect these differences while still promoting unity and a shared sense of purpose. They must also be able to leverage the strengths of their diverse teams to achieve mission success.
- **Maintain Ethical Standards.** Military leaders must navigate a range of ethical dilemmas and ensure that their actions are consistent with legal and moral norms and that they uphold the values of our nation and organisation.
- **Build and Maintain Public Trust.** The military is often seen as a symbol of national security and sovereignty and the public expects it to act with integrity and professionalism. Military leaders must be transparent and accountable in their actions and they must be able to communicate effectively with the public to build trust and support for their missions.

PART 2

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM SPIRITUALITY AND ANCIENT INDIAN WISDOM

The ancient Indian ethos through its traditions and spirituality can help modern leaders to create a more sustainable model of leadership. Relevance of these teachings through ancient literature like Vedas, Upanishads, Gita etc and study of own great leaders from history throw invaluable lessons on contemporary leadership. This section will discuss some of the leadership lessons from these texts/ traditions and leaders.

Spiritual Leadership⁷

Spiritual leadership is a concept that has gained significant attention in recent years. This type of leadership involves a deep commitment to one's own spiritual growth and the growth of those around them. It is about leading from a place of integrity, authenticity and purpose, with the goal of making a positive impact on the world. In this part, we will explore what spiritual leadership is, why it matters and how it can be cultivated.

What is Spiritual Leadership? At its core, essential element of spirituality is about science to understand 'Who Am I?' It is about transcendence of *Self* which involves the expansion of personal boundaries and a commitment to personal growth and self-awareness, as well as a deep connection to a higher power or purpose. Spiritual leaders are those who have taken the

7 Wang, M., Guo, T., Ni, Y., Shang, S., & Tang, Z. (2019, January 4). The Effect of Spiritual Leadership on Employee Effectiveness: An Intrinsic Motivation Perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02627>

time to reflect on their own values and beliefs and who are committed to living in alignment with those values. They are not afraid to ask the big questions about life, meaning and purpose and they are willing to seek out answers in a variety of spiritual traditions.

Why Spiritual Leadership is Important?⁸

- a. **Inspirational and Empowering Leadership.** Spiritual leaders recognise that their role is not just to achieve personal success but to help others grow and develop as well. They seek to inspire and empower those around them to help them tap into their own potential and live more meaningful lives. They do this by creating a culture of trust, compassion and collaboration where people feel safe to take risks, make mistakes and learn from their experiences.
- b. **Create Sense of Purpose.** For any organisation, spiritual leadership creates a sense of purpose and meaning in the workplace. When leaders are focussed on something greater than themselves, it inspires their teams to do the same. People want to feel like their work is making a positive difference to others and when they see their leaders modelling this behaviour, it creates a sense of purpose that transcends the daily grind of the job. This, in turn, leads to increased engagement, motivation and productivity.
- c. **Foster Sense of Community & Connection.** Another benefit of spiritual leadership is that it fosters a sense of community and connection. When leaders are focussed on creating a culture of trust and collaboration, it brings people together in a way that transcends individual differences and creates a sense of shared purpose. This not only makes the workplace more enjoyable and fulfilling, but it also leads to better outcomes, as people are more willing to work together and share their ideas and expertise.

8 Meng, Yishuang. "Spiritual Leadership at the Workplace: Perspectives and Theories." *Biomedical Reports* 5, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 408–12. <https://doi.org/10.3892/br.2016.748>.

How to Cultivate Spiritual Leadership in an Organisation?⁹ There are several practices that can be helpful in this regard. These are given as under:-

- a. **Spiritual Practice.** A regular spiritual practice can be cultivated in an organisation to develop Spiritual Leadership. This might involve meditation, prayer or some other form of reflection that helps you connect with your inner self and your sense of purpose. By taking the time to reflect on your values and beliefs, you can become more aware of how they influence your behaviour and your leadership style.
- b. **Cultivate Sense of Humility & Openness.** Spiritual leaders recognise that they don't have all the answers and that they can learn from others. They are willing to listen to feedback, to admit when they are wrong and to seek out diverse perspectives. By doing so, they create an environment where people feel valued and respected and where creativity and innovation can flourish.
- c. **Spiritual Learning.** Spiritual leaders recognise that personal and spiritual growth is an ongoing process and that they need to continually challenge themselves and seek out new experiences and insights. This might involve reading books, attending workshops or seeking out mentors or coaches who can help them grow and develop.

