

Conceptual Exploration of Leadership Phenomenon through 'Vedanta Model of Leadership'

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Abstract

This article is providing a conceptual model for development of leadership competencies. Considering leadership as a phenomenon of Complex Adaptive Systems comprising multiple components as leader, follower and context; authors explore 'Vedanta Model of Leadership' based on Philosophy of Advaita Vedanta by Adi Shankaracharya. Organisations are manifestations of a complex phenomenon which can be explained through triad concept of Self-People-Situations representing Brahman-Jiva-Prakruti model of Existence.

Introduction

It is experienced repeatedly in history that it is sine qua none for any society, nation or organisation to have good leaders. Rather history of world is nothing but history of good or bad leaders and history of how progress or decline of society is outcome of nature of leadership by kings or rulers of that time. Since the beginning of cultural civilization, humanity is persistently in quest of better leadership. Leadership theories of the last few decades show that early theories started from a focus on the individual leader. Different Models of leadership based on Indian Wisdom and conceptualized & empirical research are given by Pareek et al. (2002).

The schools of leadership emerged as below –

1. Trait school
2. Behaviour School
3. Contingency School
4. Charismatic or Transformational School
5. Emotional Intelligence School
6. Competence School

Meta analytic study by Gang Wang showed that transformational leadership is positively related to individual-level follower performance across criterion types, with a stronger relationship for contextual performance than for task performance across most study settings. In addition, transformational leadership was positively related to performance at the team and organization levels (Wang et al., 2011).

Leadership as a process phenomenon

Leadership development is rapidly moving to include substantial components involving international markets, world economic trends, and focus on particular regions. Leadership and leadership development are seen as inherently collaborative, social, and relational processes. (Day, 2001). Servant leadership is introduced four decades ago by Greenleaf (1970). Studies have shown that the intent of the servant leadership is in their self-concept i.e. the “Being” of Leader. Researchers have highlighted the moral foundations of the servant leadership paradigm (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). Essential to spiritual leadership are the key processes of firstly, creating

a vision wherein leaders and followers experience a sense of calling so that their lives have meaning and make a difference and secondly, establishing a social/organizational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others. (Fry and Slocum Jr.,2008).

The essence of Bass' theory on transformational leadership is that the transformational leader 'elevates the desires of followers for achievement and self-development, whilst also promoting the development of groups and organizations' (Bass and Avolio, 1990). They have further developed the factors for six leadership styles.

Leadership competencies for managers can be developed which necessarily comprises of cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence and managerial qualities. Integrated yoga techniques like SMET at S-VYASA are found to enhance Emotional Competence. Studies have shown that the leaders with high emotional intelligence see changes as opportunities for something better and they cherish not stability but outgoing development of individual workers and the organization itself (Kumari et al., 2007). It is also found that Cyclic Meditation (CM) which is essential part of Integrated Yoga Module (IYM) enhances managerial efficiency. There are various studies available related to effect of yoga practices on organisational success factors or impact of yoga way of life on emotional intelligence of managers (Adhia et al., 2010).

As we leave behind the machine model of life and look more deeply into the dynamics of living systems, we begin to glimpse an entirely new way of understanding fluctuations, disorder, and change. The layers of complexity, the sense of things being beyond our control and out of control, are but signals of our failure to understand a deeper reality of organizational life, and of life in general. Leadership, an amorphous phenomenon that has intrigued us since people began organizing, is

being examined now for its relational aspects. Few if any theorists ignore the complexity of relationships that contribute to a leader's effectiveness. Instead, there are more and more studies on partnership, followership, empowerment, teams, networks, and the role of context. Ethical and moral questions are no longer fuzzy religious concepts but key elements in the relationship any organization has with colleagues, stakeholders, and communities (Wheatley, 2009).

Advaita Vedanta Philosophy

Western philosophers give emphasis on the concepts of leadership being rooted in holistic human development. Plato in his *The Republic* explained concept of 'Human Excellence'. Socrates went further with "philosopher king" as example for deciding on right conduct with regard to policy and principle, convention and nature, the world and the divine (Dobbs 2003).

