

Leadership Traits Based on Ancient Indian Texts

Finding the Universal Fit
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Abstract

Many leadership attributes and models are consistent with the Western paradigm, grounded in Western thought processes. Current points of view show there is a need for other non-Western centric leadership traits to be introduced for global growth and development. In particular, leadership traits in ancient Indian texts provide the contextual background for the description of these styles of leadership. The ancient models serve to address the gaps found in modern leadership models and its corresponding criteria. Findings gleaned from the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Tirukurral, the Sastras, ancient fables and notable scholars highlight the Indic value system and its attributes relating to the three *Gunas*. These are *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva*. These fluid attributes capture many styles of leadership displayed by characters and expounded by ancient scholars. These findings reflect the importance of ethical boundaries and higher ideals embedded in ancient leadership models. These traits would improve the education curriculum designed to create future leaders and inculcate holistic participation among leaders in high-level leadership positions.

Introduction

India's ancient legacy rests in its intellectual property wealth, rooted in literature and its direct effect influence on its leadership models. Primarily, this assumption was not common to the western narrative and other communities dominated by the western worldview. [S.S Ali \(2006\)](#) looks to Kautilya and his perception of good governance. Upon consideration of the World Bank's identification of good governance aspects, bureaucratic accountability, administrative qualities and accompanying personal administration underlying leadership.

In comparison, [Tisdell \(2003\)](#) acknowledges the neglect of the western narrative with respect to the Indian worldview pertaining to leadership traits. When comparing leadership with other interlinking modes in governance models, he associates Kautilya's contribution to the political economy. These aspects were not limited to domestic duties but extended to international trade and diplomacy. As Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* advocated the liberal market-based economy, fixed on the invisible hand and the impartial spectator, the East contributed in the field of economic sciences, via leadership rooted in social security, consumer protection and welfare.

The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) observed social solidarity to mean mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. The former constituted a higher degree of likeness whereas the latter constituted a complex society with specialists trained in different areas. In contrast, Kautilya saw the republic, the *Sangha* to accommodate both types of solidarity. Because ancient kingdoms were republics which then transformed into monarchies, the leadership mantle was assigned to the King as the fountain of justice. His duties were documented in many ancient Indian texts such as the *Rajanitiprakasa*, the *Nitimayukha* that together formed the *Rajaniti* in words and scriptures,

If one was to observe the similarities of Hobbes and Locke to that of the ancient Indian context, this meant giving up the laws of nature for laws prescribed by the government in charge. Here,

the transference of individual rights signaled the power of the state to enforce laws and obligations manifested in the hands of secular thought and rationalism. In contrast, ancient Indian governance was rooted in theology and sociology, but provided room for the King to relinquish his power should he fail to live up to the prescribed standards. The ideal state was a consensual, duty-based mechanism between King and subjects based on a Divine Code. Punishment was observed as a last resort and the entire state mantle was held together as an organic base (Alterkar, 1949).

The state model was held together by the aims and objectives of the state machinery. The king upholds the divine law and order, premised on the dharma, artha and karma doctrines that promoted virtue and public welfare. It encouraged trade and industry, and funded the flourishing of the sciences and arts. In this social order of existence, leadership traits existed in many folds of governance and administrative departments. This will be discussed according to its contextual relevance.

Methodology

This paper employed qualitative methods, specifically, identifying ancient Indian texts that described leadership traits ordained for the leader in its individual context. Adopting these interpretations on a case-to-case basis, each angle of leadership is explored according to its varied roles and functions. These include commentaries by Indian scholars, texts and translations, puffin classics for children, and introductory approaches to Indian Knowledge Systems. In an attempt to draw from varied sources, this paper transposes valid leadership traits that are present in these reflections with an emphasis on creating greater awareness for the search of the common thread that is present in ancient Indian texts. The methodology of hermeneutics represents an interpretation that seeks to study leadership traits upon careful analysis of pertinent literature. This qualitative method seeks to amalgamate relevant ancient Indian texts embodying leadership aspects and document different perspectives found herein.

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership and Governance

The concept of servant leadership was personified in the *Dharmasutras*. Particularly in taxation, 16% tax was the King's wage, and in turn, the servant of the state. Incidentally, other figures such as Kautilya and Narada point out that taxation principles bound the King to his citizens on an equal footing in terms of wages and asset-sharing (Alterkar, 1949, p. 65).

Trusteeship was another principle of leadership that paid due regard to public welfare and being held accountable for the treasury. This leadership trait promoted ethical capitalism and equitable management of resources. In the event there was misappropriation of funds at the state level, the King would be condemned to hell and found guilty of sin, in the divine sense (Alterkar, 1949, p. 65).

Seeking wise counsel from competent persons is another leadership trait that was present in the Vedic period. The Mahabharata and the Arthashastra instill the importance of the presence of intellectual input for a leader. In the *Samhitas of the Yajurveda*, the King's Council were known as *Ratnins* (jewels). The key members of this Council were the Queens, the *Purohita* (the Royal Chaplain), the *Senani* (commander-in-chief), the *Suta* (commander of the royal army), *Gramani* (headman), *Samgrahita* (treasurer) and *Bhagadhuk* (tax-collector). These members also included the chamberlain and the guilds (Alterkar, 1949, p. 115).

The *Dharmasastra* and *Nitisastra* further provide evidence of *mantrins*, *sachivas* and *amatyas* and the emergence of the *Matri-parishad* signified the prominence the *Sungas* gave to their Council of ministers. This trait was developed by Vedic rulers to leverage on intellectual others who could provide better insights. Their scope was similar to the role of the Privy Council and its facilitation provided the members a higher status in the administrative set-up. The Royal Chaplain's role was to be the guru to the leader in areas such as political science, military art and religious studies. His influence was key to the leader's well-being and potential in the dimensions of morality and virtue. This trait of keeping wise counsel rooted in good virtue symbolized the ethical dimension for leadership to keep heading in the right direction. This trait can be adopted by today's leaders, found in the *Sukraniti* which elaborates this tradition of staying true to virtues at the leadership level (Alterkar, 1949, p. 121).

The power sharing concept called *Ubhayayatta* is another trait that made the leader and the administration interdependent of one another. This is partly due to the level of confidence the administration projected as a collective, bound to the weaknesses and strengths of the leader. The king-centred *Rajayatta* was a possibility whereas ministers would become team-players when the King's presence was weakened due to lack of intelligence. This power sharing arrangement in normal situations was possible because the leader was open to influence from the collective intelligence. This provided space for the welfare of ministerial responsibility as a collective (Alterkar, 1949, p. 134).