Leadership Lessons from Ancient Traditions and Texts¹⁰

There are many leadership principles that can be derived from ancient India, particularly from the teachings of various spiritual and philosophical traditions such as Vedanta, Yoga and Buddhism. Ancient texts such as 'Bhagvad Gita' are rich source of leadership lessons for contemporary times as well.

9 What Is Spiritual Leadership? - International Institute for Spiritual Leadership. (2021, June 18). International Institute for Spiritual Leadership - Maximizing the Triple Bottom Line Through Spiritual Leadership. <https://iispiritualleadership.com/spiritual-leadership/>

10 Bhattacharjee, Anindo. (2012). Modern Management Through Ancient Indian Wisdom: Towards a More Sustainable Paradigm.

Leadership Concepts from Ancient Traditions. Indian wisdom available in an immense range of traditional literature has its present-day relevance on leadership. The leadership principles in these continue to be valuable for the leaders today. Following are some of broad concepts which can be derived from Indian traditions:-

- a. Selfless Leadership.** In ancient India, leadership was often seen as a form of service. Leaders were expected to be dedicated to righteous cause and larger welfare of their people as it emerges from Mahabharata.
- b. Ethics and Morality.** Ancient Indian traditions emphasised the important of ethics and morality in leadership. The Arthashastra, a treatise on politics and governance written by Chanakya, emphasised the need for leaders to be honest, just and compassionate.
- c. Mindfulness and Self-Awareness.** Mindfulness and self-awareness were also important principles in ancient Indian leadership. The practice of yoga emphasises the important of self-awareness and self-control in order to lead effectively.
- d. Empathy and Compassion.** Another important principle in ancient Indian leadership was empathy and compassion. The Buddhist tradition cultivated empathy and compassion in order to lead with wisdom and kindness.
- e. Strategic Thinking.** Ancient Indian leaders were known for their strategic thinking and long-term planning. The Arthashastra, for example, provided detailed guidance on how to build and maintain a strong and prosperous kingdom.

Leadership Lessons from Bhagavad Gita¹¹. The Bhagavad Gita is a 700-verse scripture that is part of the ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata. It is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, his disciple and friend, who is reluctant to fight in a battle against his own kin. The Bhagavad Gita is considered a guide to spiritual wisdom and the teachings can also be applied

11 Mahadevan, B. (2012). “Leadership lessons from Bhagavad Gita”

to leadership. The Bhagavad Gita emphasises the important of following one's dharma or purpose. A leader must have a clear understanding of their purpose and should align their actions accordingly. Krishna urges Arjuna to fight the battle as it is his dharma to do so. A leader should be aware of their role and responsibilities and should strive to fulfil them with sincerity and dedication. Some of the shlokas in Bhagavad Gita and their translation is given below giving out key lessons for leadership:-

- a. Leadership Duties¹².** Bhagavad Gita explains two duties of a leader towards it people. The first duty is 'Yoga-Kshema' meaning arranging for the acquisition of what the people lack and the preservation of what they already have. The second duty of leader is 'Loka-Sangraha' which is about encouraging people to undertake their own duties and prevent them from taking the wrong path. The same is given as under:-

अनन्याश्चनितयन्तोमांयेजनाः पर्युपासते |

तेषांनितियाभयिक्त्तानांयोगक्षेमंवहाम्यहम् ||9.22||

(To those who worship Me and think of no one else, I provide what they lack and preserve what they already possess.)

कर्मणैवहसिंसदिधमिस्थितिजनकादयः |

लोकसंग्रहमेवापसिम्पश्यन्कर्तुमहसि ||3.20||

(By carrying out their stipulated responsibilities, King Janak and others accomplished perfection. You should also perform your duties for the good of the world and set an example.)

- b. Lead By Example¹³.** Bhagavad Gita emphasises that people are inspired by the principles that they see in the lives of leaders. Such

12 Mukundananda. BG 9.22: Chapter 9, Verse 22 , Chapter 3, Verse 20 – Bhagavad Gita, the Song of God – Swami Mukundananda. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/9/verse/22>

13 Whatever action a great man performs (n.d.). https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/Whatever_action_a_great_man_performs_common_men_follow_And_whatever_standards_he_sets_by_exemplary_acts_all_the_world_pursues

leaders motivate society by their actions and become an example to follow for the people. Leaders of society and organisation thus have a moral obligation to inspire others by their words, actions and conduct. The following shloka explains this:-

यद्यदाचरतशिरेष्वस्तत्तदेवेतरोजनः
सयत्प्रमाणंकुरुतेलोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥13.21॥

(Whatever action a leader performs, common men follow. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all of them follow.)

