



## LESSONS ON GOOD LEADERSHIP FROM 'DEVI MAHATMYA'

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### Abstract:

Thousands of years before the introduction and the development of Modern Management Theories, Indian scriptures have discussed about the concept of good leadership that the present day researchers are talking about. Good leadership is the key to good governance and welfare of the nation and organizations. It is the virtues and values of the leaders, that shapes our society and organizations and therefore good leadership can only restructure our life. The Devi Mahatmya teaches the concept of good leadership through stories of fight between the Devi and the Demons, the good against the bad forces in a symbolic battlefield. Sri Swami Krishnananda explains that all the demons in the Devi Mahatmya are the indwelling bad forces like kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), mada (pride), moha (attachment), and matsarya (jealousy) affecting our body, mind and soul. Devi kills these demons in us. Killing or controlling these forces can only one become a good leader. This paper uses hermeneutics a qualitative research methodology, which is the interpretation of an ancient or a classical literature. The paper explains the exotic meaning of Devi Mahatmya in the light of good leadership.

**Key Words:** Good leadership; Symbolic Battlefield; Devi Mahatmya.

### Concept of Good Leadership:-

Let's bring to our mind the Book 7 of the *Republic* where the liberated philosopher, leaving Plato's cave is blinded by the bright *gnosis*, or knowledge, in the sky—the sun. For Plato, the sun is a representation of knowledge. The philosopher returns into the cave to liberate his fellow man from the same lack of knowledge that once disturbed him. But why did the philosopher returned into the cave? According to Plato philosophers are leaders, they can lead their followers honestly only when they do so. Good leaders take responsibility firstly for their followers and secondly for themselves. Plato argues that "ruling," or leading, is an art. Good Leadership is for the common good, the good for all and even good for the most marginal among the followers. Plato can teach us the basics of good leadership and tell us why to lead with the spirit of service

and devotion, not ego.

Plato was displeased with leaders who lacked knowledge and moral strength to act for the common good. Rulers or leaders with self-interest are not good leaders. Plato therefore proposes that the states are be ruled by philosophers, *a lover of wisdom*. Plato says, leadership is a duty of *philosopher kings* who have the techniques and skills for the *art of ruling*. According to Plato, an ideal state can never be a reality, until philosophers become rulers, or until those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers. According to Plato political power and philosophy should come into the same hands.

Why only philosophers are morally and intellectually suitable to govern and lead? They are morally suitable because of their interest in truth and learning , while they lack interest in gaining power for the sake of power. They are intellectually fit because they can attain knowledge on the *ideal forms* of virtue, beauty, and the good. Plato's view on leadership as an *art of ruling* is based on Virtue and the Good. Leaders should attain four cardinal virtues:

- Prudence (as wisdom)
- Justice (as fairness)
- Temperance (as moderation/restraint)
- Courage (as fortitude/resilience)

The “good” refers to the ultimate goal of attaining knowledge, because actions that are “just” add utility and value for others.

Some of the modern implications of Plato's views on leadership are that first of all, the leaders must be committed to wisdom and truth-seeking. Secondly, leaders are to be just individuals, who value justice in their relationship with others. Thirdly, good leaders are of good tempered and show restraint in their actions. They are considerate, but decisive. Finally, Platonic- leaders are courageous in their vision and are flexible in the face of uncertainty. Platonic leaders go ahead and remain reactive to the challenges that come their way. Plato said: “The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future in life.”

Back in home the Arthashastra written by Kautilya describes a lot on good leadership. On the attributes of a good leader, Kautilya has said that, an ideal king is one who is an intellectual and have good personal attributes like Achievement, Persistence, Insight, Initiative, Self-confidence, Responsibility, Cooperativeness, Tolerance, Influence and Sociability. The attributes presented by Stogdill's list of attributes are very much alike to those mentioned by Kautilya in the Arthashastra. Kautilya believes that these attributes are sometime inborn and these can also be acquired by appropriate rigorous training therefore he has laid great emphasis on appropriate training. On the values of a leader Kautilya holds a holistic view. According to him the character of a leader should be based on values. Kautilya has emphasized on development of the inner-self by the king.