In terms of delegation of authority, the Secretariat's role in administration solidified the machinery of the government. Members were expected to possess high qualifications, experience, reliability, and were expert drafters (Alterkar, 1949, p. 139). It consisted of a small but able group that was tasked to keep records at a Records Office, facilitate orders from the King, supervise and control the local and district administration and conducting tours of inspection. On top of that, leadership traits involved the King inspecting the situation to unearth corrupt and/or oppressive practices. Other reasons include ascertaining the sentiments of the commoners to serve their needs and collective voices. During the Chaulukya administration, the Inspector-General of records was in charge of the Records Office and was responsible for overseeing high-level supervision. The copper plates charters were documented to be under his hand of composition.

In the judicial system, leadership was decentralized to keep away backlogs. First instance complaints did not start in official courts. This was done so to provide autonomy to village and town councils to decide local cases. Government courts were presided by *dharmadhyakshas* or *nyayakaranikas* in the Gupta administration. This was common in big cities to facilitate most of the big issues that came before them. The Chief Justice in the Royal Courts was grounded in *Smriti* literature, making their presence crucial when handling large scale crimes. In the event the King was not present to settle disputes and appeals, the Chief Justice was tasked to handle

them accordingly. Its socio-religious construct allowed others to participate in decision-making at the judicial level. This hierarchy of courts allowed the facilitation from the easy to difficulty ratio to be applied wisely (Alterkar, 1949, p. 152).

The diagram below explains the four elements that a leader should be well-versed with, and becoming of an able leader. *Anviksiki* represents the dharmic philosophy entwined in the study of the *Vedas*, political narratives, economics and the use of force. The *Vedas* represent content collated in the *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Yajurveda* that lay down the roles and representative capacity of a leader. This skill set encapsulates the dharmic vision for a just leader to adopt. *Varta* looks at trade in the economic context, ranging from agriculture to imported goods subjected to custom duties, and taxation principles. *Dandaniti* represents a legal framework that upholds law and order with administrative functions bestowed upon officers in regulatory capacities as well as the social dynamics to maintain control and respect by and on behalf of the social collective (Mahadevan B. et al., 2022, p. 717).

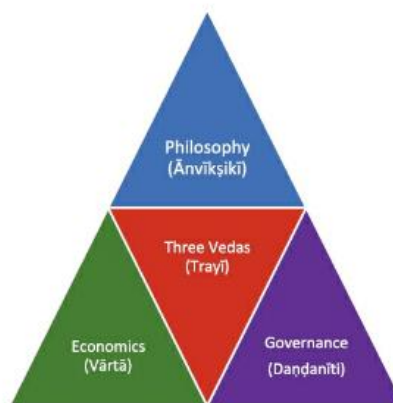


FIGURE 14.1 The Four Branches of Knowledge

Source: Mahadevan B. et.al., 2022.

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership and Taxation

The *Smritis* have outlined the basic principles of taxation that was the order of the day during the ancient Vedic period. Alterkar (1949) highlights the following to be noteworthy to the reader:

- a. The requirement of reasonableness was imposed on all taxation principles with an emphasis on the ‘No Harm’ rule. This meant all resources that were gained from nature, such as fruits and produce, honey and bees, formed the upkeep for subjects by the King;
- b. The basis of taxation was fueled by the element of fairness that went both ways, particularly in relation to the cost of labour and its returns;

- c. Net profits were taxed with respect to trade and commerce;
- d. There is no practice of double-taxation;
- e. Only a gradual increase in tax rates was allowed by the state; and
- f. Extra taxation was only enforced as an exception, during natural calamities.

Tax exemption was imposed on military villages, students studying in *Gurukulams*, the poor, those lacking capacity and women who owned negligible wealth. This was premised on protecting the weak and on humanitarian grounds. Taxation was collected as in-kind payments and 15% to 20% of the proceeds could be returned to the land-taxed local bodies from the central government. The general rate was 16% and tax rates varied according to the produce and goods traded.

Mainly because *Brahmanas* were living in poverty as a vow, they were expected to educate others in Vedic and Sanskrit education without seeking monetary emoluments. To this extent, they were only to pay quit rent when revenue was generated for the Brahmanas in such circumstances by the *Agraha* villages. Therefore, as a general rule, Brahmanas were to pay taxes if revenue was generated and in exceptional circumstances, the Brahmana poor and lacking state patronage were exempted from taxation.

Unfortunately, not all Kings professed such equitable leadership traits when taxing their subjects. Records show that Kings unaligned to the above principles abused their positions, leaving the people in destitute circumstances. King Sankaravarman taxed the subjects so heavily and left them only with air to breathe. Under Kulottunga III, the unjust tax rates resulted in protests and imprisonment thereof. They were only released when payment due was settled. It must also be mentioned that specific Assemblies in Karnatak and Tanjore allowed for resolution of taxation issues among the members and even when to the extent of specifying proportionate tax rates to be adopted (Alterkar, 1949, p. 209).

In responding to the above approach appearing in ancient Indian leadership models, exploitation of resources was not seen as the economic norm to facilitate trade and investment with regard to taxation. Transfer pricing was not practiced by the trading class to benefit from other jurisdictions nor professing to weaker taxation laws designed to address transfer pricing. This process respected taxation and its inherent purposes within the local villages and heads to secure their lives and livelihoods.

Mainly due to the agricultural economy that thrived during the ancient Vedic period, the wealth of the state was a reflection of sound financial planning to assist in building the Treasury and the army. The King was assigned to safeguard these necessities for the benefit of the subjects. As a leader, he was to exercise his role in order to maintain economic strength and prosperity in good times and more so in the bad. Recruiting able officers to impart these duties was part and parcel of this revenue-generating exercise. Penalties (*Analtya*) provided another means of contribution towards a healthy economic balance. This framework ensured the leader was tasked with employing sustainable economic and legal measures to enhance trade and commerce for the collective well-being (Mahadevan B. *et al.*, 2022).

The diagram below characterizes the importance of taxation and the role of the treasury in the state apparatus. A well-stocked and managed treasury was crucial for the state to manage its resources during bouts of scarcity. State income was classified according to city, country, mines, irrigation, works, forests, cattle-herds and trade routes. State enterprises were subjected to tax and import duties and indigenous produce attracted excise duty, usually collected at the gates. Fines were imposed for selling produce at resource sites such as at mines, gardens, and grain fields.



FIGURE 14.2 The Seven Elements of a State

Source: Mahadevan B. *et al.*, 2022

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership gleaned from the Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita is referred to as the *‘the song of God’* and prescribes Indian religious philosophy rooted in Krishna consciousness and the Brahman. Gandhi also looked to the Gita as a source of religious strength. [Strohmeier J. \(2009\)](#) describes Gandhi’s leadership traits as falling in line with lessons found in the Gita. Primarily, the Gita espouses that all belongs to God, and therefore there is nothing that can be owned by an individual for himself. Here, renunciation of the fruits is advocated and remaining unattached to its vested interests is central in practicing transformational leadership traits.

