

INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL MODEL OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Indian thoughts provide a distinctive perspective on authentic leadership and management, drawing inspiration from ancient texts and teachings. One of the key philosophical concepts applied to Leadership is “*Dharma*”, which emphasizes ethical and responsible decision-making that considers the well-being of all stakeholders. A leader following the path of *Dharma* seeks to create a harmonious and just environment where the community's needs and interests are balanced with deeply held values. This concept also aligns with the modern-day definition of leadership by the American Psychological Association (APA), which involves guiding, organizing, directing, coordinating, and motivating one's efforts towards achieving common goals. This research explores the realm of authentic leadership by drawing insights from ancient texts such as *Arthashastra*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Ramayana*. These texts offer glimpses into the profiles of leaders and kings, shedding light on their governance and administrative skills.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, *Arthashastra*, *Bhagavad Gita*,

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Ramayana, Decision Making, Management Skills, Dharma.

1. Introduction

Leadership guidance can be gleaned from a plethora of texts and teachings embedded in Indian philosophy. Ancient Indian sages underscored the importance of ethical leadership and delineated the qualities that characterize a prosperous leader. Returning to the roots, we delve into crucial leadership lessons found in two monumental Indian Epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*—and the non-fictional work *Arthashastra*. The *Bhagavad Gita* presents a charismatic leader as the one who leads by example inspiring and motivating others toward the attainment of their objectives. He should also embody virtues such as courage, wisdom, and detachment, while also manifesting selflessness and compassion in dealing with others. Similarly, the *Ramayana* serves as a symbolic narrative illustrating the governance and leadership qualities of key figures like King Dasaratha, Lord Rama, King Sugreeva, Vibhishana and King Ravana. In contrast to the ancient epics, *Arthashastra*, a relatively more recent composition, provides additional insights into effective political leadership and moral principles.

2. *Arthashastra* and Political Leadership

Arthashastra visualizes a leader as someone possessing qualities such as intelligence, integrity, and the ability to inspire and motivate others. Notably, Acharya Chanakya, also known as Kautilya, who served as a minister in the kingdom of Chandragupta Maurya during 317-293 BC, is lauded as one of the shrewdest ministers of his time. Kautilya expounded his thoughts on political management, outlining essential attributes for effective leadership. In his discourse on the qualities of a *mantri* (minister), he emphasized attributes like *drudachitta* (power of concentration), *shilavan* (character), *pragna* (logical thinking), *vangmi* (communication skills), and *daksha* (observation/vigilance). It's noteworthy that these qualities—knowledge, skills, and attitude—are the same competencies underscored by contemporary management gurus today.

Kautilya contends that the efficient operation of an organization or government necessitates a sophisticated machinery. In his discourses, he not only delves into the organizational aspects

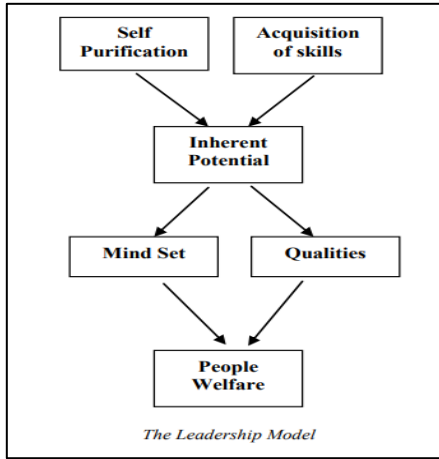
but also emphasizes their interconnectedness with human dimensions. Furthermore, Kautilya explores the essential leadership qualities required to ensure the effective functioning of the organization. In his opinion, the fundamental components of the state encompass *Swamy* (King), *Amatya* (Minister), *Janapada* (populated territory), *Durga* (fort), *Kosha* (treasury), *Bala* (force/army), and *Mitra* (ally).