Kautilya says the king must be effective, efficient and truthful in governance and governance must be based on justice and ethics. Controlling of the senses is prescribed by Kautilya to the King. He gives utmost importance to the welfare of the public and says, the king can only be happy if his subjects are happy.

We find similarity in thinking between Plato and Kautilya. Both have emphasized on intellectual power, justice, morality and ethics. Kautilya in other words have said that the king has to be a philosopher.

There are many theories that focus on good leadership traits, behaviors, values, personality, and character and so on. There exists a variety of views on leadership.

Kouzes and Posner have found that despite differences in culture, gender, age, and other variables, good leaders effectively model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart.

An overall concise definition of effective leadership can be that, it is a social process that enables individuals to work together to achieve results. Effective leadership is a social capability that can occur at any level in an organization where people influence others therefore leadership is more dependent on personal attributes rather than a position within the organization.

Researchers have found that great leaders constantly possess ten core leadership skills such as Integrity, Ability to delegate, Communication, Self-awareness, Gratitude, Learning agility, Influence, Empathy, Courage and Respect.

The objective of this paper is to extract and explore some of the principles of good leadership traits as found in the '*Devi Mahatmya*'. The author has also called upon for the development of indigenous leadership theories in India which also includes the studies on the good leadership from the *Vedic* literatures. This paper has used a qualitative research methodology called hermeneutics. "Rennie (2007) writes, "Hermeneutics has been defined as 'the theory of the operation of understanding in relation to the interpretation of text' (Ricoeur, 1978, p.141)". However, what is meant by 'text'? For the Greeks and medieval Scholastics, it meant sacred and legal documents. In the 19th century, Schleiermacher and his associates, however, saw hermeneutics as "the primary aspect of social experience, not only for the scholarly interpretation of texts or documents of the past, but also for understanding the mystery of the inwardness of the other person (Gadamer, 1984, p.57)". "Others such as Karl Jaspers have generalized it even more to include the interpretation of oral communications, when proposing that psychoanalysis is a matter of hermeneutics (Erwin, 1997)" Satpathy, (2010).

### A Quest to Learn Leadership Lessons from the Scriptures:-

#### '*Devi Mahatmya*'

The **Devi Mahatmya** is a Hindu religious book describing the glory of the Goddess as the ultimate power and originator of the cosmos and a part of the **Markandeya Purana**, it is composed in Sanskrit between 400-600 CE. Devi Mahatmyam is also well-known as the **Durgā Saptashatī** or **Chāṇḍī Patha**. The text has 700 verses organized in 13 chapters. Along with **Devi-Bhagavata Purana** and **Shakta Upanishads** like the **Devi Upanishad**, it is one of the most significant texts of Shaktism. The **Devi Mahatmyam** describes the battle between good and evil. The Devi manifests as goddess **Durga**, the personification of good forces and fights against the bad forces(demons). The goddess very angrily and ruthlessly fights against the demons and ultimately forces of good win. In peace and

prosperity, the Devi manifests as **Lakshmi**, granting wealth and happiness. The ultimate reality, the Brahman in Hinduism is conceived as a female in this text. This book is one of the most earliest existing complete manuscripts of the Hinduism that admire and worship the feminine aspect of God. The **Devi Mahatmya** is ranked at par with the **Bhagavad Gita**.

### Lessons That Makes Good Leaders Great:

According to Devadatta Kali the three tales in Devi Mahatmya are the outer and inner experiences of human awareness. The evil challengers of the Goddess are human urges, such as crave for power, property, apparitions or pride. The Goddess wages war against this. Like the philosophical and symbolic battlefield of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Devi Mahatmya* symbolic killing grounds target human weaknesses. Kali states, the Goddess targets the demons of ego and dispels our mistaken idea of who we are. (Kali, Davadatta ,2003, *In Praise of the Goddess: The Devimahatmya and Its Meaning*. Motilal Banarsidass.)