Moreover, a leader must be ready to leave when the time is ripe and continue with the next assignment that is required of him/her. Here, intergenerational-equity is preserved to maintain continuance of younger generations to take over responsibilities. This can be achieved because clingy leadership is disapproved of and all together abandoned. [Burns \(2012\)](#) spelt out transformative leadership principles based on the concept of servant leadership. This is woven together to prevent exploitative practices, consistent with the ‘No Harm’ rule. Understanding religious parameters enables the appreciation of this model and its equitable ramifications.

Therefore, the leader will be emboldened to serve the community because the religious premise permits renunciation as a valid attempt to redistribute resources through the spiritual manifestation of self-detachment.

Another central theme in the Gita dispels the notion of intrinsic selfishness. This is a response to idealizing the Self as the eternal soul which resides in all as the Supreme. With this worldview, Prabhupada (1986) opined that “concentrated selfishness” and “extended selfishness” would be a thing of the past, mainly due to the effulgence of the Supreme consciousness, a commitment to the welfare of others and the assimilation of servant leadership principles. This implies a focus on others and not on oneself and personal ambitions. This approach respects the collective as a just means to a political end.

The Gita advocates the control of one’s senses to refine the mind and its cognitive abilities. This is done by practicing *dhayana yoga*, the union of self-regulation based on meditation practices. This exercise of the mind cleanses the inner workings of the uncontrolled mind, fueled by mental agitations and other constant flows of energy consumption negating productive thoughts. Leaders can also benefit from the three *Gunas* analogy found in the Gita that groups characteristics according to the inherent fluid tendencies.

Nayak (2018) narrates the three *Gunas* for the uninitiated. The *Sattva Guna* is the mode of goodness and includes qualities such as knowledge, happiness, purity, and self-control. The *Rajas Guna* personifies the mode of passion. These qualities are exhibited as restlessness, intense emotion, false pride and easily affected by joy and sorrow. The *Tamas Guna* is the mode of ignorance which accompanies indifference, confusion and procrastination. These modes are in constant flux, depending on the conditions of the individual. As personal and professional capacity dictates, controlling the senses incidentally relate to the flows of each separate Guna and its corresponding influence on the individual. Presently, leaders that can harness the continued exertion of these self-controlled *Gunas* can make progressive decisions and limit disorderly conduct, unbefitting of their positions. This self-improvement tool enables the process of transformational leadership to take place and find solace in *Sattva* qualities.

Time (*Kala*) is regarded as the agent of change and plays an active role in leading this change. Therefore, leading by example involves utilizing time wisely and to accept change as it presents itself to the leader. This is presupposed by the notion of performing one’s duty righteously, pursuant to one’s dharma. The indifference towards success or failure connects the impartial elements to one’s actions. This approach discards the drive attached to the results of actions, and fends off the element of greed that consumes such desirous pathways.

The wisdom found in the Gita does not correspond directly to the western narrative. However, when paired as transformative effects, this universal culture of imparting valuable knowledge through teaching as an invocation exists. This approach is presented by Lord Krishna, the guru and Arjuna, the disciple. The mentally agitated Arjuna received mentoring by his guru on objectives and results arising from cause and effect. This transformative capacity can be appreciated by all aspiring leaders capable of honing their skill sets and mental well-being. These self-induced actions contain the innate ability to adopt western-centric values which take into account the self-fulfillment of human potential in its highest grandeur.

Jeste and Vahia (2008) highlight the differences in the western and eastern outlooks. The west invests in material pleasures and shies away from the spiritual God-based social judgment. The

Gita catapults duty and work-based presumptions in spiritual pursuits, whereas other post-modern western schools represent secular beliefs that are modeled for personal success and self-gratification of the senses. In essence, there is a cultural shift that can take place in this civilizational kaleidoscope of spiritual cognizance. Finding merit in imparting the wisdom in the Gita carries the groundwork most leadership schools can benefit from, precisely by educating the Arjunas of their potential to deliver when duty calls to lead wisely.

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership gleaned from the Ramayana

Transformative leadership was defined by Burns (1978) to mean a leadership model that was either transformational or transactional. The former is a process which looks towards higher ideals and acts as a catalyst for followers to accept and embrace. The latter is based on a pre-existing model based on current systems and presiding values judgments. Change management carries the adoption of transformative practices when faced with bottlenecks in current practice and procedure.

In the Ramayana, scholars have identified qualities that transformative leaders tend to project. Tichy and Devanna (1990) find Sri Rama to be an agent of change, demonstrate courage, placed faith in others, stuck to values, preached life-long learning, and showed the ability to handle the complex and remained forward-thinking. These elements are further explored by Muniapan (2007) to reflect intellectual stimulation contained in the Ramayana. The roles of Sri Rama and other characters provide a vivid illustration to their scholarly narrative.

In the Ramayana, Rama's wife, Sita was kidnapped by King Ravana. In order to bring his wife home, Rama decided to work with Hanuman, other animals and people to see this done. Unlike King Ravana who was consumed with himself and his evil desires, Rama assembled a team and together, they marched towards Ravana's homeland. This tactical approach enlisted the help of Jatayu, Nal & Neel, whom were animals formed the collective to avenge dark forces. Similarly, transformative leaders take into account the strength of the collective to face difficult tasks and overcome challenges that cannot be handled alone.

Queen Mandodari was an able female character who saw the vice in her husband, King Ravana. She used her guiding presence to bestow words of wisdom on Ravana. Unfortunately, he did not appreciate her insights and ethical outlook. Despite being his wife, she did not blindly take his side and assuage his demands. Instead, she chose to display her values and affections for him, which remained unreciprocated. Organisational leadership should look to an ethical guide who will make needful statements that may create fruitful pathways for leaders to reflect upon. This can be a difficult task for many who seek to please their superiors. However, Queen Mandodari can offer distinguished observance to a leader by committing to higher ideals and manifestations.

Decentralisation of authority is another leadership trait that Rama displayed with the help of Hanuman. The team of *Vanaras* (monkeys) were assembled into coordinated groups to oversee and execute their respective roles. Hanuman went in search of Sita. Peace negotiations were held by Angad with Ravana and Sushen played his role as the medicine man in saving Lakshmana's health from deteriorating (Bendale and Sharma, 2017). In many organisations,

parting with concentrated power is a monumental task. In other circumstances, micro-managing personnel can come dangerously close to employees who have their assigned roles. This cloistered ambiance suffocates growing talent who are honing their responsibilities in the organizational hierarchy. Therefore, Rama teaches us to instill confidence in individuals who are assigned their respective roles in the leadership framework. In this manner, the collective functions and intended consequences, leading to victory in the Ramayana.

