

THE ENLIGHTENED LEADER: AN INSIGHT INTO BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR 21ST CENTURY

by Manish Prasad Rajak*

ABSTRACT

Buddhism in recent times has garnered extensive recognition from scholars' around the world for responding to some of the major contemporary issues that threaten the existence of mankind. Be it in the arena of politics, economics, conflict-resolution, sustainable practices, etc., effective leadership is seen quintessential for averting the variety of interrelated problems humanity faces; this paper aims at developing an ideal leadership model on the lines of Buddhist philosophies that have existed for centuries in the teachings of Buddha. Philosophies that addresses the root of all problems and extends its unique prescription of selflessness, love, compassion, kindness and peace, for men to follow. The Noble Eight-Fold path along with the ethical (Buddhist lay ethics) principles and the ten perfections (as laid down in the Jatakas) provide with an effective tool for integration with modern theories and develop a holistic model for exemplary leadership that can bring paradigm shift in the World leadership front to ensure sustainable peace and stability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humanity is on a course that is considered to be the beginning of the end of our so called 'civilized society' as the 21st century world is struggling against challenges that are threatening the very existence

*. Senior Research Fellow, Department of Business Administration, Assam University, India.

of mankind. In this era of economic instability and inequality, environment degradation, terrorism, religious intolerance and radicalization, displacement of people due to war and conflicts-human beings have failed to address the threats and provide a concrete solution. The problems are not independent of human beings as it originates from our deep-rooted selfish motives and self-centered goals; so, the solution lays within us and it cannot be denied that we as responsible beings have failed to help ourselves. In his quest for materialistic and short term (temporary) happiness and to feed his 'ego', man has ruthlessly exploited not just nature but his fellow beings too. Therefore, the problem lies not in the threats but the people who are at the helm making decisions and the ones who blindly follow them for selfish pursuits. Be it in Western or in Asian context, the future of humanity and the objective of peaceful co-existence depends on the leadership and pro-active participation of the community of responsible and concerned leaders who can bring change within them as well as in the system.

The inability of modern leaders to address the emergent issues which were brought to their face is a testament for the failure of evolved mindsets and the botched approaches that we have been boasting of with pride. The 'self-centered' philosophy of modern men is not a viable solution to address the issues as they deal with them superficially. Hundreds of theories and models, decades of peace conferences and sustainable goals seemed to be going in vain if the leadership at helm is unable to follow what they have been preaching without understanding the gravity of the situations knocking at the door. Scholars have been finding some new models of leadership and seeking different views as to what makes an ideal leader but have failed to come up with a holistic model that can claim to be the perfect leadership model. Because leadership has nothing to do with any models or theories, it has to deal with human beings and no superficial theory can claim to understand human beings and his motives in a comprehensive manner.

It is believed that the 21st century would be the era of Asian dominance but are we ready to accept that responsibility or is the Asian leadership is going to repeat the same mistakes of the West and pursue 'self-centered' materialistic goals? The answers seem not

to be distant; they lie in the centuries old philosophy that has been followed on these lands in the form of religion – Buddhism, which originated some 2500 years ago and have been the guiding light for a major part of the Asian community. Scholars are now of the view that Buddhism has to offer a great array of inter-disciplinary principles in terms of economics, ecology, peace and, definitely, leadership. This paper will aim to bring forward the Buddhist perspective into modern leadership and provide an insight into the Buddhist view of leadership for a holistic and sustainable future.

2. LEADERSHIP

There are a number of schools of thought on leadership approaches which define leadership from different perspectives according to the style and ideology of the leader and the functions of it. Generally, a leader is someone who guides a group of individuals to achieve a defined objective or set of goals by certain skills and techniques. It is the equation of ends and means where a group is either motivated or cajoled to meet an end through some prescribed means. At times the means may not be justified or called ethical because it may not consider the well-being of the various stake holders, or even the followers; to put it in simple terms, such actions may not be ethically correct and most of the leadership theories have failed to address these aspects of leadership. Although a few of the models, like the ethical leadership, spiritual leadership, the sustainability leadership and holistic leadership models do address these issues to a considerable extent; it is required to supplement such leadership models with a more ethical and wholesome philosophy.