- c. Develop Sense of Equanimity¹⁴.** The equanimity or sense of levelheadedness enables us to accept all situations and circumstances with serenity. When we understand that the sincere effort is in our hands and we do not have control over the results, we then concern only with doing our duty.

योगस्थःकुरुकर्माणसिङ्गंत्यक्त्वाधनञ्जय |
सदिध्यसदिध्योः समोभूत्वासमतत्वंयोगउच्यते ॥2.48॥

(Be steadfast in the performance of your duty, O Arjuna, abandoning attachment to success and failure. Such equanimity is called Yog.)

- d. Principle of Mutual Dependence¹⁵.** Current era is characterised by dominance of eccentricity as a value of life. For a leader, any idea that begins as individuality will lead to self-centeredness as such leaders then become sensitive to their personal needs and start demanding. A leader must understand that in an organisation, decisions and outcomes are interconnected and interdependent. Lord Krishna brings this aspect by guiding Arjuna that in order to accomplish our tasks, we need to honour the principle of mutual dependence. The

14 20 Most Important Quotes from Bhagvad Gita. (2020, November). <https://www.templepurohit.com/20-important-quotes-bhagavad-gita/>

15 Mukundananda, S. (n.d.). BG 3.11: Chapter 3, Verse 11 – Bhagavad Gita. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/12/verse/15>

spirit of sharing and giving is the basis of this principle.

देवान्भावयतानेनतेदेवाभावयन्तुवः ।

परस्परंभावयन्तः श्रेयः परमवाप्स्यथ ॥3.11॥

(By your sacrifices, the heavenly gods will be delighted and by collaboration between humans and the celestial gods, great prosperity will reign for all.)

- e. **Inspirational Leadership**¹⁶. Inspirational leadership is the ability to be a positive influence on those around you and motivate others toward success. This has several attributes which need to be inculcated by current leadership.

यस्मान्नोद्वजितेलोकोलोकान्नोद्वजितेचयः ।

हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तोयः सचमेप्रयिः ॥12.15॥

(Those who are not a source of annoyance and who in turn are not troubled by anyone, who conduct themselves same in pleasure or pain and are free from fear, such persons are very dear to me.)

16 Mukundananda, S. (n.d.). BG 12.15: Chapter 12, Verse 15 – Bhagavad Gita. <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/12/verse/15>

Lessons from Leaders of Ancient India

Ancient India had many great leaders, each with their unique leadership qualities. These leaders had exceptional qualities that set them apart as role models for leadership, courage and vision. The leadership traits exhibited by these are still relevant and can be inculcated by new age leaders. Some of the examples of leadership from ancient India across different periods are as under:-

- a. **Chandragupta Maurya (350 to 295 BC)¹⁷**. Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire in ancient India, offers several valuable leadership lessons. Chandragupta demonstrated the importance of strategic vision and long-term planning. He envisioned a unified and prosperous empire and meticulously executed his plans to achieve it. He also showcased exceptional adaptability and flexibility by forging alliances, building a strong network and incorporating diverse ideas into his administration. Chandragupta's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and leverage available resources was crucial to his success. Next, Chandragupta emphasised the significance of surrounding oneself with capable advisors and experts. He sought guidance from the renowned philosopher Chanakya, whose wisdom greatly influenced his decision-making and governance. Additionally, Chandragupta exemplified strong leadership through his emphasis on efficient governance and the welfare of his subjects. His policies focused on maintenance of law and order, promoting trade and providing a fair and just system for the benefit of his people. Overall, Chandragupta Maurya's leadership teaches us the importance of strategic vision, adaptability, collaboration and people-centric approach.