Vibhishana's role in the Ramayana is testament to his individual ethics devoid of his familial ties. Human rights education can be taught in the way Vibhishana displayed his inherent peaceful tendencies. To the extent of Ravana's aggressive exploits and the familial ties that bound them, the younger brother of Ravana was bigger in heart and mind. Without fear or favour, Vibhishana tried to talk his elder brother out of his monstrous ambitions. Power was Ravana's tool and enterprise-driven agenda. His motives mirrored his inward desires. Fortunately, Vibhishana found strength in the power of peaceful motives, and drove his will towards Rama and his collective. This personal attempt takes inner strength to uproot, away from one's familial convenience towards the guiding light of good conscience.

A true leader has the willingness to take the right side in these situations which have a powerful resonance with futures and leadership potential. Having the ideals at heart, learning to make powerful small steps in the right direction is Vibhishana's model characteristic of a true leader. Unlike Kumbhakarna who did not leave Ravana's side, family bondage and privileges, Vibhishana's actions constitute an act of leadership by example, looking to peaceful means as a source of power.

Finally, Hanuman is another example of a leader who can put his Ego aside for the greater good. In his fight with the mother of serpents, Surasha, Hanuman retreated to the size of a mosquito as Surasha multiplied her size to fit her Ego. [Kumar D. et al., \(2020\)](#) point to this subtle male characteristic as opposed to the female characteristic in their keen scholarly sense of male leadership criteria. This element falls squarely on men holding corporate positions, outlining the soul of service and the need to leave the Ego at the lower stages in human development. The duty of a leader can surpass the mundane needs of the Ego-ridden manifestations. Hanuman did not match Surasha's Ego-ridden motives. In contrast, Hanuman surpassed that of Surasha's mental strength and impressed her enough to let him pass. A leader can look to Hanuman's conduct as a sign of maturity in the face of adversity. Presenting this front in leadership is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of inner strength one can revisit via managerial roles facing internal conflicts.

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership gleaned from the Tirukurral

The Tirukurral is an ancient tamil book of wisdom that is written in couplet forms. [Chendroyaperumal and Meena \(2007\)](#) attempted to find common leadership Kurral pointers that corresponded with modern leadership theories. Among these, notable theories that stand out in the Kurral are examples of the traits theory, behavioral theory, Path-Goal theory, transformational leadership, social cognitive resource theory, ethical leadership and leader participation theory. To the layperson, these theories may sound conventional and may not

provide context for the ancient text. However, the reader maybe surprised to note the similarities in the following paragraphs.

Leadership traits can be observed at Kural 382 which lays down courage, magnanimity, intelligence and enthusiasm as the four qualities a leader should adopt ([Chendroyaperumal and Meena, 2007, p. 4](#)). Ethical leadership is assumed at Kural 384 and includes ethical behaviour underlying the needs-based test for governance. Implicitly, governance devoid of ethics is deemed incomplete governance. Therefore, behavioral traits are interwoven with ethics and leadership qualities for an able and functioning government of the day. Intrinsically, social cognitive resource theory embeds Kural 390 in defining brilliant traits found in a leader, namely, rewarding, awarding grants, good governance and paying attention to social welfare of subjects. Therefore, responsible leadership appears to be a composite set of traits that can be perfectly aligned to conventional theories. This analysis provides a glimpse of the similarities and nuances that are present in the TiruKural.

There are other notable traits that a leader can grasp from this text. In the translation by [Jayaprakasam \(2019\)](#), remaining unbiased is specifically spelt out in Kural 119. One who has removed bias from his/her mind will always project a pronouncement that is independent. A leader who is able to remain impartial when making decisions on behalf of the nation will reflect the quality of decisions made. Apart from that, realizing the truth is another trait the leader should embrace. Kurrals 354 and 355 highlights that intelligence goes in search of truth, the innate propensity, and building the capacity for realizing the truth is fundamental in order to attain the mastery of the five senses. In this context, the ideals truths hold and nurture are seen as fundamental for the strengths to be imbibed in leadership. Unfortunately, in current times, these ideals preserved in this text ring hollow due to many reasons. One being the need to shield truths for material gains and individual prosperity. In this light, the Tirukural reserves its rights for the truth to be heard, through the able leader.

The element of refinement is seen as a boon for the leader. Kural 1000 aptly states that a rich person with unrefined senses is akin to pure milk becoming putrid due to a stain. Kural 997 also looks at intelligence unrefined as a dummy block. For a more meaningful attempt at finding the common good in all, Kural 996 states that the world stays as it is because of the refined person. Otherwise, the world would suffer destruction in the hands of the unrefined. Therefore, the refinement of the senses is not only for the budding leader, but also for an entire community to preserve their sanctity and creative abilities as human beings. As a member of the ecosystem, Kural 995 specifically states that refined persons would not stoop so low as to deride others of their personality despite suffering from the enmity within themselves. These are elements of higher-level consciousness that one needs to develop in order to be able to handle these tense situations. Common parlance dictates that defamation actions are common place when the unrefined demonstrate their abilities upon others. This is multiplied by the emergence of lawyers who take this task on as a career to boost their futures. This underdeveloped trait is then a tool for income generators that seek to exploit the unrefined person's senses to the detriment of his/her financial capacity.

Finally, the Thirukural dedicates a chapter on governance and the sovereign. Kural 388 deems that meting out justice by the King in a wholesome manner is a precondition for protecting his subjects. Other Kurrals in this specific chapter point to righteousness as a path of virtue (Kural 384) portraying prestige by upholding it as a mark of valour. Becoming one with these virtues,

a leader has set high standards for his/her branch of leadership. Moreover, these embedded qualities are seen as stepping stones that all can journey upon. For the leader, it becomes imperative to adopt these traits because his/her leadership will set the markers for building better futures in the land and for the inhabitants thereof.

In conclusion, these set of Kurrals offer valuable guidance to the lost and serve as constant reminders to the alert. Being of value to the upcoming leader, spiritual growth is sorely abandoned, as many go in search of material and financial pursuits to make leaders of tomorrow. This ancient text ignites reasons as to why one has to look to high-level thoughts and values in order to sustain success and treat others as one would want to be treated.

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership gleaned from Children Stories

Literature narrated as stories for children documented many traits that are leadership-oriented. The *Brihatkatha* was produced in the sixth century and written in Paishachi. These set of stories are believed to be written by Gunadhya. Notably, the *Simhasana Dvamtrimsika* or *Singhasan Battisi* are all an assortment of texts that were produced in the thirteenth century. Kashmir, Nepal, and Tamil prose document these stories forming their part of the great oral tradition of India. Sanskrit versions were orally distributed by Somadeva and the consistency of the contents of these tales are attributed to its underlying messages ([Agarwal, 2016](#)).