The global challenges can be categorized as complex adaptive challenges or wicked problems which, while familiar are in some way new and have no prescribed solutions, two of the most wicked problems impacting current and future generations are issues of sustainability and peace (Saterwhite, et al., 2015). For humanity to embrace each of the beliefs needed to create a healthy, economically vibrant, and sustainable global society we would need approaches to leadership that differ quite markedly from those offered by most leaders in recent history (Alder, 2009).

Providing ethical leadership is one of a leader's most important responsibilities. Ethical leaders act as moral persons, behaving ethically as they carry out their leadership values, treat employees fairly and express care and concern for followers. They live up to the values they espouse and are perceived as open and honest. Spirituality in organizational settings operate simultaneously at two levels: individual and collective. Individual spirituality derives from the values, feelings, and practices of each person in the organization. Spiritually oriented individuals engage in behaviors designed to nurture their inner lives, they strive to get in touch with their deep desires and feelings, seek a sense of purpose and want to establish deep connections with others (Johnson, 2009). Transforming from the inside out turns conventional leadership theory upside down, it posits that in order to change someone else, one needs first to change oneself. Spiritual leadership is therefore relevant because these leaders can transform others, organizations and society by transforming themselves first (Law, 2016).

For an organization to prosper to a higher state of thinking and doing on leadership, so that it eventually becomes a natural way of how people demonstrate their own leadership, a guiding set of principles is helpful way in which to get pointed in right direction (Taggart, 2006). Such guiding principles can be an ethical philosophy or a holistic vision which can guide the leadership for a higher vision; vision when combined with a sense of mission of who we are and what we do establishes the organizations culture with its fundamental ethical system and core values (Fry, 2003). Holistic leadership is an approach to leadership that incorporates not only what leaders need to do and how they do it, but also who and where of leadership. It is not just about acquiring some leadership 'skills' or 'techniques' or even 'behavior', it's about aligning the whole person-intellect, emotion, spirituality and behavior (Larcher, 2011).

A sustainability leader is someone who inspires and support actions towards a better world, care for the well-being of humanity and all other forms of life, as well as being guided by moral compass are often associated with sustainability leadership (Visser & Courtice, 2011). Sustainable leadership means a kind of leadership undertaken with the responsibility to individual people, groups

and organization by assenting ecological, social, and economic principles of sustainability in context of a group, organization and community and by encouraging successful mastering of ideas of sustainability, co-operation with environment, successful and teaching based on the principles of sustainability-operation with environment, successful learning and teaching based on principles of sustainability as well as peoples self-expression. The leaders who seek sustainable leadership in an organization should start with oneself; to analyze themselves. The leader's own personal qualities and skills and having identified insufficient abilities, to learn consistently sets an example for the employees to use innovations and creativity (Simanskiene & Zuperkiene, 2014). One of the pre-conditions for creating sustainable peace is the presence of a critical mass of peace-building leadership from the domains of politics, diplomacy, defense, economics, religions etc. Peace building leadership attaches a great deal of importance to the future, they envision a shared, clear and mutually attractive peaceful future depicted as non-violent, inclusive, and as a win-win situation. Peace building leaders having courage, humility, sense of humanity, personal integrity, ability to cope up with personal stress and complex situations, and intrinsic motivation, (Reychler & Stellamans, 2004).

Buddhist leadership philosophy situates itself somewhere among in the spectrum of ethical, spiritual, sustainable, and holistic approaches which makes it even more interesting to get into an in-depth analysis for discovering new avenues in the field of leadership. The views various scholars bring a different outlook to leadership approaches in application and in theory; the need of the time is to bring more insights in such leadership models based on some concrete ethical and logical philosophies; this is where Buddhist philosophy comes into the picture.

3. BUDDHISM & LEADERSHIP

The rationale behind venturing into Buddhism to seek a way for a better leadership lies in the very philosophy of Buddhism which is based on 'self-introspection', 'self-development' and ethical conduct; taking into consideration the well-being of every stake holder. Buddhism has always been appreciated for its advocacy of

non-violence and compassionate approaches and loving kindness for every sentient being. The truth of suffering and the noble eight-fold path is the most basic of Buddhist philosophies that can be studied to understand human nature and behavior. In this paper, the Buddhist concepts of wholesome and unwholesome motives, the noble eight-fold path and the ten perfections would be studied from the stand point of an ethical and holistic leadership approach.

Bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya- for the good of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world- is the world view of Buddhist philosophy which not only encompasses individuals but each and every sentient being.

The Buddhist monastic code and other Buddhist principles can illuminate the following three modern categories of Governance: (1) Leadership Skills; (2) Decision making; and, (3) Problem solving. They teach us that a better world is possible and that it can be achieved through wise and compassionate governance (Brahm, 2007). Buddhism has got much to offer to enlighten the corporate executives, government officials and politicians about the dangers of excessive greed (Monksfield, 2009). The philosophy of Buddha comprehends a theory of knowledge, a theory of reality, an ethical system, a social and political, philosophy, suggestions for philosophy of law and international relations. The Buddhist theory of reality and ethics are summed up in the four noble truths, and the rule of power is to be dependent on the rule of righteousness (Jayatilleke, 1978). Buddhist teachings which include a combination of self-reflection, compassion, renunciation and wisdom can improve one's leadership performance and ability to lead others (Atkinson & Duncan, 2013). A leader who engages in (morality) right view will mindfully concentrate on decisions that are based on improvement of quality of life for all stakeholders, consequently, all intentions, communication (speech), effort and actions of this leader will be geared towards the goal of becoming morally sound, with such mindful approach from initial views to ultimate actions, the leader becomes aware of the need to engage in right livelihood, as he consistently gauges his or her accomplishment to higher moral standards developed. While some may think that the ancient eight-fold is too idealistic for contemporary leadership, there are

hopefully enough who may start utilizing this path as a mindful moral compass in their decision making and directional process (Marques, 2017).

In Buddhism, the intention behind any action defines it as wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*), this also brings into the preview the concept of ends and means for a leader. The Buddhist teachings on wholesome and unwholesome roots provides a criterion of good and evil that is neither theological nor authoritarian but experiential, one with sound psychological basis offering an autonomous pragmatic motivation for avoiding the evil and choosing the good (Thera, 1999). The ten perfections are a post canonical list describing attributes that should be cultivated by the being who wishes to be Buddha and teach others, these perfections have evolved as the qualities that goes into the making of the Buddha (Shaw, 2006). *Kusala* and *akusala* are the terms perhaps most commonly used for praise worthy and responsible actions or states of mind in early Buddhist texts; the roots of wholesome action, literally non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion are not just absence of greed, hatred and delusion, but states which oppose them: anti-greed (generosity and renunciation), anti-hatred (loving kindness and compassion) and anti-delusion (wisdom) (Harvey, 2010).

3.1. The 3 Wholesome and Unwholesome mental states (roots)

The justification of good or evil before undertaking any action depends largely on the motive behind it; in terms of leadership it becomes even more important as to any action or decision taken by the leader will have large scale implications not just on his immediate environment of followers and organization but also other stake holders- be it the society at large, or economy and environment. Therefore, for leaders it is necessary to ensure if they have been under the influence of such defilements, as a decision taken under greed, self-interest, and ignorance may fetch immediate results but in the long run they will be having implications on the reputation of the leader and the society. On the other hand, the decisions that have the welfare of masses in mind, and which based on loving and compassion for all sentient beings may not give immediate results or short-term benefits but in the long run, it will prove to be beneficial for everyone including the leader and his followers and organization.

3.2. The Ten Perfections (*pāramīs*)

The ten perfections in Buddhism denotes to the ten qualities or values of Bodhisattva that helps on the path of enlightenment. These qualities have taken form in the shape of ethical values that have been used to teach the masses about the Bodhisattva virtues through stories of previous lives of Buddha. The *Jatakas*, which are a part of the Pali canon, have been most instrumental in making these virtues reach the masses in the form of stories.

The ten perfections, *pāramīs* are the most important conditions for the complete eradication of defilements and every effort should be made to accumulate every kind of *Kusala* for *pañña* (wisdom) to arise which can eradicate all defilements stage by stage. It is beneficial to study the ten perfections so that we can consider and investigate ourselves as to which perfection has not been accumulated and should develop all of them in order to realize the four noble truths (Boriharnwanaket, 2007).

The ten perfections are: Generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*virīya*), patience (*khanti*) truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*Adhiṭṭhāna*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These perfections can be taken as the ideal characters of a leader and help in developing a personality that encompasses all these virtues. These virtues are directly related to overcoming of the mental defilements mentioned before and the cultivating of these perfections enable one to walk the path of Bodhisattva. From the standpoint of ethical leadership, the ten perfections can be taken into consideration as the qualities of ideal leadership.