The essence of all scriptures as monism or Advaita Philosophy is most scientific and logical theory of what we see and experience as Divine. Advaita Vedanta Philosophy by Sankara, through his criticisms and debates, has effectively negated other contemporary schools of philosophies and thinkers. Sankara has given intellectually insightful interpretation of Shrutis, Upanisads and Vedanta sutras and commentaries at the time when Hinduism was on decline and confusion had prevailed regarding religious truths in Indian Philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 2006).

Indian Traditional Knowledge Base can leadership competencies as a whole based on Vedanta philosophy of oneness of existence i.e. 'Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shakaracharya'. The main principle of Adi Shakaracharya's philosophy which describes ultimate Truth is as mentioned below - everything else in religion is just a way to prepare yourself for that stage.

1. There is only one existence known as Brahman.

2. Brahman manifests itself as Jivas and Prakruti.
3. Whatever experienced through mind-body complex is illusion - called as Maya.

This indicates three components – Brahman, Jiva and prakruti which are inter-operational through a power called as Maya. (Radhakrishnan, 2006)

Leadership Models

Philosophical concepts are interpreted in this article to relate with Self as leader and People as followers and situations as context. There emerge three components of the system - Leader, Follower and Context.

Theories are developed to explain the inter relation of these components. Leader- follower and leader-situation are more popular among them. Follower-situation are studied as more in Organisational performance context rather than leadership phenomenon. Out of these three, leader and follower relationship, as explained by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Hersey & Blanchard 1969) explains relationship and influence by leaders while Situational Leadership theory (Sternberg and Vroom, 2002) explains how leadership can develop their competency in different situations. The exchange leads to a consensus that emphasizes the importance of person–situation interaction.

Leader- Member Exchange (LMX) process can be identified as reciprocal sacrifice. In-group members do more than expected for their leaders and in exchange they get more concern, understanding, help and support from their leaders. Instead of behaving due to the urges of emotions, controlling and coordinating the emotions will lead to a high level quality of LMX. (Ordun and Acar, 2014).

S.K.Chakraborty has studied leadership phenomenon as concepts of Rishi Consciousness and Rishi Process and explained that managerial and organizational psychology for leadership is yet to grapple with the most fundamental of all the

themes: the complete model of man which places the spirit-core of SELF in the centre. He further adds that, it would be useful to treat organisations (of any kind) only as a second tier concretization. First level of attention and pursuit must be directed to the whole cosmic and transcendental scheme of things (Chakraborty, 1998).

Vedanta Model of Leadership

Thus we come across a model where we are considering the underlying truths of our existence. World, like human beings, is a Complex Adaptive System (CAS). The possibility to benefit from the user's own resources is increased when organizations are viewed from a CAS perspective. CAS promotes emergent ways of working (Edgren and Barnard, 2012). As managers are part of the change context itself, they have to act in a way that is different from the traditional role of the administrative leader to become successful change leaders (Blomme, 2012). Further, the Process model of leadership examines the application of an integrative process model of leadership to help determine the psychological interactive processes that constitute leadership. In particular, the model identifies the various dynamics involved in generating leadership processes by modelling how the loci and mechanisms interact through a series of leadership event cycles. (Eberly et al., 2013).