Arthashastra, as the science of economics, serves as a foundational source for many contemporary economic and management practices. The contemporary goals of vision, mission, and motivation find their elucidation in the *Arthashastra*, wherein administration is guided by *prabhu shakti* (vision), *mantra shakti* (mission), and *utash shakti* (motivation). The ruler's aim is to attain power, solidify acquired assets, extend the acquired territory, and relish the fruits of those acquisitions (Sorcerer, Shabbir S). Kautilya asserts that true leadership is embodied by an individual who can simultaneously weigh both favorable and unfavorable factors, and autonomously make well-informed decisions. Furthermore, it is essential for a leader to exhibit mastery over their senses in all circumstances.

According to Kautilya, a leader should be endowed with divine intellect and ethical virtues (*Daiva-buddhi-satva-sampanna*), coupled with a robust memory (*smriti*) and human intellect (*mati*). Leaders ought to handle those who err with sensitivity and reduce animosity within the team. A leader's foremost responsibility lies with his peers and subordinates, prioritizing their well-being over personal interests, particularly in times of crises. This approach contributes to the overall welfare of the subjects. Consequently, a leader is advised to maintain open communication channels both horizontally and vertically. Again, Kautilya advocates for a belief in the law of reinforcement rather than punishment, as he contends that punishment alone does not effectively curb crime or rectify errors (Rajan and Shrikrishnan).

Kautilya asserts that self-purification, which includes engaging in meditation and interacting with the elderly, is a necessary component to obtain self-discipline. The intrinsic potential, which combines self-purification and skill acquisition, is characterized by energy, analytical aptitude and learning capacity. This enhances a leader's efficacy and efficiency. Possession of *Virtues/Qualities* and

Endowment of *thought* through which he initiates into the realm of ethics, morals, empathy, and kindness, is always nurtured by his natural capacity. According to Rajan and Shrikrishnan, all of the aforementioned factors support preserving organizational accountability and upholding global order. This view is depicted through the following diagram



Source: (Rajan and Shrikrishnan)

Kautilya goes beyond emphasizing mere intellectual prowess in a leader and advocates for the cultivation of specific cognitive qualities known as *Prajna-gunas*. Comprising eight virtues, these *Prajna-gunas* form a comprehensive set of attributes essential for effective leadership: 1) Desire to learn 2) Listening 3) Learning 4) Retention 5) Thorough understanding 6) Reflecting 7) Rejecting (false views) and 8) Intentness on truth. Indeed, a person who adeptly applies these virtues in their daily interactions and empowers their thought process has the potential to ascend to leadership role (Jain 134-140).

3. Linked Leadership Model in The *Bhagavad Gita*

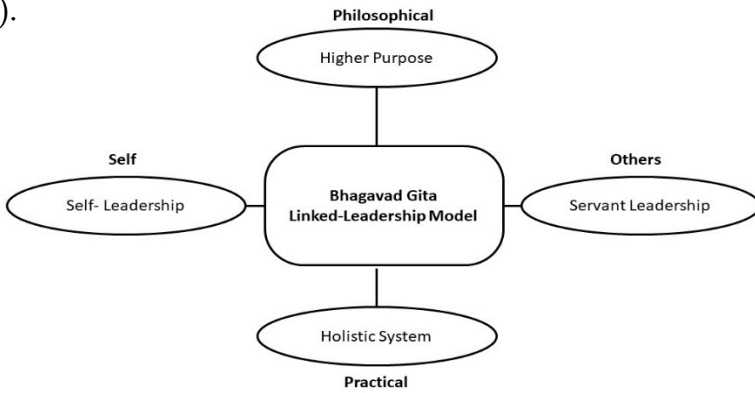
The *Bhagavad Gita* could also be valued as a philosophical manual for authentic leadership. In contrast to the *Arthashastra*, it does not directly serve as a manual for governance; instead, it functions more as a spiritual and moral guide.

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ याजयौ |
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि
|| 38 ||

sukha-duḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jāyājayau
tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivaṁ pāpam avāpsyasi
(Tanishka)

One can perform one’s duty, treating happiness and distress alike, both in loss as well as in gain, in victory as well as in defeat. By fulfilling one’s responsibilities in this manner, one avoids the occasion of sin.