17 Management Lessons from Chanakya and Mauryan Empire. (n.d.). Management Lessons From Chanakya and Mauryan Empire. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/management-mantras-from-chanakya-cs-anil-sharma>

- b. Ashoka (269 to 232 BC)¹⁸.** Ashoka, the ancient Indian emperor, offers valuable leadership lessons that resonate even today. He demonstrated the power of transformational leadership by undergoing a personal transformation from a ruthless conqueror to a compassionate and enlightened ruler. His ability to introspect, adapt and embrace a more ethical and inclusive approach showcases the importance of self-awareness and continuous growth for leaders. Ashoka's emphasis on moral and ethical governance serves as a reminder that leaders must prioritise the well-being and happiness of their subordinates. He implemented policies that promoted social welfare, religious tolerance and environment conservation, highlighting the significance of considering the broader impact of leadership decisions. Ashoka's commitment to communication and engagement with his diverse empire exemplifies the importance of effective and empathetic communication in leadership. He used edicts and pillars to disseminate his messages and fostered dialogue with his people, promoting transparency and accountability.
- c. Rajendra Chola I (971 to 1044 AD)¹⁹.** Rajendra Chola exemplified visionary leadership. He had a clear long-term vision for his empire's expansion and prosperity which he pursued relentlessly. He adopted innovative military tactics and forged alliances to achieve his goals. He trusted his officials with responsibilities, empowering them to make decisions. The emperor also valued diplomacy and the importance of maintaining strong relationships with neighbouring kingdoms, enabling peaceful coexistence and mutual benefits. Rajendra Chola displayed a commitment to justice and good governance. He implemented fair policies, ensured efficient administration and prioritised the welfare of his subjects.

18 Voss. (2016). King Aśoka as a Role Model of Buddhist Leadership. Philaarchive. <https://philaarchive.org/archive/VOSKAAv1>

19 "Leadership Lessons from the Legendary Cholas: Strategic Brilliance and Adaptive Excellence." (n.d.). <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/leadership-lessons-from-legendary-cholas-strategic>

- d. Akbar (1556 to 1605 AD)²⁰.** Akbar's policy of religious tolerance showcases the important of inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives within a team or organisation. Akbar's ability to engage with individuals from different faiths and cultures fostered an environment of unity and harmony. His commitment to continuous learning and seeking advice from knowledgeable advisors exemplifies the importance of humility and a growth mindset in leadership. By acknowledging that he did not possess all the answers, he displayed the willingness to expand his knowledge and make better choices. Akbar's leadership teaches us the significance of embracing diversity and continuous learning in fostering a successful and harmonious environment.
- e. Shivaji (1646 to 1680 AD)²¹.** The Maratha King was a visionary leader who empowered his people and inspired them to fight for their rights and independence. He emphasised the important of a strong vision and strategic planning. Shivaji had a clear vision of establishing a self-governing Hindu kingdom and he meticulously planned his military and administration strategy to achieve this goal. He displayed exceptional courage and led by example. Shivaji fearlessly faced challenges, inspired his troops with his bravery and personally participated in battles. He prioritised the welfare of his soldiers which fostered loyalty and dedication. He adopted new concepts such as *Guerrilla Warfare* to take on and defeat much stronger enemy.
- f. Rani Lakshmi Bai (1828 to 1858 AD).** She was a brave warrior queen who fought for her people's freedom and rights and inspired generations of Indians to fight against colonialism and oppression. Rani Laxmi Bai fearlessly led her troops into battle, displaying resilience in the face of adversity and setting a powerful example for her followers. Rani Laxmi Bai fought not only for her own rights but

20 Akbar the Great: How the Mughal emperor set an example for religious tolerance in India. (n.d.). Middle East Eye. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/india-akbar-great-mughal-emperor-template-religious-tolerance-today>

21 10 Leadership Lessons from the Legend of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj-. (n.d.). 10 Leadership Lessons From the Legend of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj-. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/10-leadership-lessons-from-legend-chhatrapati-shivaji-bhalerao>

also for the rights of her people, displaying a deep sense of empathy and a desire for a better future for all.

SUMMARY

Contemporary military leadership demands a commitment to continuous learning and self-reflection, as well as the ability to adapt and innovate in response to new challenges. Effective contemporary leaders must be able to communicate authentically, inspire and motivate their teams and build trust. By embracing various qualities and approaches given in this article, these leaders can build strong and resilient organisation that is future ready to face any uncertainty and change. The lessons given are equally applicable to new age military leaders as well. With the right mindset and a willingness to learn and grow, everyone can develop the skills and qualities needed to become an effective contemporary leader.

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