The tales of King Vikramaditya and the Vetala, a demon is a description of kingship morals that a King needs to grapple with in a series of questions and answers. The twenty-five tales narrated by the Vetala depicts lore of kings and their episodes with beautiful women, Brahmin scholars, robbers, etc. Each story ends with an intelligent question posed to the King. Inherently designed to test the King's ability to judge and think critically, the King cannot remain quiet if he knows the answers to the questions posed. The King remains of sound temperament as he answers the questions, inducing the Vetala to leave the King's shoulder, only to head back to its original place slumped upon the Sinsapa tree. This is because the power of truth releases it from the King's grip. The King needs to bring the demon corpse back to an unscrupulous ascetic who intends to use it for his own evil ends, resulting in the King's planned demise.

As it were, the King took to his critical thinking and judgment quite well, and his perseverance and unwavering stature for the pursuit of truth ultimately keeps him alive. The Vetala warns him of his imminent death should he choose to blindly abide by the intentions of the ascetic. Presumably, the Vetala was keen on saving its own self from the clutches of the ascetic. However, the ethical basis of these set of questions and answers are not adversarial and neither did it seek to solicit its version of the truth from one another. It merely requires logical thought and reasoned conclusions to which sometimes, the Vetala appeared to agree and disagree.

The tale of the parrot and the myna describes the nature of the man and the woman. The male parrot and the female myna are staunch advocates of their respective sexes. Both versions describe the same storyline from different adversarial perspectives. To a legally trained mind, this set of facts are unique to his/her narrative. The parrot paints a negative picture of females and the myna points to the negative traits in the male. Both birds are ardent advocates of their preferred gender programming and inevitably changed into celestial beings and left. However,

when the Vetala questioned the King as to whom he thinks has the penchant to perform evil actions, the King's answer places an emphasis on education and the need to discriminate between good and evil. He thinks unlike males, women are prone to evil deeds, because they are not conditioned to use this art of discrimination. Here, the reader should understand the underlying note of female empowerment that requires attention. If women are educated and given the platform to develop their mental abilities, they will not be prone to causing harm to others. Therefore, the leader should enhance women empowerment and give space for women participation.

Another noteworthy tale is that of the two magic balls. These magic balls were tactics deployed by one Vamanaswami to deceive the King and planned to wed his daughter. He received this advice from Muladeva but the trickster decided to turn his back on Vamanaswami and made his partner, Sasi marry the King's daughter in an open and transparent manner. Sasi married the princess with the consent of the King and left Vamanaswami rudderless. From this tale, the Vetala asked King Vikram who should be the rightful husband to the princess, to which the King replied, Sasi. He was assured that Vamanaswami's tactical misconduct, and seeking advice from the trickster, Muladeva should not be rewarded. Instead, he welcomed transparency and openness to seek the hand of the princess, conduct, worthy of appraisal. From this tale, one can assume following procedural safeguards is tantamount to respecting law and order. If Muladeva's magic balls were used for discreet purposes resulting in unethical actions, King Vikram would not condone these actions to be appropriate and/or intelligent to be subjected to rewards of any kind.

The Panchatantra is a treatise, a collection of fables for children and adults alike. It comprises an open canon of five *Tantras*, each corresponding to distinct knowledge aspects. Taylor (2020) loosely translated the five *Tantras* in chronological order. The first *Tantra*, "how to break up a friendship", the second *Tantra*, "how to win friends", the third *Tantra*, "traditional hostility", the fourth *Tantra*, "Loss of what is being gained", and the fifth and only human beings-based *Tantra*, "Rash deeds" reflecting his interpretation. These fables are similar to Aesop Fables of the western canon and can be grouped together to demonstrate traits a leader can pick up. Initially, the Panchatantra was believed to be written by Vishnu Samartha upon the request of King Amarasakti who had three sons who showed no interest in study. To enhance the spirit of learning, Vishnu Samartha was tasked to author the five *Tantras* to make the sons develop their inclination to learn and absorb knowledge in the form of animal stories depicting characters such as crocodiles, monkeys, owls and crows, and lion and bulls.

In Book Three, the owls become a victim of deception. The crows plot ways to bring down the parliament of owls. The crow conference takes place with various strategies being discussed and discounted. Unfortunately, the owls hold a double-agent crow captive and find themselves in a losing position and ultimate downfall. Various debates and supportive arguments are gleaned from other narratives and materials to hold these propositions as valid in the conference and the parliament respectively. Here, the leader can learn to be wary of cunning strategies designed to harm others, the enemy within the four walls of the state. Ultimately, the art of deception can lead to untimely deaths and loss of amenities. In this book, hostility among common enemies is picturesquely explained to impart realistic consequences a leader needs to acknowledge. Therefore, the Panchatantra is suitable for adult professionals heading big organisations, staying wary of their cunning competitors who may plot to harm reputations and bring down legacies.

The Dharmic Duties in Leadership gleaned from Shanti Parva in the Mahabharata

The Shanti Parva describes the political ideology of Bhishma as he lays dying at the battlefield. Amidst the men who come to seek counsel from this dying male presence, Bhishma relays his pearls of wisdom which are attributes a leader can take up. His narrative has underlying tones of disapproving of womanhood. However, this denotes the service that is expected of from men and requires higher level responsibilities and duties that come attached for men to perform.

The Shanti Parva touches on various domains of leadership. These include but are not limited to kinship, governance, diplomacy and ethical fundamentals for the prosperity of the internal development of the leader and subjects (Garg, 2004). Of the many conversations Bhishma shares in his dying days, his narrative gives the importance of upholding the dharma for the purposes of sustaining righteousness on behalf of all living creatures that dwell among us. Therefore, *Rajadharma* and *Rajdharmanushasan* are two aspects that clarify advice on royal duties and responsibilities and the need for effective government to run the affairs on behalf of the masses. The preservation of dharma implies the ideal workings of wealth accumulation (*Artha*) and desires springing forth from within (*Kama*). Derived from the divine presence and the social contract between the King and the subjects, this line of leadership advice also invokes law and punishment (*Danda*) for the leader to supplant his/her duties.

In Canto 10 of the *Rajadharmanusasana Parva*, Part 1 of Shanti Parva, Bhishma outlines the importance of meaningful actions to support an interconnected system consisting of the existing social order and the natural tendencies for the purposes of execution. Here, being passive and remaining inactive is highly disapproved of when active participation is expected. Bhishma demarcated the range of responsibilities that arise in the social order, making each contribution a purposive account for respective stations in life. The dharmic consistency maintains this equilibrium by monitoring performance in action of all workings of karmic balance. This can arise in the conduct of the warrior class keeping up to their duties and/or the leader's role to take up *Rajadharma* responsibilities. This ensures the wheel of meaningful actions continues to remain in motion (Menon, 2009).