There are four higher-order qualities which were referred to as the four wheels of Arjuna’s chariot in the Bhagavad Gita. **1. Self-Leadership-** It focuses on the integrity of the process of achieving goals rather than solely on the goal itself. It emphasizes that success is determined by the manner in which goals are pursued and achieved; **2. Servant Leadership-** It involves recognizing that all individuals play distinct spiritual roles while maintaining spiritual equality. It is about guiding others with a spirit of inspiration and voluntariness, emphasizing the idea that leadership is a service to others rather than a position of authority; **3. Holistic Systems-** This approach involves embracing all resources as gifts, each possessing its unique qualities. In this perspective, these resources are considered elements that can be harmonized or disrupted, emphasizing a holistic understanding of their interconnectedness within the system; **4. Higher Purpose-** This idea asserts that infusing heartfulness into actions provides them with a deeper and more significant meaning and purpose. It highlights the idea that actions guided by genuine care and heartfelt intention contribute to a greater sense of purpose (Simpson and Pina e Cunha 44-47).



Source: (Simpson A 2019)

A leader's credibility is derived from his unwavering commitment to follow his own words: “*Yad yad ācharati śhreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janaḥ sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokas tad anuvartate*” (3.21) (Mukundananda). Leadership is an inherent quality of every individual. A child looks at his parents and teacher in building a value

system. As the child grows, he/she influences the peer or others with the value system and skills (Mahadevan B). The challenge for leaders is to overcome the paradoxical tension existing between idle oaths, knowledge (*Jnana*) and active work (*karma*) by wisely carrying out their responsibilities. In fact, in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna asserts that the perceived conflict between knowledge and work is a false dilemma. Although they both appear to be contradictory yet are interdependent on themselves. To an embodied being, inaction is not an option when the knowledge is not put into action. Action requires knowledge and knowledge requires action (Simpson A, 60-66).

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

Karmanyevadhikaraste Ma Phaleshou Kada Chana

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि

Ma Karma Phala Hetur Bhurnatey Sangostva Akarmani

// 47

(Mukundananda)

A leader should not be attached to results; rather he is to be calm and firm in judgment (*sthita prajna*) to possess *sattva guna* (noble traits). Let him be a *karma yogin* (one who performs actions without attachment to their fruits). While one is entitled to perform prescribed duties, he/she is not entitled to desire the fruits of those actions. It is important to have no attachment to the results of the actions or to inactions. Leadership is inherently laden with latent and competing tensions; When these tensions remain unresolved or incomplete, they can potentially give rise to anxiety. In some instances, the resulting sense of hopelessness may even hinder or paralyze effective action. An individual can become a successful leader only when he/she transcends such paradoxical tensions (Agarwal and Rastogi 141-150).

Table1: Transcending Paradoxes Source

Competing Tension		Transcendence Tension
Karma (Action)	Jnana (Knowledge)	Karma Yoga (Work with action)
Senses	Intelligence	Intelligent action
Attachment	Detachment	Dethatched engagement
Possession	Renunciation	renounced possession
Entanglement	Freedom	free engagement
Bondage	liberation	liberated embodiment
Action	inaction	Reactionless action
		(Simpson A, 60)

4. Management Model

The *Bhagavad Gita* is composed of three segments that can be related to Business or organizational management. *a. Samkhya Yoga* - It emphasizes the importance of cultivating self-discipline in discharging one’s duties. *b. Bhakti Yoga* - It places a strong emphasis on devotion to something greater than oneself. In a leadership context, this philosophy highlights the importance of prioritizing the needs of employees and customers over personal interests. It encourages leaders to approach their roles with a sense of selfless dedication, fostering a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship with those they associate and serve. *c. Karma Yoga* - It involves performing selfless actions. In the realm of business and leadership, adhering to this philosophy entails a commitment to engaging in actions that prioritize what is morally right for the growth of the organization and the well-being of employees, rather than seeking personal benefits. This approach emphasizes the importance of ethical decision-making and a focus on the greater good in the conduct of business activities (Chakraborty Partha).

