

# **MILITARY LEADERSHIP – AN OBJECTIVE STUDY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There is always an initial hesitation before one ventures to write on a subject like leadership. The hesitation comes from an apprehension that with so much having been written on the subject by so many eminent military leaders, the reader may not feel appreciative of another article on the subject. In spite of this, military leaders at various levels have felt tempted to write on the evergreen subject of leadership. Leadership being an art, as much as a science, lends itself to treatment in various ways without making the subject boring, which is normally the case with a 'story retold'. Moreover, leadership having to confront infinite situations, each different from the other, cannot be acquired through any set piece all-time formula. It is acquired by drawing on the wealth of experience accumulated over the years by numerous leaders, big and small. The aim of this article is to contribute, in a modest way, towards the stock-pile of experience. In an endeavour to make the article thought provoking, the subject has been dealt with in an objective manner with Indian conditions in view.

Leadership is expected of every military rank; from the Lance Naik to the General. In the strict sense of the term, leadership qualities expected of each rank should be the same. In fact, however, the highest form of leadership is expected of the Officer class. It is this form of leadership that is dealt with in this article. For obvious reasons reference is to the junior Officer who directly commands the Men. The one Arm where "Man" is more important than the weapon is Infantry. When, therefore, we talk of leading Men we mostly mean Infantry Men.

## **THE IMPLICATIONS**

Leadership has been defined in a number of ways by various writers. Whereas it would be futile splitting hair over definitions, it is necessary to evolve one that would cover the important implications of leadership. The most appropriate definition would, therefore, be the one that defines leadership as the art of making the men willingly to do tasks involving danger and discomfort. Analysing this we would find that leadership implies not only getting work done from the men but also getting it done through their willingness. The impediment to their doing the work willingly is the danger and discomfort involved; which is just an aspect of human nature.

Getting work done is undoubtedly the primary function of a leader. As a matter of fact that the purpose of his being installed as a leader. A military leader has wide powers to ensure that he is obeyed and the work is done. However, it is also the responsibility of the leader to get the best out of his men, which he cannot do use of authority alone. Use of authority may be necessary at times but it would certainly amount to failure of leadership if it has to be used all the time. A horse can be flogged to the water-point but it cannot be forced to drink. The aim is to make it drink. Further more the men have many times to operate unobserved by their leader and quite beyond the reach of the Army Act. Working unobserved they may not have the inducement of their work being appreciated. True military leadership operates by appealing to the conscience of the men, so that they perform under its omni-guidance, giving their best selflessly and voluntarily, even under the severest mental and physical strain. One may wriggle out of the clutches of law but not from the dictates of one's conscience.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY

The strongest psychological factor that can persuade a human being to sacrifice his comforts, and even life, is his faith in something which will make such a sacrifice appear to him worth the while. In order to induce a soldier to sacrifice his all he must be built up psychologically to have unflinching faith in the following:

- (a) Faith in the Cause for which he is fighting.
- (b) Faith in God.
- (c) Faith in his leader.

### **Faith in the Cause**

A sufficiently aroused conviction as to the righteousness of the Cause for which a soldier has to fight will not only build in him mental robustness to see him through sustained hardship and suffering, but also make dangers and discomfort involved look small and insignificant.

In totalitarian regimes, where the thinking of a soldier can be canalised through compulsory indoctrination, building up of the soldier's faith in the Cause hardly poses any problem. For democracies, however, where the nation as a whole is enjoying the freedom of thought and expression, unflinching faith in the Cause is difficult to instil in the soldier. The Americans while explaining the cause to their troops in Korea found that this exercising of the mind by the troops unnecessarily invited more questions and doubts which their leadership found difficult to keep pace with. The task of the American leaders to explain to their men as to why it was necessary for them to be in Korea, (and now in Vietnam), was a difficult one as there was a controversy regarding this in their own country. It is these controversies in democracies that undermine the *will* of their soldiers to fight.