The human body has six chakras and the Devi Mahatmya has six set of Asuras. The seventh Chakra is Sahasrara (the Crown Chakra) this is the chakra which liberates, as Surath and Samadhi in Devi Mahatmya were blessed. The leaders must understand the six set of Asuras and kill them by invoking the Ultimate Energy that is pervading everywhere even within us. (“**Ya Devi Sarva Bhuteshu Shakti Rupena Samsthita**”)

The leaders first encounter the duality **Madhu and Kaitabha**: **Madhu**, the sweet and **Kaitabha**, the bitter. The leaders must invoke their inner power the Sakti to have the wisdom like Lord Vishnu to overcome these Daityas. They have to rise above the duality of **Acceptance and Rejection, Taste and Sound**. Michael Beck wrote, the duality of effective leadership is evident in three areas. A great leader is visible at some times and invisible at others. A great leader is strong at some times and yielding at others. And a great leader is sometimes a master and sometimes a servant. Great leaders learn and master the dualities of effective leadership. A great leader's action in one circumstance may be completely opposite in a different circumstance. Consistency of action is important. But differing circumstances call for differing approaches to leadership. It's this mastery of the duality of leadership that makes good leaders great. ([https://www.leadersource.org/resources/500/LE\\_April2014\\_Final.pdf](https://www.leadersource.org/resources/500/LE_April2014_Final.pdf)) One has to master this art of overcoming the duality of sweet and bitter (Madhu and Kaitabha). This is the first set of Asuras to be defeated. Suratha and Samadhi are two characters in Devi Mahatmya who were blessed by **The Mother** because they practiced the penance as directed by the sage.

Next in the series comes **Mahishasura (Egotism)**. **Ego disregards the promptings of the Devas such as Self-discipline, Universal Love, Selfless Service, Courage etc. And thus egoistic person becomes self centered, lives only to satisfy his sensual pleasures and makes self-glorification. He is aided by lesser demons like Greed, Lust, and Anger.** Ego drains away all the physical power to satisfy the self-glorification. The leaders must kill the **Mahishasura by concentrating their mental energy on the Sakti**. **Ego is I'M RIGHT - YOU'RE WRONG. This is where everything fails.** Jennifer Woo says the most important responsibility of the leader is to manage his ego, craving for fortune, fame, and power. Finally, an inflated ego narrows our vision. The ego always leads to information biasness and tries to confirm the information that it wants to believe. Big ego means a strong confirmation bias. Because of the ego, the leaders lose right perspective and are trapped in a leadership hallucination where the leader only see and hear what he wants to. As a result, he loses touch with the people, the culture, and ultimately the clients and the stakeholders. (<https://hbr.org/2018/11/ego-is-the-enemy-of-good-leadership>)

The final episode the Devi destroys the demonic brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha but before that SHE kills **Dumralochan**. Who is this **Dumralochan**? Dhumra means cloudy and Lochan means sight. **Dumralochan** is our illusion of sight. How leaders develop this **illusion of sight** and how to overcome it? According to Priscilla Archangel“Illusions may be in the form of initiatives taken on by leaders and their teams to accomplish admirable goals. But they lose sight of the organizational realities.”

When these illusions involve addressing significant business challenges, they are not easily or quickly resolved or attained. For example, innovative new technologies need to be thoroughly tested and validated to ensure clarity of results. Business strategies, mergers and acquisitions may promise great gain but the realities of the market may negatively impact the ability to accomplish it. And when leaders appear capable, but their business expertise, leadership competencies, or emotional intelligence are not aligned with the needs of their roles, it will be manifested in their performance.

Illusions can admittedly be more pleasant and soothing to the conscious mind, but they are temporal. They draw our focus from the truth of the challenges we face, but ultimately we must address those issues. It does mean clearly acknowledging the present challenges that must be addressed to support those future plans. Realistic leaders dream of ambitious possibilities, but then they get to work understanding the problems and issues in the present, and develop a pathway forward. They are not seduced by illusions of grandeur, but are influenced by thoughtful opportunities.”(<https://lionessmagazine.com/illusion-reality-7-fundamentals-realistic-leadership/>)

