

# Evolving from Manager to a Business Leader: Characteristics of ‘Yogic Perspectives’ & ‘Vedic Philosophy’

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## Introduction

*Indian civilization has survived in values and practices over the last 4000 years or so. Civilizations that weathered the forces of time were mostly led by healthy leadership practices and systems. India has thus been a very rare context that exhibited good leadership. This stems from Indian civilization with its philosophical perspectives based upon healthy leadership practices. These leadership perspectives could be deciphered as lessons for business leaders. In this article the author developed a set of themes that aspiring or extant leaders could follow to embark on a journey of salubrious leadership. The themes were drawn from ‘vedic’ and ‘yogic’ perspectives. Eight themes and an integrated perspective on yogic leader have been presented here.*

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Indian civilization has survived continuously for thousands of years (Sen, 1999). In any society leadership prevailed in organizing it towards achieving a meaningful objective specially for a country like India with such a long and rich history (Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018). Civilizations that prospered were led by great leaders while the civilizations that perished were often the victims of poor leadership (Thoroughgood, Sawyer, Padilla & Lunsford, 2018; Butzer, 1980; Luthans, Peterson & Ibrayeva, 1998). Business organizations are a part of the society and civilization. The effect of leadership has been pronounced for business organizations (Bhattacharyya, Chaturvedi & Chaturvedi, 2009). This can be emphasized with a good example like Apple to poor one like Enron (Isaacson, 2012; Friedman, 2010; Seeger & Ulmer, 2003). Substantial amount of literature has deliberated on what are the attributes of a good, healthy leadership and how to achieve the same (Di Fabio & Peiroi, 2018; Jiménez, Winkler & Dunkl, 2017).

Given the perpetuity of Indian civilization over these thousands of years the author believes that there was an element of secret recipe of leadership indigenous to the Indian way of life (Muniapan & Dass, 2009; Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2018). The author based upon literature on yogic perspective in this article develops a yogic perspective on leadership. This has been presented as themes which aspiring or extant leaders could follow to embark on a journey of salubrious leadership. The themes are drawn from 'vedic' and 'yogic' perspectives (Srinivasan, 2005; Peterson, 2000; Selvi & Thangarajathi, 2010; Trivedi, 2017; Chatterji & Zsolnai, 2016).

### **Theme 1 - Quest to Imbibe the Good 'Gunas'**

The perspectives on 'Guna' have been based upon the work of scholars like Agarwalla, Seshadri & Krishnan (2015), Kaur & Sinha, (1992) and Kejriwal & Krishnan (2004). A yogic leader like any individual creates an action because of the very nature of being that means the extant 'Guna' that is nature. 'Guna' that is the nature of an individual decides the karma (action) (Agarwalla, Seshadri & Krishnan (2015). There are three 'Gunas' viz., 'Tamasa', 'Rajasa' and 'Satva' (Sharma, 1999; Bharvad, 2005). 'Tamasa' means being lethargic. A lethargic individual can never create a proactive, meaningful and mindful action thus, display of lethargy is the worst 'Guna'. An individual who wants to be a leader cannot afford to have 'Tamasa'. 'Rajasa' means aggressive and possessive behavior coupled with pro-action. Business and political

leaders are required to display such 'Guna' as it is action oriented and proactive and it entails doing hard work. 'Rajasa' helps business leaders to achieve material gains because of competitive behavior. Thus, 'Rajasik' behavior has positive and desirable connotation. However, 'Satvik' behavior means spiritual behavior which is balanced, it helps an individual to achieve tranquility. An individual with 'Satvik' thoughts would think about competitive business gains however, with only such initiatives that benefits all stakeholders as espoused by stakeholder theory in western literature (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). It is more about a leader thinking not only purely for shareholder gain but for all stakeholders in an inclusive manner. A 'Rajasik' leader might undertake actions that are good for only stakeholders (that is pure business gains). However, a 'Satvik' leader would achieve business gains while accommodating stakeholder gains. A Yogic leader demonstrates moderation in all activities that is a balance in life (Bennis & Townsend, 1989).