Nishkama Karma involves spontaneous and selfless action, emphasizing the performance itself rather than being driven by a fixation on the end results. In the context of leadership, it suggests engaging in actions with a focus on the intrinsic value of the task, without being overly attached to the outcomes. Contemporary organizations often grapple with short-termism, exemplified by the practice of providing quarterly guidance. This entails informing market stakeholders about anticipated performance in the upcoming quarter. Consequently, organizations tend to project positive outcomes on a quarterly basis; but this approach often involves engaging in stress-inducing activities and prioritizing short-term gains over long-term sustainability.

विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ।
2, 71

*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumānśh charati niḥsprihaḥ
nirmamo nirahankārah sa śhāntim adhi-gachchhati*
(Mukundananda)

In the aforementioned verses, Lord Krishna imparts to Arjuna the wisdom that both sensations of happiness and distress are transient. This teaching suggests that managers should cultivate the confidence to undertake activities and make decisions that strike a balance between short-term and long-term considerations. To achieve

inner peace, a leader must avoid falling into the traps of greed and anger. The key is to distance oneself from the destructive force of the ego, which often serves as a source of conflict between individuals (McCormack). Statistics indicate that a significant number of executives, particularly those departing from senior management roles, experience job loss not primarily due to professional incompetence but rather as a result of interpersonal issues.

5. Knowledge and Leadership Skills

ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं परिज्ञाता त्रिविधा कर्मचोदना |

jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ pariñātā tri-vidhā karma-chodanā

करणं कर्म कर्तैति त्रिविधः कर्मसंग्रहः ||

karaṇaṁ karma karteti tri-vidhaḥ karma-saṅgrahaḥ

3,18

ज्ञानं कर्म च कर्ता च त्रिधैव गुणभेदतः |

jñānaṁ karma cha kartā cha tridhaiva guṇa-bhedataḥ

प्रोच्यते गुणसङ्घे ख्याने यथावच्छृणु तान्यपि || 3,19

prochyate guṇa-saṅkhyāne yathāvach chhṛiṇu tāny api

(Swami Mukundananda)

Knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the knower – these are the three factors that induce action. There are also three components of action: the instrument of action, the act itself, and the doer. The *Sāmkhya* philosophy categorizes knowledge, action, and the doer into three types, delineated by the three modes of material nature. It is essential for a leader to recognize that their role constitutes just one of the five contributing factors

The *first factor* is the place or field of activity, conceptualized with the organization as the field and the individual identified as the body responsible for operating within that organizational context. The *second factor* is the agent, encompassing the individual, the organizational team, and the organization as a unified whole. The *third factor* involves the means employed to achieve the goals; the *fourth factor* is the efforts undertaken, including the skills practiced. The *fifth and final factor* is providence or divine sanction, stemming from the supreme soul (Simpson and Pina e Cunha 44-47). According to the outlined factors, an individual is not inherently entitled to claim ownership of the results of his actions. The act of renunciation signifies an acknowledgment of oneself as a non-doer, detached from the fruits of actions. Renounced leaders, devoid of attachment and guided by a sense of duty, perceive themselves as mere agents playing a small part in the broader scheme of things.

In Arjuna's concern about potential contradictions between knowledge and work, Lord Krishna advises that wise leaders are to

be supported by knowledge, work, and workers. Krishna's analysis emphasizes the cultivation of goodness by steering clear of passion and ignorance. That is to say, harmonizing knowledge and work is always achieved by embracing virtuous qualities.

Table 2: Distinction Between Knowledge and Worker in the *Bhagavad Gita*

Knowledge	Worker
A knowledge of goodness emphasizes unity in diversity, taking into account the material differences that make all living beings unique.	A worker in goodness lacks egoism, attachment, and aversion, and is objective. Despite failure and success, their mode of work remains the same.
Knowledge in passion places great importance on external differences, promoting partisan competition.	A Worker in passion is greedy for fruits and is prone to emotional outbursts; sometimes leading to obsession and even violence.
Knowledge gained in ignorance is illogical, dominated by external trivialities, and of little consequence to truth or meaningful existence.	Ignorant workers are stubborn, undisciplined, vulgar, depressed, and procrastinators. Instead of considering the desired outcome, they focus more on action.