So far in India we do not have such a problem. An overwhelming majority of our population is nationalistic in outlook. The Indian soldier today is fighting for his hearth and home, kith and kin. Fighting for the security and honour of the Motherland is inherent in our culture and is engrained deep in our fighting forces through their martial heritage. This is strong enough cause for the soldier to sacrifice his all. As yet there is hardly any controversy regarding this, but if the Chinese ideology of "world revolution" gains sufficient ground in our country then a controversy as to the cause would arise; much to our detriment and Chinese advantage.

Political aloofness must not be allowed to expose the soldier to subversion aimed at undermining the soldier's will to fight by creating a doubt in the Cause for which he is fighting. The Chinese under the garb of socialistic brother-hood are consistently striking at the roots of nationalism in their neighbouring countries for furthering their imperialistic and expansionist designs. It is of interest to note that although they preach socialistic internationalism for others they themselves are cleverly fostering nationalism of the most militant kind among their people. The bogey of 'Reactionaries' and Revisionists' has been created to denounce all that does not help to further their own imperialistic designs. This threat has to be countered at this stage when it is to find its roots in India.

Although this threat has to be met at the highest level so as to prevent contamination of the masses which provide soldiers for the armed forces, there is much that a leader can do to protect his men from this sort of subversion. For this he must not adopt the usual passive approach of just keeping an eye on subversive elements and preventing the troops from coming in contact with such elements. It would be impossible to prevent contact with undesirable elements. A leader must be able to convince the men that the high sounding economic and socialistic slogans are meant for perpetuating Chinese imperialism. "Talking Points" from higher

headquarters are important but ultimately it is the direct influencing force of the leader that can effectively resist subversion. For this the leader may have to be specially trained.

Political cause, though important, is not the only reason why a soldier fights. Besides making him realise the do or die aspect of our cause, appealing to his sense of self respect, martial traditions, regimental spirit and creating an intense hatred for the enemy, my sufficiently induce him to risk his life and bear extreme hardship most willingly. A soldier must therefore be treated with respect and his sentiments valued. He must be given a place of honour in society to retain which he will be morally compelled to make the highest sacrifice.

### **Faith in God**

Though a soldier's strong conviction in the cause enables him to face dangers and discomforts during the performance of his task, it may not by itself be sufficient to overcome the fear of death. For this he needs to have faith in something supreme and beyond life – for instance God. Implicit faith in the existence of the protective hand of God over him at all times gives him the much needed strength during trying circumstances. Faith in his will predominating, and death having to come when it must, makes the soldier realise the futility of worrying about death. The Bhagwad Gita wherein death has been ridiculed as something insignificant was, perhaps, composed entirely for the benefit of the soldier. Religion also preaches nationalism and lays a moral obligation on an individual to sacrifice for the sake of motherland. It is therefore evident that belief in God and religion are a must for the soldier to build his courage, not only to face death when it comes but also, if need be, to invite it on to himself in the service of the country.

It may sound paradoxical but even the communists have not failed to realise the importance of religion for the soldier. Their soldier too has a religion – communism; perhaps more dogmatic than any other religion in the world. Indoctrination, more effective than that of any other religion is applied on the soldier to totally numb his reasoning power, and he willingly risks his life with the blind faith in something that he has been made to believe as good and beyond this material world. Lack of belief in God has been compensated by the extreme militancy of his “religion”, and the fear of punishment by his own commanders, which is more dreadful than even than the fear of death.

The spiritual well-being of our troops is no doubt an important aspect of man management but it should not be taken to mean mere performance of religious rituals. Religious teachings which go to induce fearlessness should form part of regular training of the troops and be accorded due importance. Our troops are, by and large, religious minded and we must exploit this to prepare them for war. It is the responsibility of the leader, therefore, not only to allow his Men to practice their beliefs, but also to positively encourage them and guide them towards the ultimate goal of preparing them to face hazards of war with fortitude. No leader can wash his hands off this responsibility irrespective of his own personal beliefs or disbeliefs.