In Canto 57, Bhishma observes the symbolism of a true leader, one who builds the confidence of all his/her subjects. A leader who is able to speak truth to power and develop a sound temperament is able to make decisions with a clear mind, free from insincere conduct and emotional outbursts. Mainly due to the reliance on the sastras, judicious actions are ordained by counsel who must be kept secret from others. In many circumstances, confidentiality is paramount and keeping state secrets, a statutory obligation. In this manner, sound decisions will not be affected by espionage and/or vices stemming from third parties. Peace-building efforts become the catalyst for followers who are confident with the leader's approach to safeguarding their interests and bringing empowerment through the sphere of influence and order. Securing peace and protection is the prime responsibility of a leader, as noted in Canto 58. This measure must be pursuant to righteous actions mandated by able counsel and to further ascertain the nature of protection. In essence, a leader with crooked intentions will fail to safeguard those counting on him/her for safe passage in life. Therefore, the force of strength in a leader is an exertion of affirmative action that resonates with merit, enforced according to the *Rajadharma*.

In areas that deal primarily with governance, policy matters and legislation, Bhishma's counsel professes that virtues must be open to objective scrutiny. Bhishma opined that legislators need

to stand up for the right side, which requires courage, truthfulness and sincerity. Counsels learned in their respective fields will be a source of strength for the leader who will then require adequate counsel in various legislative corners. Furthermore, solution-providers who observe their commitments and stay true to their pledges will be around long enough to see sustainable leadership. Walking away from problems and leaving the camp in the face of adversity amounts to disorderly conduct unbecoming of their stations. The act of concealment is to keep their wise counsels away from the limelight. This is partially rooted in the contribution of policy developments without compromising on standards. Bhishma warns of the deceiving, envious and vain. Finding able gurus and being educated in the “science of consultation” will ensure balanced opinions and effective running of the government. In international relations, this is linked to the collective strength of human capital, extensively discussed in Canto 83 (Menon, 2009).

Cantos 93 to 95 speaks of the public confidence a leader must instill in his/her followers. Bhishma noted that leaders who do not meet these high standards will begin to lose their influence among counsels and will slowly grow to undermine the state of governance and eventually impact the subjects. When the presence of dharma starts losing its significance, paying lip service to values become the norm, safeguarding self-interests and resorting to the concentration of power will all form the dark ages. The analogy that is drawn out is that of a large bag puffed up with wind as the *dharmic* elements begin to shed away, leaving with the wind. As a direct result, the wind takes the *adharmic* persona away from its internal roots, making him appear as “an earthen pot broken on a stony surface” deserving the consequences that befall the leader. In this manner, the means to achieve the results must be built on dharmic foundations seeking to embrace higher deals. Likewise, finding just means to create wealth and harmony will depend substantially on leadership styles that do not seek to cut corners, nor hoping to get ahead of others in pursuit of personal fruits and currying favours.

Hence, the Shanti Parva is another valuable source of literature that seeks to implore future leaders to develop their capabilities in securing a better future for others who do not have these responsibilities accorded to them. Women were not painted in a meaningful light in these male-dominated spheres. However, times have since changed and women can equally learn from these bodies of literature to fulfill their *dharma* in various positions of leadership. This approach can see equal participation of women and henceforth result in their empowerment as they become exposed to various counselling sessions for the leader in waiting.

Leadership Traits Found in Adi Shankara

The young Adi Shankara was not a King by birth nor a leader by modern perception. However, as a scholar who espoused the philosophy of Vedanta in his short yet fruitful life, there are many traits that a leader can draw from this young mind’s life pursuits.

The *Viveka-Chudamani* (the Crest-Jewel of Discrimination) is his magnum opus for many generations to appreciate. This reforming exercise allowed his brand of philosophy to thrive, particularly among the scholarly community.

The illusion (*Maya*) that Shankara described was that of evil or ignorance (*Avidya*) and good (*Vidya*). By pursuing the knowledge of truth, this journey unveiled the real Self within One, and brings One closer to the ultimate good. Hence, these set of actions will release One from

ignorance and transcend to the absolute Reality, the Brahman. Ethical goodness and ethical evil are bound by certain characteristics that entertain such behaviour. These ethical characteristics resonate with justice, the abolition of barriers in the social order, finding the common in the universal existence, and living honestly. In contrast, selfish leanings contribute to ethical evil, feeding the Ego. Bearing in mind that ethical conduct is a valid means to an end, the trajectory of non-dualism brings together ethical conduct to concentrate upon direct experiences that allows One to realise the Inner Reality found in all. This is the golden thread that runs across space, time and causation, acting on its inter-dependent axis.

Shankara's set of virtues bring forth this sense of connectedness among all and celebrates self-control, mental poise, forbearance, tranquility and liberation. Therefore, as a seeker of knowledge, the leader resorts to a guru who can illumine the path for ethical means to help others. Liberation therefore are attempts to free oneself from selfish motives that bind the leader towards personal gain and harmful self-interests. The English translation by [Prabhavananda and Isherwood \(1971\)](#) gives prominence to the role of a teacher who is free from impurities that haunt the untrained mind. The teacher's abilities must be a call for a student who finds devotion in his/her to service. In this context, human capacity is trained to build bridges and hone talents to bring forth the light that shines as the illumed Atman. Therefore, education tailored in this manner will train leaders to look beyond their personal interests clouding their leadership capabilities designed to uplift the collective.

Furthermore, the concept of *Rajas*, *Tamas* and *Sattva* qualities are reproduced to bring clarity to the uninitiated. In the tree of life, *Tamas* is the seed with potential to spring forth as creation. The *Rajasic* desires envelope the leaves, the trunk and embody the sap. The vital forces and sense-objects therein are the branches, twigs and flowers which ultimately bear fruit. In this analogy, the individual is the bird that eats the fruit off the tree of life ([Prabhavananda and Isherwood, 1971, p. 66](#)). In this sensual state, the leader needs to be taught how to discriminate between the bondage of being caught up with oneself and the need to be armed with knowledge of oneness to keep the mind pure, bound by *Sattvic* qualities. These skill sets empower the leader to think of the collective as the interconnected Oneness.