6. *Ramayana* and the Righteous Leadership Model

The legendary tale of Lord Rama, Sita, their devoted companion Hanuman, and the entire *vanara sena* (ape-human army) is a divine narrative deeply ingrained in the beliefs of the Indian people. Sage Valmiki wrote the stanza in the *Ramayana* that is regarded as the *Adikavya* (First Poem), and his followers sang it in every Indian hamlet and in the royal court. The epic *Ramayana* tells the tale of Lord Rama's search for Sita, who was taken captive by Ravana, along with the help of Hanuman and other *vanara sena*. The whole text unveils the virtues of *moksha* (liberation), *kama* (fulfillment of wants), *artha* (economic progress), and *dharma* (righteousness). Let us now examine some of the verses that highlight ethical values in leadership.

तेन सत्याभिसंधेन त्रिवर्गमनुतिष्ठता |
पालिता सा पुरी श्रेष्ठा इन्द्रेणैवामरावती | | १-६-५

The above passage discusses King Dasaratha, Lord Rama's father, highlighting his regime marked by exemplary leadership

qualities. It conveys that a leader who champions truth and justice, while actively working for the progress of their team or people, is deemed worthy of a place akin to heaven. Leadership is thus defined broadly as "the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts to achieve specific goals" (Muniapan 104). According to the *Ramayana*, an ideal ruler desires that his subjects can confront challenging situations independently, without constantly depending on him.

तस्यां पुर्यामयोध्यायां वेदवित्सर्वसंग्रहः |
दीर्घदर्शी महातेजाः पौरजानपदप्रियः ||
इक्ष्वाकूणामतिरथो यज्वा धर्मपरो वशी |
महर्षिकल्पो राजर्षिः त्रिषु लोकेषु विश्रुतः ||

puryām tasyāmayodhyāyām vedavit sarvasaṅgrahaḥ |
dīrghadarśī mahātejāḥ paurajānapadapriyaḥ || 1 ||
ikṣvākūṇāmatiratho yajvā dharmarato vaśī |
maharṣikalpo rājarṣiṣṭriṣu lokṣu viśrutaḥ || 2 ||

These verses praise King Dasaratha, emphasizing his widespread acclaim among both urban dwellers and rural residents. He is hailed as the foremost chariot-warrior among the Ikshwaku kings, distinguished for his virtue, exceptional leadership, and saintly qualities. King Dasaratha is portrayed as an exemplary ruler, renowned across all three worlds, a formidable force who has vanquished all adversaries, a man with numerous allies, and one who has mastered control over his senses.

तस्मिन्पुरवरे हृष्टा धर्मात्मानो बहुश्रुताः |
नरास्तुष्टा धनैः स्वैः स्वैरलुब्धाः सत्यवादिनः ||

tasminpuravare hr̥ṣṭā dharmātmanā bahušrutāḥ |
narāstusṭā dhanaiḥ svaiḥ svairalubdhāḥ satyavādināḥ || 6

The above verses discuss management skills that hold relevance in organizational contexts. A leader should meticulously choose the organization's representatives, cultivate a robust network of connections, offer moral support to employees facing challenges, and remain emotionally grounded to avoid the pitfalls of greed, jealousy or pride, whether experiencing success or setbacks. This aligns with the wisdom encapsulated in Napoleon Bonaparte's statement: He would run an army of rabbits led by a lion rather than an army of lions led by a rabbit. An exemplary and authentic monarch would prioritize the selection of intelligent and talented individuals, ensure the populace's economic satisfaction, promote friendly alliances over animosity, exhibit a lack of greed, and uphold principles of honesty.