A yogic leader must be aware of the elements of 'Deva Guna' (Godly characteristics) and 'Asura Guna' (devil characteristics) that are inherent in human beings (Srivastava, 2012). A leader influences followers as is the very definition of a leader. 'Asura Guna' reflects the characteristics of anger and punishment to motivate others as epitomized by demonic manifestations (Virkler & Virkler, 1977). 'Deva Guna,' on the other hand, reflects a behavior full of mutual love, respect, a notion of spontaneous duties and responsibilities (Srivastava, 2012). If a leader demonstrates 'Asuric' behavior

it will alienate and offend others and create disharmony in the group. A leader demonstrating 'Asuric' behavior might be able to achieve targets in the short run, but in the long run the disharmony would manifest beyond control and achieve sub-par results. A leader demonstrating 'Deva Guna' would motivate others through affection and respect. A 'Deva Guna' following leader would encourage others to perform so that they can gain individually as well for the organization as a whole. Individual progress happens because of gain of knowledge, experience and respect from team members (Andolsen, 2008). Followers would achieve hierarchical organizational position gains and monetary benefits (Gabriel, 2015). Organizational gain transpires through increased market share, profit, trust, image and goodwill in the industry and amongst stakeholders (Gächter et al., 2012). A leader leading with 'Deva Guna' would gain the goodwill of stakeholders whereas a leader with 'Asura Guna' will gain goodwill of only the shareholders and that too in the short run.

## Theme 2 - 'Nirdwanda'-To achieve 'Nitya Sanyasa'

An individual evolves as a leader because she undertakes complex, uncertain, non-routine and high-stake decisions (Maxwell, 2002). Leaders have to, thus, have a balanced state of mind at all times so that they can best judge and deliver the best results (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011; Bottles, 2001). In the epic Mahabharat, when Yudhisthira had lost his four Pandava brothers, he approached Yaksha to free the Panadava brothers

**Only a mind without anxiety would choose the right direction for problem solving and undertake the right action.**

(Menon, 2013). Yaksha, in order to ascertain the case, asked Yudhisthira - when you are in great trouble who is your best friend? Yudhisthira answered - a balance state of mind and self-confidence (Rajagopalachari, 1972; Lal, 1980; Badrinath, 2006). A balance of mind entails that which is not anxious. In other words, a mind without anxiety. Anxiety pulls ones thought in multiple directions (Hartley & Phelps, 2012). One must remember that out of the multiple directions where thoughts are roaming only one possible amongst all the directions is correct and only a mind without anxiety would choose the right direction for problem solving and undertake the right action (Miu, Heilman & Houser, 2008). This answer from Yudhisthira pleased Yaksha and eventually led to the rejuvenation of his Pandava brothers (Rajagopalachari, 1972; Lal, 1980). The crux is that for business leaders to have both self-confidence and a balanced state of mind free of anxiety. It is important to understand what is anxiety? Anxiety comes from tension, a duality in mind (Miu, Heilman & Houser, 2008; Hartley & Phelps, 2012). This is a negative aspect and it is because of 'Dwanda'. There are five types of 'Dwanda'. These are: -

1. 'Ushna and Sheeth'
2. 'Sukha' and Dukha
3. 'Maan' and 'Apamaan'

4. 'Jaya' and 'Parajaya'
5. 'Labha' and 'Hani'

Ushna and Sheeth' stands for hot and cold, 'Sukha' and Dukha stands for happiness and sadness, 'Maan' and 'Apamaan' stands for praise and insult, 'Jaya' and 'Parajaya' stands for victory and defeat and finally 'Labha' and 'Hani' stands for gain and loss (Sheard, 2012 ;Briñol, Petty & Barden, 2007; Anolli, Ciceri& Infantino, 2002). These five characteristics are always present when a human being confronts a challenge. The same holds true for a business leader. A good and successful business leader thrives on challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009).

In certain challenges all the five 'Dwandas' are present and in certain challenges a few 'Dwandas' are present in varying intensities. A yogic leader must strive to achieve 'Nirdwanda'. This means a Yogic leader must not be bogged down by these dualities too much. One who has achieved these balanced state of mind has achieved 'Nitya Sanyasa', which a business leader must strive to achieve (Tripathi & Vajpeyi, 2016).

'Nitya Sanyasi' is one who has achieved the state of 'Sanyasa' at every moment of time. 'Nitya' means at all times and 'Sanyasa' means one not trapped in the whirlpool of the 'Dwandas'. This is more so in the present day business context when rapid technological progress is causing job loss and hyper competition is leading to fierce competitive battles.

### **Theme 3 - To Develop a Sense of - 'Vairagya'**

Another important aspect of 'Sanyasa' is 'Vairagya' (Bhusan, 1998). 'Vairagya' means a state of detachment that means not giving too much attachment to worldly materials (Kalisch et al., 2005). A leader can attain much wealth, but greed has no end, given this human state of mind it is very pertinent that a leader remains contented with the material stuff without being entrenched in indulgence (Klein, Gabelnick& Herr, 1998). In a world where dark and toxic leadership is entering the lexicon, it is important to follow 'Vairagya'.