Finally, the leader should be open to debates and advocacy that seek to bring progress to the collective and appreciate the role of the scholarly community. This is aptly documented in the debate between Adi Shankara and King Mandana Misra. The presiding judge was the Queen consort and the debate lasted for many days. It concerned the philosophical premise of the Brahman, the interpretation of *Tat Tvam Asi*, the doctrine of unity and its corresponding contradictions, the purposive approach to Vedic authority and the persuasive authority of supportive texts and materials. The winner of the debate would assume the responsibilities and respective duties of the other's vocation and stage in life; either the monk or the householder respectively. During this discourse, the premise of the debate was strictly bound by their thesis (*pratijna*), the means of knowledge (*pramanas*), and the binding conditions, with an unequivocal agreement to respect the verdict ([Tripathi, 2016](#)).

The King lost the debate, and the verdict was handed down by the Queen consort, Bharati Misra who was made the umpire (*Sadasya*). As a direct result, the King became one of Shankara's devoted disciples and committed himself to annotating Shankara's Brahma sutras. This act of leadership portrays the need for debates and the recognition of the younger generation in this forum for talent development and intellectual progress. 'Sureshvara Archarya' therefore,

becomes the disciple-King of Adi Shankara. This change of heart by the King endorsed the importance of debates and refined advocacy in the absence of adversarial means and the assumption of tactical positions.

Adi Shankara was a learned individual and wise beyond his tender years. His capabilities as a young scholar were celebrated and given prominence by the King in his Court. In the absence of ugly tactics and a deep sense of mutual respect for the art of debate, the *Shankara-dig-vijaya* documents these utterances in written form. In this regard, developing a keen sense of the art of debate and equal participation allows the leader to observe this prestigious ancient art in theory and practice.

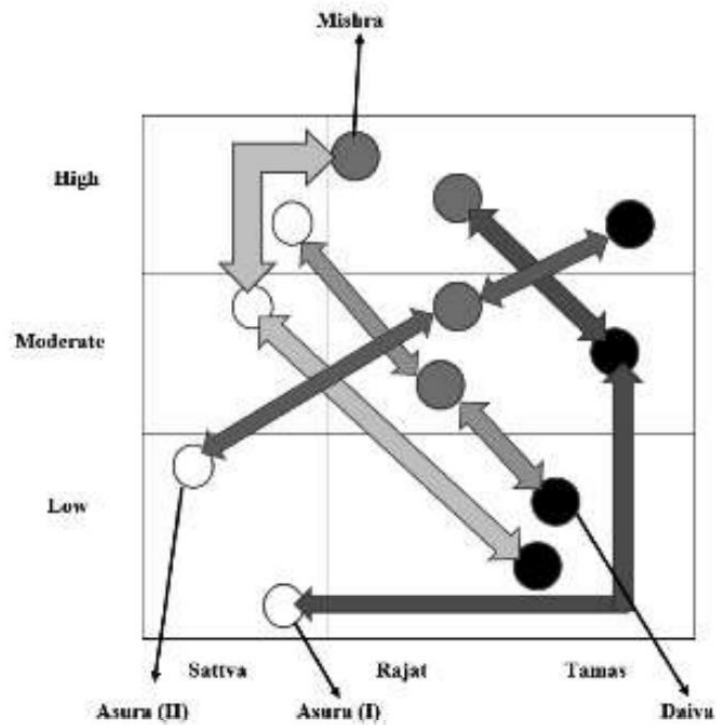
Wisdom of Indian Knowledge Systems and Leadership Styles

Sanatana Dharma is the terminology that aptly engulfs the knowledge built upon the studies of Vedas and the system it created. This large database gave birth to the creation and celebration of knowledge, virtues and relied upon ethical and scientific foundations for the benefit of humanity. Keeping this interpretation at the heart of this discussion, the leader should then find cohesive reasoning methods and seek solace in the mental development of the senses. This forms the scope of this branch of philosophy, modelled after a working culture pursuant to these rules of merit and procedure. It is akin to “... like a river, which has shallows that a child may play in, and depths which the strongest diver cannot fathom...” (Central Hindu College, 1904).

Pictured in this light, various leadership models were analysed by Sathish M. et. al., (2020) covering various roles and qualities that were observed in ancient Indian texts. These models were further analysed to configure a systems-based leadership approach to different categories and styles. This was designed in modern times to manage a “volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world.” This study therefore presented leadership models based on *Daiva*, *Asura* and *Mishra* qualities gleaned from the Gita, Ramayana and other abovementioned texts. “*Mishra-Samparke*” is a term that connotes an intermingling of *Asura* and *Daiva* qualities, presumably, adopting a cross-sectional perspective of the *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva* attributes. These three *Gunas* underpin the internal development of the Self. Effective leaders are those that are able to adopt proportionate amounts of the *Gunas* to impact the *Sattva* qualities imbued in their brand of leadership. Examples of *Sattvic* leaders include Rama, whereas *Rajasic* leaders are projections of Ravana. *Tamasic* attributes will carry no influence or control over his/her subordinates. Likewise, the *Rajasic* temperament will find ways to overpower other characters, particular those that are deemed as threats to their influence and power play.

With this in mind, *Daivas* are presumed to have more intellectual capacity, keen to assume responsibilities, adopt succession planning on behalf of inter-generational equity, and are open to constructive feedback. The *Asuras* are presumed to be the opposite of the *Daivas*. They are quick to be arrogant, harsh with conduct and words, conceited and practice hypocrisy. The *Mishra* model embraces both *Daiva* and *Asura* qualities, more suited for middle-manager roles and implementing strategic objectives.

Figure 7: IKS based Modern Leadership Model



Source: Sathish M. *et. al.*, 2020

Therefore, the diagram above is constructed by [Sathish M. et. al., \(2020\)](#) to provide a thorough fixation of the three *Gunas* and its corresponding leadership models. It provides an internal perspective and its direct output is based on qualities hinged internally in one's Self. For self-reflection purposes, the leader is able to gage his/her qualities based on these fluid criteria and change their respective styles. Further to this, other colleagues would be able to initiate feedback to improve other structural flaws based on poor leadership styles. Pertaining to leadership awareness for the finer values and ideals, potential leaders can look for guidance herein and work towards enhancing their leadership capabilities.

The Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) repository is an amalgamation of scholarly output that is dated as ancient as 3000 BCE to 1800 CE. It covers a variety of knowledge systems with references to spirituality, governance, statecraft and accompanying literature that has stood the test of time. In preserving these written and oral traditions, many attempts have been made to secure adequate recognition and preservation to bring forth its unique contribution in the sphere of knowledge creation.

Drawing insights from the Indian epics (*Itihasa*) provide a basis to analyse leadership styles portrayed by the characters pursuant to their distinct *Gunas*. Therefore, the *Mishra* model of leadership is considered to be the morphed aspects which other prevalent models do not present in their natural elements. For these reasons, the *Daiva* model of leadership carries with it, traits that a leader can seek to study and adopt in naturally arising situations.