The kings in the *Ramayana* showcase both negotiation skills and

resolute decision-making. When Lord Rama is requested to leave the country for fourteen years, his brother Bharatha approaches him in the forest, where Lord Rama resides with his wife Sita and younger brother Lakshmana. Bharatha endeavors to persuade Lord Rama to return to the kingdom, citing their father King Dasaratha's demise and the need for Rama to assume the responsibilities of the throne. Despite Bharatha's plea, Lord Rama remains steadfast in his resolve, adhering to his previous statements. Indeed, there are numerous instances in the *Ramayana* where Lord Rama demonstrates remarkable composure and serenity despite the emotional and sensory challenges. In the *Yudha Kanda*, the entire *vanara sena*, along with Hanuman (Rama's friend and disciple) and the allied King who vowed to rescue Sita, advises against accepting Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana, who had captured Sita. Despite the counsel of his allies, Lord Rama chooses to trust his instincts and extends protection to Vibhishana, who approaches him as a refugee. This decision showcases Lord Rama's unwavering commitment to principles and his ability to stay calm and resolute in the face of conflicting opinions (Muniapan 104).

सकृद् एव प्रपन्नाय तव अस्मि इति च याचते ।। ६-१८-३३
अभयम् सर्व भूतेभ्यो ददामि एतद् व्रतम् मम ।

Lord Rama asserts that anyone who places their trust in him and acknowledges him as their own will be granted protection and survival skills to overcome all adversities. The aforementioned passages from the Valmiki Ramayana highlight how the kingly figure in this epic imparts valuable lessons, emphasizing that a leader should be devoid of greed and strong emotions when making decisions. They should maintain moral integrity in their interactions and possess a keen understanding of the prerequisites for success. Upon Lord Rama's return to his kingdom after the exile, his rule transformed the entire land into a realm devoid of anxiety, resembling *vaikunta*. In Ayodhya, under his leadership, the people exemplified righteousness. Even during his exile, Lord Rama treated the *vanara sena*, who collaborated in the search for Sita captured by Ravana, with dignity. Remarkably, the harmony is extended to untamed animals, as they refrained from fighting and killing each other (Muniapan 104). This illustrates that one can qualify as a leader, irrespective of status or level of authority, by holding on to the mantra of *dharma*.

7. Conclusion

Ancient wisdom continues to yield positive outcomes even in our modern and sophisticated era. Political leaders who prioritize self-awareness, empathy, and a sense of purpose, while adhering to ethical principles, are more likely to build trust, loyalty and motivation across diverse segments of society. A striking example is the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., whose graceful skills, moral uprightness, and inspiring rhetoric spearheaded one of the most influential civil rights movements in American history. His authentic leadership brought together millions of people from diverse backgrounds to effect enduring change. In contrast to toxic leadership styles such as authoritarianism, dictatorship and polarization, contemporary organizations value leaders with positive attitudes, realistic thinking and emotionally balanced approach.

According to the Indian leadership model, political leaders are encouraged to allocate time for meditation, emphasizing the significance of prioritizing mental health. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* outline essential attributes like self-discipline, silence, and detachment, with leaders setting an example through their personal yoga practice. A mentally resilient leader dedicates time for others, emphasizing service over self. Advocates of the interpersonal approach assert that genuine leadership evolves from the dynamic relationship between the leader and followers, underscoring the relational aspect of true leadership (Gordana Nikolić, Sanda Grudic Kvasic, Lucija Grbic). Therefore, an authentic leader is the one who: 1) is self-aware, humble, always looking for improvement, aware of those who are being led and looks out for their welfare; 2) builds a strong ethical and moral framework; 3) strives to achieve organizational success within the framework of social values (Whitehead, 847-872). If the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* highlight the significance of self-mastery, detachment through prioritizing the service to others, the *Arthashastra*, on the other hand, emphasizes pragmatic intelligence and ethical conduct in governance.

Political leaders should always exhibit high emotional intelligence, adeptly navigate dichotomous thoughts, and make decisions that are both firm and flexible. Is it possible for the spiritual values enshrined in Indian texts to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, envisioning a dissemination that instills

ethical values in both civil and political leadership? Certainly; by embracing the legacy of *dharma* in practice, it is indeed possible.

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