Once we surpass the **Dumralochan** than we encounter with two more powerful Daityas. They are **Chanda and Munda**. Who is this Chanda? Chanda means the terrible. What is most terrible that prevents good leadership is the **inner conflict**. An inner conflict leads to cruelty and violence. A person who has a lot of inner conflicts would usually exhibit the below behaviours:

- Is usually easily influenced by the opinions and point-of-views of others.
- Feeling of guiltiness about some natural impulses in oneself.
- Finds it difficult to make decisions and is always doubtful about the decisions made.
- Finds one attracting dysfunctional relationships that are rife with conflicts with no sense of harmony.
- Feels no sense of stability in oneself and is highly volatile when faced with a challenge.
- Is constantly seeking support from others due to lack of conviction in one's own self.
- Feels sudden changes in moods and personality.
- Is highly uncertain about what he/she really wants/desires from life in the realm of finances, relationship and lifestyle.

• Is usually trying to distract oneself from having to face the conflicts within – distractions are usually in the form of entertainment, relief inducing chemicals (alcohol, drugs), escape-oriented spirituality, ambiguous work etc.

All these behaviors are against good leadership. These inner conflicts are to be trounced. Our scriptures say that our true nature of the "self" is actually a blissful state called Paramananda. The "self" called some times as "atman," is the one that you might consider connecting to the Paramatma. Of course, if we only believed in rational thought, we would be perfectly justified in rejecting these claims. But if you suspend your judgment for a while, and entertain the possibility that this bliss exist than you believe that there is a blissful state of being that is your true self,

then your approach to future turmoil or inner conflicts relates to the brain and mind and are illusory.

- Being prone to cognitive biases, unconscious influences, and worry that justifies itself, we cannot trust the brain or mind to make our best decisions. Worry is a weak and unpleasant form of control.

- When we experience turmoil, identify this as your "lower" self. You are capable of more blissful states of being.

- Rather than spending your waking mind constantly looking for threats, look for bliss and reasons that justify why you should feel this way. After all, if it is your essential and true nature, why would you not want to justify it?

- As a simple start to this more perpetual state of bliss, find something or someone to love. Even the God. Expose yourself to moving art, scenes of beauty, or choose a meditation method that works for you.

If you are stuck in a storm of emotions, rather than trying to control them, relocate to knowing who you truly are. See these emotions as an ambush from the world that will distract you from your essence. Start your journey toward your essence now. And if you can believe this, you will move from "journeying" to being. This is how we can defeat the Demon **Chanda**.

**Munda** is our head. Head is the seat of our passion. The leader has to be passionate but passion without perspective and reason can actually serve to distort one's perception of reality. These distorted perceptions can blur the judgemental capacity of the leader and the leader finds difficulty in distinguishing between fact and fiction. People sometime are so obsessed with proving their views to be true that they create circumstances to maintain their own false reality. If someone can convince himself or others that his view is correct then that does not necessarily mean that it is the truth.

Just as there exist a very fine line between brilliance and insanity, there also exists a fine line between passion and many negative traits such as narrow-mindedness, narcissism, fanaticism, delusion, and even paranoia. For instance, there is a big difference in a leader who is passionate about their business, and one that is emotionally over-invested in their business. A passion that is balanced by perspective and reason can reveal purpose, but passion absent those filters can just as easily impede purpose.

A healthy passion in leadership speeds up growth and creates sustainable accomplishments by bringing in focus and precision of thought. However, being emotionally over-invested in one's business can lead to irrational decision making, prideful or ego-driven actions, the use of flawed business logic, and poor execution. These are the regrettable and completely avoidable precursors to unnecessary loss and failure.

Passionate professionals, entrepreneurs and executives who think visibly gives independent thought outside the views of their counsellors and advisers to check and refine their thinking. Emotionally driven professionals avoid counselling and they are surrounded by yes-men. Another trait of healthy passionate thinking is to recruit tier-one talent at the executive leadership and senior management levels in order to stimulate innovation and thought growth. Effective leadership teams have a balance of left-brain and right-brain thinkers from a variety of backgrounds so that they can draw from the broadest possible array of experiences when formulating positions and options. Emotionally over-invested professionals tend to surround themselves with very small teams of like-minded individuals from similar backgrounds who tend to reinforce each others' thinking instead of challenging it.  
(<https://www.n2growth.com/when-passion-impedes-purpose/>)

So to defeat the Demon **Munda** we are to seek advice and counsel from those who will tell us the truth. We are to be passionate with clarity, focus, and purpose.