### **Theme 4 - To Reduce- 'PanchaKleshas'**

All of us as individuals are born with 'PanchaKleshas'. These are: 'Avidhya' (ignorance), 'Asmita' (which is ego compounded with arrogance), 'Raaga' (attachment), 'Dawesha' (hatred) and the last 'Bhaya' (fear) (Bhavanani, 2011a;2011b; Meek, 2019). To become a good leader, it is important to evolve above these 'PanchaKleshas' as its presence can stunt the development of a being, let alone impacting followers as a leader does. It is important to understand how a leader can be free from these 'PanchaKleshas'. 'Avidya' which is ignorance can be overcome by learning slowly over a period of time (Bhavanani, 2011a;2013). 'Asmita' (that is arrogance and narcissism) can be cured by not giving too much importance to 'I' & 'Me'. It can be done by systematically killing the 'Aham' (excessive praise of self)

which comes from within (Bhavanani, 2011b). This can be successfully done by being aware and practice its subjugation. 'Raaga' is cured by 'Vairagya' which is generating a sense of detachment (Bhavanani, 2013). If a leader is constantly reminding herself, not to be too emotionally connected to any materialistic aim or pure personal gains then it would cure the ills of 'Raaga' (Bhavanani, 2011a;2011b;2013). 'Dweshha' can be cured by generating a feeling of love for all others and thinking good about others all the time. Having a harmonious behavior with others and a ubiquitous positivity would help build a constructive work environment. 'Bhaya' can be cured by not being afraid of the unknown and always following the righteous path (Bhavanani, 2013). An individual who has conquered all the 'PanchaKleshas' would be able to achieve 'Aishwarya' that is self-reliance and secure confidence not only at an individual level (self) but also for others (in the organization) (Bhavanani, 2011a;2011b;2013). A leader who has achieved 'Aishwarya' would infuse determination and confidence in others (followers). Thus, a proactive culture would be developed.

#### **Theme 5 - To Follow- 'Achar', 'Vichar' and 'Ahar'**

A Yogic leader follows good 'Achar' (that is harmony in behavior), 'Vichar' (that is purity in thought), 'Ahar' (that is consuming healthy and good food) and does proper amount of 'Vihar' (physical exercise) (Bhavanani, 2017). This would help a Yogic leader to be mentally and

physically fit. A healthy mental and physical state helps in fructifying thoughts and agility in decision making.

#### **Theme 6 - To Attain Pure -'Chetna'**

A leader with Yogic traits would work with mindfulness as the brain would think and translate managerial decisions into actions with complete coherence (Menon, Sinha & Sreekantan, 2014). There would be reinforcing interconnection between cognition, behavior and action (Gollwitzer & Bargh, 1996). 'Chetna' reflects consciousness (Prakash, 2008; Hoffman & Prakash, 2014). A Yogic leader should attempt to reach a state of 'Paschim Chetna' in which pure inner consciousness would be more than impure outer consciousness that is 'Bahir Chetna'. 'Bahir Chetna' dominates most individuals. In 'Bahir Chetna' an individual is reactive in responding to environmental stimuli and it is not creative. In 'Para Chetna' a leader can reach pure inner consciousness so that pure creative thoughts and ideas can emancipate from the leader and disseminate all across the organization (Yogi & Tompkins, 1966; Rosenthal, 2002).

#### **Theme 7 - To Display- 'Chitta', 'Dweeti' & 'Nirodha'**

A Yogic leader should display 'Chitta', 'Dweeti' and 'Nirodha' (Ramdev, 2006). This means that a Yogic leader must manage his mind and control her urges and thoughts (Bennis & Townsend, 1989). 'Chitta' stands for mind, 'Dweeti' stands for urge and thought while 'Nirodha' means control.

A leader is a visionary. A visionary requires 'Drishti' sight and a leader who follows 'ChittaDweeti' and 'Nirodha' would be able to have a good vision because of attainment of 'Subha Drishti'.

### **Theme 8 - To follow - 'Yog Sutras'**

There are few principles of Yoga as espoused by Patanjali- these are the ways to live life (Iyengar, 2005). A Yogic leader should follow this way of living (Bindlish, Dutt & Pardasani, 2012). The first is with 'Ahimsa' that is non-violence (Gandhi, 2008) and this can be achieved by leaders by not being hurtful to others. This is important for leaders because often in Western literature the 'stick' (coercive leadership) has been the dominant mode of achieving hard pressed targets (Landa & Tyson, 2017). A Yogic leader was also expected to follow 'Satya'. This means a leader has to be truthful (Bennis & Townsend, 1989). In modern times when stakeholder's expectation is significant and media always expect positive news it is indeed challenging for leaders to always follow the path of providing stakeholders' unadulterated reality (Davis & Tama Sweet, 2012; Colleoni, 2013). Further, a Yogic leader is also expected to walk on the path of 'Asteya' that is righteousness. This entails that a leader uses business resources only for organizational purpose and not for personal use and it also entails not seeking anything unduly from business (Knights & O'Leary, 2006). In simple words it is about being honest (Becker, 1998). This can augur well when a business leader follows 'Brahmachari' that is life with a spiritual inclination to have an enlightened focus. It is about being conscious of focusing on non-