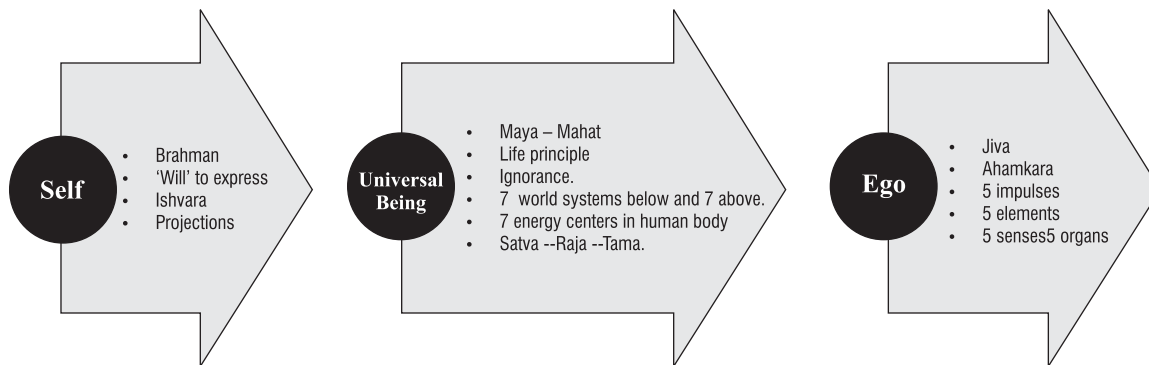
Gaudapada in *Mandukya Karika* established the view that no real creation ever took place. Everything that exists being in reality the non dual Brahman while according to Sankara, Man cannot ignore the world as long as he sees it; nor can he deny his relationships with other human beings or objects of the world as long as they appear to be real. Maya or Prakruti is said to consist of the three gunas, known as *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Brahman associated with collective ignorance is designated as Isvara. Brahman or pure consciousness associated with individual ignorance is called the Jiva or individual living soul. Brahman uses Maya as material of creation. Besides fourteen world systems, the five gross elements produce the four kinds of gross bodies dwelling therein and food

and drink appropriate to them. The body that *Jiva* assumes on earth is determined by its past *Karma* (Swami Nikhilananda, 1947).

The Universe is manifested from Singular Brahman. They say that these existences – God, nature and soul are one. God is as it were the Soul

and nature and soul are the body of God. (Swami Chetanananda, 2011). Hence Eternal Brahman has first the 'Will' to manifest at the beginning of each creation cycle, mentioned as 'May I Be'. Then the creation takes place in *maya* to manifest the reality as we experience it in our material world.

Figure 1: Role of 'Will' power – (Sankalpa) in creation of entire existence



Components of Vedic Model of Existence (see fig.1) are considered to explore the externally manifested in the leaders-followers-contextual situation triad.

1. Self when acting as Leader, in view of Ultimate Truth is Brahman.
2. People when act as Followers are also Brahman in the form of Individual souls (Jiva), hence are not separate from Him. People and followers are just an expression of Leader and they are

- leaders themselves.
3. While situations and contextual states of management are modifications of forces in Prakruti and are nothing but collective expressions from leader and his followers.
4. There are propelling forces running this triad are Sankalpa of Brahman & Jiva, Conviction by Self & people and Will-Power of Leaders & Followers.
5. These forces enables them control Prakruti,

Table 1: Triad Concept of 'Vedanta Model of Leadership'

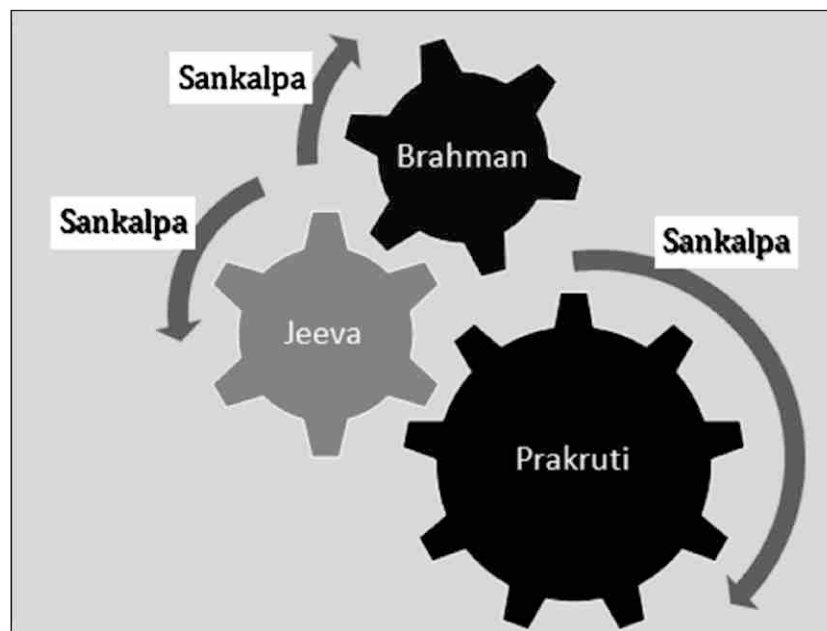
Model	Vedanta view	Social view	Organisation view
First Circle	Brahman	Self	Leader
Second Circle	Jiva	People	Follower
Third Circle	Prakruti	Situations	Context
Propellant	Sankalpa	Conviction	Will-Power