After the demise of **Chanda-Munda**, then came the most dreaded Demon **Raktabija** to fight with the Mother. Raktabija had an advantage that if a drop of his blood falls on the ground, another Raktabija would take birth. In the war against Maa Durga, Raktabija's blood fell in the battle field and numerous Raktabijas took birth and came to fight against The Mother. Maa Durga and the Matrikas were taken aback by seeing this and faced the difficulty of killing this Demon. Mother then created Goddess **Kali** to join the battle; She stretched her tongue over the battle field and swallowed each drop of blood bleeding from Raktabija's body while other goddesses fought against him. Maa Kali gulped down the duplicate Raktabijas and ultimately Raktabija was killed.

But in real sense this **Raktabija** is our desire. If we fulfill one desire then numerous other desires springs in. "The desiring energy is at the basis of every generative action; it directs and expresses an extraordinary energy. Such energy needs to be fostered and directed or it will incur the risk of exhausting itself. Desiring takes a lot of effort because it gets us in contact with our most vital and visceral part. Therefore, we need to be educated to desire so that this energy might be useful and gratifying for both, the companies and individuals. This ability to desire is directly connected to leadership skills and it is typical of several entrepreneurs and leaders. Desiring means feeling empowered to do something. Managing our own desires therefore means managing our own power. We must understand that desires are very different from needs. We should satisfy our needs but not all the desires.

Desires are delicate and need to be protected but without any useless overtreatment. Desires should be treated in the same way like taking care the rose: protected under a glass bell. The protection offered by the glass bell is important because they are delicate and fragile. Desires are like arrows, shot with commitment, dedication, love and hope." Disciplined desires are the strength of a good leader. (<https://torreluna.com/en/leadership-power-desire/>)

Finally the Asuras **Shumbha and Nishumbha** came to fight with Maa Durga. People like John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, have viewed Shumbha and Nishumbha as symbols of arrogance and pride. Pride can be either a positive or a negative. It's a great and appropriate thing to feel when you've worked hard to accomplish something difficult. But when pride becomes too entangled with ego, it comes across as arrogance. This kind of pride can be personally destructive and dangerous to leadership. (<https://www.lollydaskal.com/leadership/happens-pride-gets-way-leadership/>)

Sri Swami Krishnananda explains that all the demons in The *Devimahatmya* are the indwelling demons affecting our body, mind and soul. Devi kills these demons in us. Body and mind are products of Prakrti (matter) while the individual soul is pure by itself. The soul because of its association and proximity to the body, mind, and Indriyas, takes a load of Malas (impurities). Human is made up of body, mind, and Indriyas; the development of these three elements of human being can help one to attain full realization i.e eradication of Tamasic Malas by **Karma with the help of Mahakali**, eradication of Rajasic Vikshepa (tossing of desire) Sakti by **Worshiping Mahalakshmi** and removal of Ajnana associated with Sattva by **Knowledge with the help of Mahasarasvati**. The soul struggles in defeating the demons. The victory over the demons is emancipation and realization that is the ultimate goal of the good leadership and management. ([https://www.bhagavadgitausa.com/DEVI\\_MAHTMYAM.htm](https://www.bhagavadgitausa.com/DEVI_MAHTMYAM.htm))

## Conclusion:

In the light of above mentioned explanation of the Devi Mahatmya, the researcher has tried to highlight the real meaning of the sacred text and its relevance with good leadership. It has clearly been shown that why leadership should be ethical and value based. The researcher has found that the Devi Mahatmya also agrees through its exotic meaning that the leader should be a philosopher as described by Plato and Kautilya to seek a quest for just and fair society. To the question of good leadership for achieving fairness or equity in the society, the Devi Mahatmya suggests the perspective of 'what needs to be done?'

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