materialistic aspects rather than just the material ones in life. A Yogic leader has to achieve 'Santosh' that is a feeling of contentment with what he/she has. Further, a Yogic leader needs to follow both 'Tapas' and 'Swadhyaya'. 'Tapas' means that a Yogic leader need to follow self-discipline by leading a disciplined life. While 'Swadhaya' means gathering knowledge by learning through reading to watching knowledge laden audio/ video to spending time in the company of the learned. In a world where business leaders are also portrayed by media to be drowned in exorbitant salaries, unrealistically high incentives to super luxurious perks, a Yogic leader is expected to live an austere to simple life that is 'Aparigraha'. The expectation is that a leader lives a material life which is good but not overly opulent. It is important for a Yogic leader to be rich inwardly not outwardly. A Yogic leader is also expected to be worshipping a spiritual ideal that is 'Ishwara-Pranidhana'. If a leader follows to emulate a spiritual way of life to living, then his leadership would be harmonious. This would also help the Yogic leader to follow 'Shaucha' that is a purified life. This mean where the 'Ahama' regarding the self to ego is suppressed. This again helps a Yogic leader to lead through empathy to harmony.

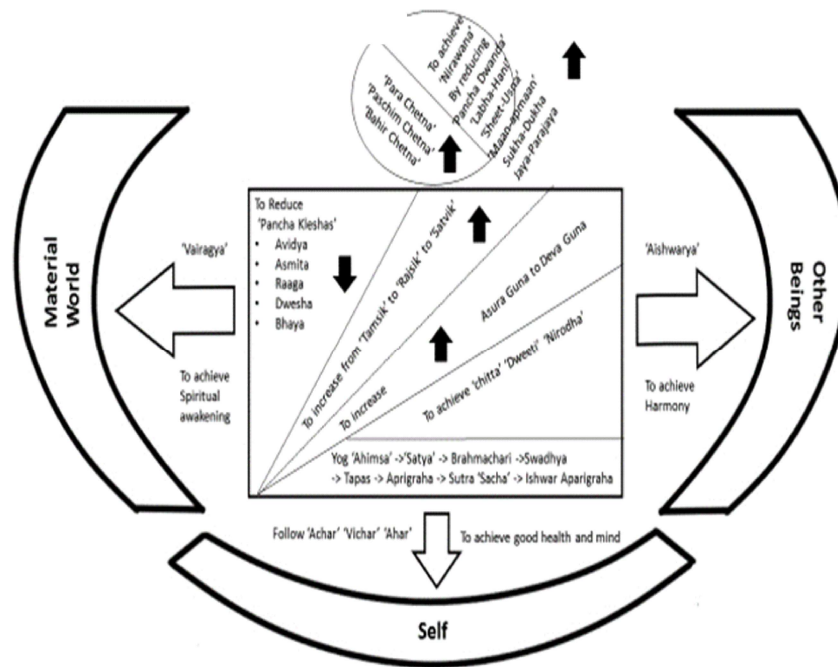
### **Conclusion**

In literature, conversations from 'Sanatana' (Mehta & Bhattacharyya, 2013) and Yogic perspectives (Bhavanani, 2011a; 2011b; 2013) have been much required and a very Indian philosophical frame of reference has been much desired (Bhattacharyya, 2011). This work

was a step in this direction. To conclude, for one to be a Yogic leader an individual has to reduce 'Panchakleshas' and 'PanchaDwandas'. A Yogic leader would strive to achieve 'Vairagya', 'Satvic Guna' (rather than 'Tamsic' or only 'Rajasic Gunas') and 'Ashwairya' by reducing 'PanchaKheshas'. Attainment of a state of 'Para Chenta' would bring in 'Subha Drishti' that is good vision and creativity. Further, by reducing 'Pancha

Dwandas' a Yogic leader displays 'Nitya Samadhi' (a state of constant 'Nirdwanda'). By good 'Achar' and 'Vichar' (action, behavior and thoughts) a Yogic leader achieves harmony with other individuals. The quest of becoming a Yogic leader would not only be enhancing for the self and the organization but also for the society as a whole. In figure 1 an integrated perspective on Yogic leader has been presented.

Fig 1 Integrated perspective on Yogic Leadership



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