The process of manifestation this Leadership is through leaders' thoughts and 'will' (Sankalpa) (see fig. 2a and 2b). This Will-power is further operational in triad model of Self – People – Situations. This 'Sankalpa Shakti' or Will-power is used by Leader to influence the people and situations. This competency can be developed through systematic practice of Yoga as given in Indian Traditional Knowledge base. This Will is termed as Sankalpa in Indian Scriptures and is expressed externally in organisational context as decision making by organisational leaders. If leadership is process of attaining the equilibrium then it operates between the components of system where the leader expresses his own will to

influence others and controls the situations.

In words of Swami Vivekananda, “*God is a circle with its circumference nowhere and centre everywhere...Individuality in universality is the plan of creation. Each cell has its part in bringing about consciousness. Man is individual and at the same time universal. It is while realising our individual nature that we realise even our national and universal nature. Each is an infinite circle whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. By practice one can feel universal Selfhood which is the essence of Hinduism. He who sees in every being his own Self is a Pandita (sage)...*” (Swami Vivekananda, 1907)

Figure 2a: Yogic Model of Existence – 'Sankalpa' as propellant

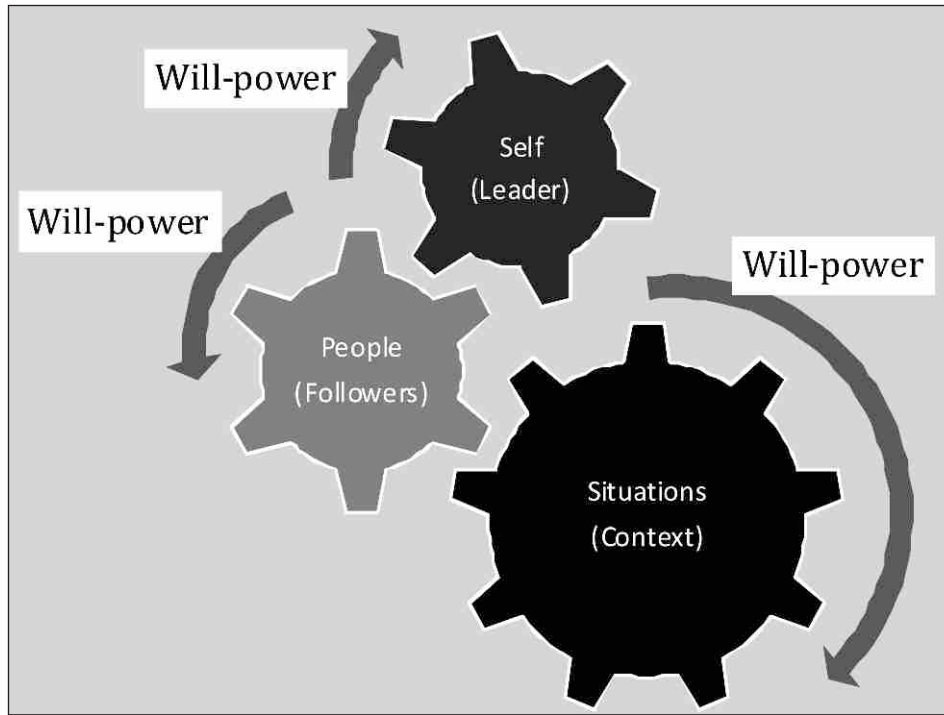


Entire Existence is moved through 'Sankalpa'. Brahma's Sankalpa to 'BE' manifested the universe and then Karma chain has resulted in propelling the world of Maya.