Leadership models analyzed in this section, can range from head prefects in school, CEOs' running multinational corporations, to the Head of States taking up ministerial responsibilities. Finding coherence in the international global architecture in sustainable leadership is critical at this juncture. Currently, threats by climate change destruction, unfettered capitalism and resource exploitation are harming the ecosystem. With these challenges in mind, leaders can look to ancient models from a personal angle and reflect upon the impact and ways to meet international challenges. Other leadership models do not look to the basis of the three *Gunas* and its overall impact on the world at large.

Knowing one's internal construct and finding the side-effects is a well-founded approach that is designed to tap into the wealth of Indian Knowledge Systems offerings. This method seeks to improve one's state of being. Respecting these attributes and finding common ground between different human setbacks constitute a universal approach designed to look past national boundaries and differences in cultural perspectives.

The political situation in Myanmar and Russia are valid scenarios, aptly described, using the diagram above, without the need to resort to regional alignments and communal setbacks. Current leadership styles in two very different parts of the world are the source of constant attempts at resolving state aggression. To counter these threats to harmony and collective peace, spotting Ravana qualities and Rama attributes sheds light on behavioral rationale employed by certain actors to exhaust their individual desires (*Vasanas*). Studying these minds as they harness their unfettered power will enable significant others to find ways to gravitate towards bolder versions of leadership that empower the average citizen, the aspiring student activist or the diligent scholar.

Conclusion

In modern times, leadership schools are mushrooming in many parts of the world to tackle leadership shortcomings. A valid example is the approach adopted by the British government and the European Union as they proceeded with Brexit negotiations and breaches of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Belfast Agreement was forged to maintain international peace between two countries that would become peaceful neighbours in the future. Due to leadership constraints, the world witnessed the legal battles and unprofessional mannerism of the outgoing state in the face of the Brexit departure.

In the same vein, the Russia-Ukraine aggression highlights another prominent example of leadership pressed towards harming another's sovereignty and breaking international law. As a result, economic sanctions were imposed on Russia and an energy supply crisis is the direct consequence for the European Union and its brand of open strategic autonomy. As Ukraine raced towards the European Union for security and shelter, China filled the vacuum to strengthen the international order and brought systemic cohesion to power relations in this geopolitical collision between the Global North and the rest of the world. In this regard, public opinion is divided as to which brand of leadership and its accompanying attributes are to be held as the gold standard for other nations to adopt.

Closer to ASEAN shores, Myanmar experienced a power grab as the lady leader, Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted by the military Junta. This country descended into chaos as civilians were subjected to aggressive state control, costing civilian lives and livelihoods. Here too, other developed nations heaped economic sanctions, further crippling the economy, resulting in continued stagnation for progress. In this regard, Myanmar was pushed to a dark corner by high-level players in international organizations and amongst the ASEAN community. This is the state of leadership affairs for the selected few and the harmful effects are experienced by significant millions.

In Sri Lanka, their leadership was ousted by the commoners, and was forced to seek shelter in Singapore. There, Gotabaya Rajapaksa formally issued an email correspondence affirming his resignation as the Head of State. Huge numbers started taking to the Sri Lankan streets and caused unavoidable aggression on Sri Lankan soil. The economic meltdown saw prices skyrocketing to unimaginable levels. Students could not take exams because paper became scarce and staple food for consumption became a luxury item. Naturally, China did not intervene to safeguard its vested interests and strategic assets in Sri Lanka. As a free country with business ties, it merely watched on as ugly scenes unfolded in Sri Lanka, expressing no intention of making a foreign intervention in domestic political struggles. With other interests at stake, Beijing walked into Afghanistan to strengthen economic ties with the Taliban, as the world witnessed the United States walking away from its peacebuilding efforts. Therefore, failed leadership attempts ring louder for all who live in peaceful environments and sustain privileged livelihoods

In this plethora of disharmony, leadership traits lie aplenty in ancient Indian texts, documented for future generations. Characters who appeared as *Daiva* and *Asura* in the Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata and ancient fables speak of these fluid traits.

Similarly, other renowned scholars such as Adi Shankara brought their brand of leadership to the Indic spaghetti bowl. The electorate was keen to witness the scholar and the King debating on matters of philosophy and reason. The Queen consort was made the umpire to adjudicate the debate. Eventually, the King switched to disciple-hood, respecting the verdict and the young scholar won the debate, teaching the leader to become a better version of himself.

Legal advisors and the King's counsel were monumental figures for the leader to rely upon. Texts such as the *Arthashastra* and the *Nitisastra* document essential needs that must occupy the hearts and minds of the many and not the few. These were enumerated as leadership pointers observed in taxation principles, legal standards, and the fundamentals of knowledge preservation. The Sastras outlined an ethical code of conduct established in *Rajadharma*, the leader's duties and were subsequently tied to heavy responsibilities and the central protection of the collective.

In this regard, divine power that rested in the King as the fountain of justice still carries symbolism in today's England and Wales. The Royal Courts of Justice and the Inns of Court are a reflection of its Royal titles. The British academies and institutions of learning also carry the "Royal" title to extrapolate this royal presence. In this manner, today's *Rajadharma* duties have assumed symbolic undertones on behalf of the Royal presence.

Finding ways to hone future leaders should not be limited to prestigious institutions that only accept the elite and cater to their exploits. Leadership must be seen to embrace the three *Gunas*

to provide able leadership at all levels. Concentration of power and *adharmic* values which sustain these efforts will see countries fall into disrepute, engage in chaos among its electorate and produce refugees fleeing to other parts of the world in search of safety and better futures. Presently, countries that are stuck in this irreparable condition face foreign interference in their domestic sphere of influence, are forced to rely on foreign investments to save their domestic economy, and harm their domestic capabilities and human capital.

With these constant threats and challenges, leadership must find its place and must deliver when the occasions arise. To counter the *adharmic* forces that are present and all- pervading, looking to *dharmic* traits in leadership formulas will bring together various characteristics. This can be picked up by future leaders for their day-to-day responsibilities. These characteristics are not meant to be exclusively for males-dominated roles. Following this gender-neutral perspective, the ability of a person to refine his/her senses according to the *Gunas* will then experience the development of the internal Self and its untapped potential.

Leadership figures such as Rama and Ravana further teach us the nature of the unfoldment of the Self. One can learn the behavioral shortcomings from Ravana and follow one's path towards refining the senses. We can harness power in knowledge accumulation and seek to embrace intellectual humility. We can aspire to embrace higher values and discard lower tendencies. We can find guidance in Krishna's empowering words and Bhisma's responsible mandates. Therefore, renunciation of the fruits of actions will lead one towards higher goals and aspirations, without compromising on standards and principles. This pathway is sustainable for all leaders who are free to choose their destiny.

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