Preaching of religion to the soldier cannot, however, be divorced from reality. It would be difficult for him to live in an isolated world of devotion and sacrifice when people around him in other walks of life are indulging freely in worldly pleasures without caring for ethical values. Before, therefore, expecting a high moral standard in a soldier at least some minimum standard will have to be expected of the nation as a whole. The higher the moral standard of the nation, the finer the quality of its soldiers.

### **Faith in the Leader**

Even with the faith of the soldiers in the Cause and God, there yet remains the most important faith that needs to be developed in him. It is the faith in his leader. Even when armed with a strong conviction in the Cause and the belief that death must come when it must, he will

still have some doubts lurking in his mind that make him hesitate as to whether he must take the plunge or not. Some of the doubts likely to enter his mind are:

- (a) whether the leader will stand by him through thick and thin;
- (b) whether there are chances of success;
- (c) whether the task is within his physical capability;
- (d) whether he is being exposed to the danger only to the extent necessary; and
- (e) whether the method of accomplishing the task is the best possible.

The sole aim of good leadership is to dispel such doubts from the minds of the men. It is not by reasoning or explanations, however, that these doubts are dispelled. There would never be time for reasoning and explanations. Neither may the men always be able to understand reason due to their inherent limitations. The only way for the leader to keep the men's mind free from doubts is by winning their confidence and inspiring implicit faith in him, whereby the men always feel that the leader must be right. Such an unquestioning faith will make the men surrender themselves voluntarily to the *will* of the leader.

### QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

The primary function of a leader is to produce in his men an unflinching faith in himself. Before expecting to be willingly accepted by his men as their leader, he must establish his right to lead. He must exhibit qualities that would automatically win him the admiration and confidence of his men and make them look up to him for guidance and inspiration. There are two basic qualities necessary in a leader – “superiority” to establish his right to lead and “sincerity” to beget sincerity of his men.

#### **Superiority**

From time immemorial superiority of one man over the other has formed the basis for any sort of leadership. It is based on the law of human nature, whereby the weak follows the strong. In modern times the emphasis may have shifted from physical superiority to mental but the basic principle that only the man with superior performance and superior capability to think has a right to lead, has remained unchanged. Of course for a military leader, particularly the junior leader, his superiority in brawn is still as important as his superiority in brain.

Whereas superiority of the leader by virtue of his superior conduct, superior status and rank all go to assist him in establishing his over-all superiority over his men, the real superiority comes through his superior professional knowledge and performance. Professional superiority of a leader is not only required to build up the faith of his men in that their lives are in safe hands, but also for setting before them a personal example by doing what he expects them to do. Needless to say that personal example is a single factor that, besides winning for the leader his men's admiration, arouses interest and willingness in them by building their confidence by demonstrating that what is expected of them is not impossible. Towards this end, therefore, not only must the leader be proficient but also superior to his men in performance. The unfortunate fact is that during the training of a leader while the utmost attention is paid in making him proficient in his own job, due regard is not given to the necessity of his knowing the job of his men. The Officers do not themselves feel inspired by the proposition of being superior to the men in their job because, while some never have the desire to learn anything more than what is required for promotion, others genuinely see no necessity for attaining high degree of proficiency in what they will not be expected to do in war. It must be understood that proficiency in the men's job is a vital requirement in as much as it establishes superiority of the leader. An infantry

leader, for instance, not being able to fire all the weapons on charge of his men with outstanding accuracy; not being able to go to the ground to give a demonstration in crawling; not being able to snatch a rifle from the jawan to give him the correct demonstration in bayonet fighting; not being able to lead the men in hill climbing with as much load on his back as he expects his men to carry would make a poor spectacle in leadership. The mere fact that he has passed his Staff College would not be able to impress his men sufficiently to compensate for his this weakness. True superiority can only be established by the leader beating his men in their trade. Only then will they submit to his authority willingly. This superiority apart, it is also the function of the leader to train his men during peace and it goes without saying that an instructor must be proficient in what he has to impart. No doubt every Officer at one stage or the other has to undergo training pertaining to the job of his men but he tends to forget it due lack of practice. This the junior leader, who is in direct contact with his men, must guard against.