Swami Vivekananda states - “*The highest Advaitism cannot be brought down to practical life. Advaitism made practical works from the*

plane of Vishishtadvaitism. Dvaitism—small circle different from the big circle, only connected by Bhakti; Vishishtadvaitism—small circle within big circle, motion regulated by the big circle; Advaitism—small circle expands and coincides with the big circle. In Advaitism "I" loses itself in God. God is here, God is there, God is "I". (Swami Vivekananda, 1907)

Figure 2b –Apparent Model of the Organisation - 'Will' Power as propellant



'Will' of leader and followers act as propellant. Chain of actions and reactions reflects the results in different situations.

Swami Vivekananda states: *“The soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere (limitless), but whose centre is in some body. Death is but a change of centre. God is a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere. When we can get out of the limited centre of body, we shall realise God, our true Self.”* (Swami Vivekananda, 1907)

This model has scriptural evidence in Indian Traditional Knowledge base. Few of the references can be mentioned as -

Yogic Scriptural Texts

Indian Philosophy emphasizes on all round development for human excellence, leadership traits are very well discussed through various stories and parables. The terms like “Rajarshi” – king (Raja) with philosopher monk (Rishi) like qualities, king who is a philosopher monk as well.

Emphasis is given on management of mind and thoughts. As said by Rajarshi Janaka –

जनक उवाच -

अविच्छिन्नचित्तात्मिकः पुमानस्तिह नेतरत् ।

स्वसंकल्पवशान् वहः निःसंकल्पः च मुच्यते ।

- योगवासिष्ठः - मुमुक्षुव्यवहारप्रकरणम् ॥ २-१-३६

avicchitnācīdatmāikāḥ puṁānaḥ=stīha netarāt ।
svasankalpavasāt bahāḥ niḥsankalpaḥ ca mucyate ।

• yogavāsīṣṭhah -mumukṣuvyavahāraprakaraṇam ॥ 2-1-36

Meaning:

“There is here but one Self who is of the nature of undivided consciousness. There is nothing else. He is bound by his own will, free from ideation, he is liberated.”

- Yoga Vasistha- 2-1-36

As long as Sankalpa exists, world exists and whatever happens is within the consciousness field only. Hence Sankalpa – Will or strong ideation of thoughts of intention themselves are primary

propellant factor for the phenomenon called World. Human world is also filled with inactive and inert 'followers' who are in fact operates as per the 'will' of some leader of society. Bhagawad Geeta states that Rajarshis are required to provide examples before the people to follow the righteous path.

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः ।
स यत्प्रमाणम् कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥ - श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता ॥३-२१॥

Yadyadācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janah ।
Sa yatpramāṇam kuruṭe lokastadanuvartate ॥ - Śrīmadbhagavadgītā ॥3-21॥

Meaning:

“Whatever a superior person does, another person does that very thing! Whatever he upholds as authority, common man follows that.” - Bhagawad Geeta- 3-21

This underlines the importance of leadership in any organisation or society. It indicates the importance of sound mental and intellectual alertness among leaders. There are others like Yoga Vasistha who explains on Vedantic concepts and depicting will-power (Sankalpa) as tool for managing the mind and acting through that power.

ब्रह्मा संकल्पपुरुषः पृथ्व्यादिरहिताकृतिः ।
केवलम् चित्तमात्रात्मा कारणम् त्रिजगस्थितेः ।
संकल्प एष कचति यथनाम स्वयंभुवः ।
व्योमात्मैष तथा भाति भवत्संकल्पशैलवत् ।
- योगवाशिष्ठः - उत्पत्तिप्रकरणम् ॥ ३-३-२०, २१ ॥

brahmā sankalpapurusaḥ pṛthvyādirahitākṛtib ।
kevalam citta mātrātmā kāraṇam trī jagasthītib ।
sankalpa eṣa kacati yathanāma svayambhuvah ।
vyomātmāiṣa talhā bhāti bhavatsankalpaśhailavat ।
- yogavāsiṣṭhībh - utpattiprakaraṇam ॥ 3-3-20, 21 ॥

Meaning:

“Brahma is embodied with His own Divine will of creation where this Will is devoid of any material form. He is cause of all creation, present

everywhere in Consciousness state. Because of this Self Will, He is named as Self Existing. This Divine Will present in Brahma is similar to appearance of mountain in the sky.”