3.3. The Noble-Eightfold path

The Buddhist path begins with understanding the four noble truths which are the first discourse of the Buddha in the *Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta*, which had as its subject- the four noble truths and the middle way. These are: the truth of suffering; the truth of cause of suffering; the truth of cessation of suffering; and, the truth of the path which is the Noble Eight-fold path of Buddhism (Santina, 2012). The four noble truths are the way of leading to the cessation of *Dukkha* (suffering), which is known as the

middle path. The middle path avoids the two extremes of searching for happiness through sensual pleasure, which is unprofitable and the way of ordinary people, and searching for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism, which are painful and unworthy and unprofitable too (Rahula, 1958).

The middle path that Buddha prescribed for removing the veil of ignorance can be the ideal path for the new leaders who have to nurture themselves for the challenges in front of them. This path is far from our self-centered and egoistic goals and objectives of life and therefore incorporating it in any form of leadership style will be beneficial for not just the society but for the leader as well. The noble eightfold path:

- i. Right Understanding (correct understanding of oneself, and the reality of things as they are which is the highest wisdom).
- ii. Right Thought; thoughts of selfless renunciation, love, and non-violence.
- iii. Right Speech; which means to abstain from falsehood, slandering, harsh and malicious words, frivolous and idle talk.
- iv. Right Action; promoting moral, honorable and peaceful conduct (abstinence from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct).
- v. Right Livelihood; one should abstain from making one's living through profession or business that brings harm to others (arms and lethal weapon, intoxicating drinks, killing animals, and in human-beings such as slave trade, trafficking etc.).
- vi. Right Effort; endeavor to discard evil, preventing evil and unwholesome states of mind from arising, to produce and cause arise to good and wholesome states of mind not yet arisen, to develop and bring to perfection the good and wholesome states of mind already arisen.
- vii. Right Mindfulness; being mindful of the body, feelings, mind, and thoughts.

viii. Right Concentration; one-pointedness of mind, meditative absorption.

(Mahathera, 1982) (Rahula, 1958).

The Table below shows a relationship between the three unwholesome/wholesome roots and the noble eight-fold path.

3 Roots of Unwholesome (<i>akusala</i>)	3 roots of wholesome (<i>Kusala</i>)	Stages for overcoming	The Eight-Fold Path
Greed (lust, self-indulgence,	Non-Greed	Stage I- Morality (<i>Sila</i>)	Right Speech Right Actions Right Livelihood
Hatred (Ego, Pride)	Non-Hatred	Stage II- Meditation (<i>Samadhi</i>)	Right Effort Right Mindfulness Right Concentration
Delusion (Ignorance)	Non-Delusion	Stage III- Wisdom (<i>Panna</i>)	Right Understanding Right Thoughts

Source- Author

Overcoming the defilements is a three-stage process which leads to the middle way of Buddhism, the noble eight eight-fold path. The Eight-fold path is divided into three parts- of which Morality is the first one and it comprises of Right speech, action, and livelihood; it can be considered as the first step towards realization of one-self and removes the defilements of greed, craving, self-indulgence, and attachment thereby developing generosity, self-less service and sacrifice. The second aspect is Meditation- which comprises of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration; at this stage

one develops loving kindness, compassion and sympathy. The last one or the highest is the wisdom stage which comprises of right understanding and thoughts, at this stage one develops insight, wisdom and equanimity which are the highest goals of the path.

4. CONCLUSION

Every religious philosophy has a multi-dimensional approach addressing various aspects of men and society. These approaches are either in the form of commandments or philosophies and they aim to address the ethical aspects of society. Buddhism is one such philosophy that most authoritatively places itself in the forefront of such approaches. This paper was an attempt to develop a practical and universal leadership framework based on the Buddhist philosophy which would address various issues that are being faced in our times. It would be arrogant to say that Buddhism is the best philosophy at our disposal but rather it is the most viable and time-tested philosophy that could rescue humanity and fulfill the dearth of an ideal leader- ethical leadership community that can put forward principles that will safe guard the interests of even the weakest and smallest stake holder in the world. This paper can serve as the base for in-depth study of Buddhist leadership model and open new avenues for research.

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