- Yoga Vasistha (Utpatti Prakarana – 3-3-20,21)

लीनधिरपि जागर्ति यो जाग्रद्धर्म विचर्जितः ।
बोधो निर्वासनो यस्य स जीवन्मुक्त इश्यते ॥ विवेकचुडामणि - ५२९

Linadhīrapi jāgarti yo jāgraddharma vivarjītib ।
Bodho nirvāsano yasya sa jīvanmukta īsyate ॥ vivekacudāmani - 429

Meaning:

“He whose intellect is merged in Brahman, who though wakeful, is yet free from the effects of wakefulness and whose knowledge is free from desire – he is called a jivanmukta, free even in this world.”

Freedom from desire (for objects) indicates that the focus of 'Will' power is Himself. Such a leader, with un-scattered focused 'Will', act as locus point of inspiration followers naturally.

The leader of highest wisdom (Rajarshi) has leadership competencies. Such a Leader, is explained in Vivekachudamani by Adi Sankaracharya as enlightened while alive ('Jivanmukta') and in Bhagawad Geeta by Lord Krishna as person with steady wisdom ('Sthitaprajna'). Without these characteristics Leader cannot claim himself to be Spiritual or transformational leader. Even though we are aware of the rareness of such characteristics and difficulty of finding and recognizing such leaders, authors are considering this on theoretical possibility of highest manifestation of leadership competencies given for leaders in Indian Philosophy. The power of Will (Sankalpa) becomes many folds when the leader has steady wisdom state- Sthitaprajna.

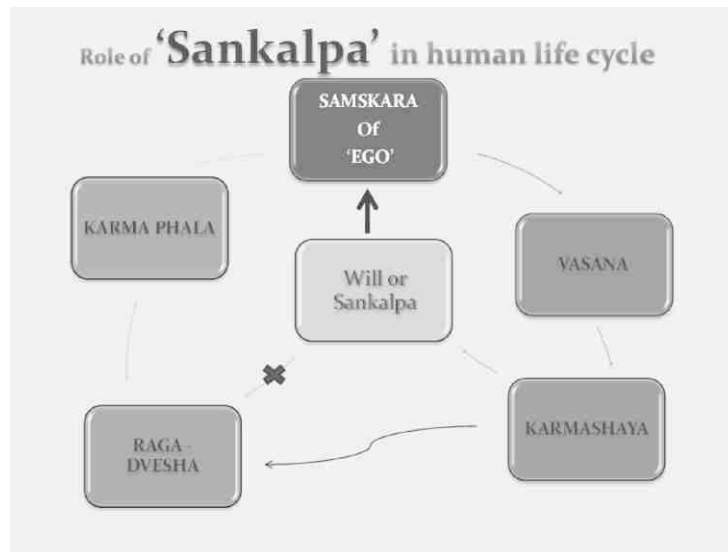
Adi Sankaracharya commentary states - The characteristics of the man of steady wisdom and the disciplines he had to pass through is being

given both for the one who has, indeed, applied himself to steadfastness in the Yoga of Knowledge, for the one who has applied himself to this after having passed through the path of Karma-yoga. For in all the scriptures without exception, dealing, with spirituality, whatever are the characteristics of the man of realization are themselves presented as the disciplines for an aspirant, because these

characteristics are the result of effort and those that are the disciplines requiring effort, they become the characteristics of the man of realization (Swami Gambhirananda, 2000)

Will-power intervenes the Cycle of Karma by avoiding the Raga and Dwesha (likes and dislikes) and propels the Cycle of Human systems towards more equilibrium (see fig, 3).

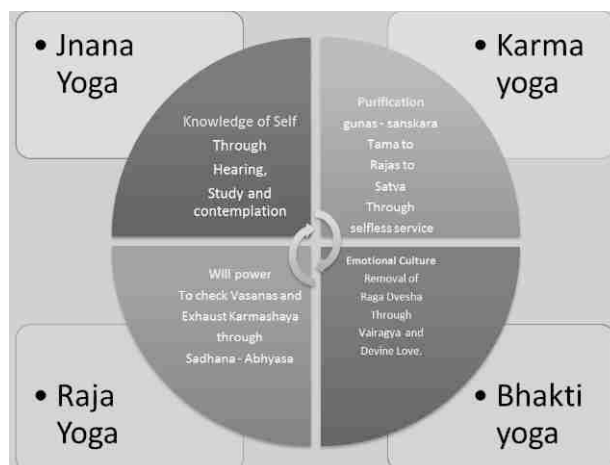
Figure 3: Role of Will (Sankalpa Shakti) in human life system



Adi Sankaracharya's commentary reveals that such a steady wisdom state (Sthitaprajna) can only be outcome of integrated yoga comprising all yogas.

Yoga Philosophy contains four paths like Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga. The path of four yogas can be presented as in Fig. 4.

Figure 4: Four Yogas by Swami Vivekananda



Leadership, Will and Will-Power

Past psychological studies discuss the importance of Will in human life. Great will-power is an asset, provided one also possesses high ideals with tendencies to be useful and do good.” (Goddard, Henry H., 1948). Further its role in management was also area of interest for many researchers especially in human psychology and effect of self-control. Will-power for self- control is expressed through a approach builds on the processes of state Self-regulation that have been identified as characterizing the pursuits of individuals who may already perceive substantial control over a given task (Kruglanski and Higgins,1996). Bruch and Ghoshal (2004) have tried to define and explain the meaning through deconstructing Will-power as a capability and rather argue that a person's willpower relies on a combination of his or her energy and focus. Energy is defined to relate to a person's degree of personal commitment and involvement towards a purpose or cause while focus signals how well the person channels his or her energy towards the desired outcome. According to them ambitious goals, long-term projects, high uncertainty and extreme opposition are examples of some forces that stimulate willpower.

“Morality in decision-making is, in many cases, certainly a test, but not a test of character per se or even of depth of character, but a test of willpower. I argue that it is a leader's potential lack of willpower that influences his or her ability to act morally, rather than defining who they “are” in terms of character traits, virtues, and cultural or social breeding.” (Tom Karp, 2012). He further studied on possible ways of Will-power development. “Will power governs acts of leadership. Willpower is a capability that has been found to be genetic, but which also is possible to develop by raised awareness, disciplined practice, and extending one's comfort zones by exposing oneself to challenges. Willpower is a mental capability, and if leaders develop their ability to focus their time and manage their energy, and become more aware of

their feelings, they may improve their willpower. Additionally, their energy balance matters: taking care of basics including paying attention to nutrition and to resting, as well as taking up some form of physical/mental practice may have a positive impact on a leader's willpower.” (Tom Karp, 2014).

“What is certain is that fundamental religious and cultural narratives (e.g., the Bhagavad Gita, Thora, Odyssey, Bible, and Koran) have, at all times, shaped problems involving the exercise of will. The view of will and willpower is therefore fundamentally embedded in the story of sin, with its emphasis on moral conflict and temptation versus long term self-interest. I focus on a belief in free will and its effect on leadership. The notion of free will allows people to work for, and anticipate, a better future, and hence, free will is needed to experience accomplishment, autonomy, control, dignity, and positive relationships (Kane, 1996).

Swami Vivekananda states:

“Freedom of the will — it is as you feel you are free to act. But this freedom is a species of necessity. There is one infinite link before, after, and between the thought and the action but the latter takes the name of freedom — like a bird flitting through a bright room. We feel the freedom and feel it has no other cause. We cannot go beyond consciousness; therefore we feel we are free. We can trace it no further than consciousness. God alone feels the real freedom. Mahapurushas (saints) feel themselves identified with God; hence they also feel the real freedom (Swami Vivekananda,1907)

This is the stage where Integrated Yoga Module seems to work towards development.

Conclusion

Indian philosophy and Indian Traditional knowledge base provides insights about yoga. In addition to Karma yoga, which is the beginning stage, there are other yogic paths such as Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga in Life Cycle.

Author has further studied impact of all these yogic practices in management leadership competency development. It develops each individual from individual to social and finally to integrative life. In addition to the authoritative scriptures given, scientific evidence through empirical studies is required to further validate the model. Author came across the limitations of measurement tools which can truly represent the leadership phenomenon through 'Vedanta Model of Leadership'. There is scope for further study and development of such measurement scales.

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