### **Sincerity**

Even when the leader has acquired the necessary superiority over his men, he would still need some moral bond to keep his men true to him to such an extent that they would be prepared to sacrifice even their lives at his dictates. This bond comes through sincerity; sincerity of the leader automatically begets sincerity from his men. A leader would need to develop a two fold sincerity – sincerity towards his task and sincerity towards his men.

Sincerity towards his task implies his genuine belief in the necessity and urgency of the task given to him and his men. The leader's sincerity towards the task creates an interest among his men whereby not only do they perform the task without having to be goaded but also do it well. The slightest sign of insincerity on the part of the leader towards the task has an adverse effect on the men. They would then tend to lose interest and themselves suggest hundred and one excuses to the leader as to why a particular work cannot be done.

The second aspect of sincerity of the leader is his sincerity towards his men. This is the most important aspect of sincerity, as around it is woven the moral bond which keeps the leader and his men together through thick and thin. This produces a sense of security among the men during dangerous situations, in that it assures them:

- (a) that they are being made to undergo only what is absolutely necessary;
- (b) that they will never be left in the lurch;
- (c) that their good work will be appreciated; and
- (d) that it will be worthwhile making a sacrifice for some one who loves them and has always had their good at heart.

Sincerity may in fact be termed as the loyalty of the leader towards his work and towards his men. The general concept of loyalty includes a leader's superiors also, though not to the extent of producing 'henchmen' and 'yes men' among junior leaders. Loyalty towards the superiors comes into play only when it does not clash with one's higher duty towards the country and the men he commands.

## **PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP**

### **The Changed Situation**

For the Indian military leader there is a special requirement for carrying out some re-thinking with regard to his conventional ideas about practical leadership. Ever since independence our Armed Forces have been experiencing a silent revolution in consonance with the revolution undergone by the nation as a whole. The general feeling of equality among all has

posed a challenge to leadership. The officer today no longer has the white skin to distinguish himself from his men. Nor has he the backing of higher social status by birth. Leadership is no longer a matter of birth-right for any one. Riches, style, snobbery, and Western ways of living no longer contribute towards establishing leadership. An Officer today has to be genuinely superior to his men to be accepted by them as their leader. With opportunities for Commission now open to all and sundry he probably has to acquire even a higher standard than normal, to be able to fight against the possible prejudice of his subordinate, who may have a feeling that with a little better luck he too might have been an Officer.

Another change that has come about in military leadership is the direct contact of the Officer with his men. The British-time function of the Junior Commissioned Officer to act as a link between the Officer and the men is now redundant. This change is healthy as it brings the Indian Commissioned Officer at par with the Officers of other armies the world over. Unfortunately, however, this inevitable change is meeting with heavy resistance from the 'old guards' of the British legacy who still insist on perpetuating the special status of the 'sahib' over and above that to which he is entitled by virtue of his position in the normal chain of command. All this has resulted in creating some confusion in the minds of the younger generation. It must be clearly understood that leadership to be effective has to be through a direct contact between the Officers and their men. To this effect the Officers must now perform (in a better way) what the Junior Commissioned Officer had been doing in the bygone days.

The general concept of maintaining distance from the men will also have to be revised. No amount of mixing up with the men by the Officer can jeopardise his leadership. Provided he has genuine qualities of a leader he will always stand out. The modern jawan has many doubts and queries on varied subjects which he would like to ask his Officer provided he is accessible to him. In case the Officer is not accessible, he will fall an easy prey to rumours, loose talk and enemy subversion. Those Officers who maintain distance from their men so as not to expose their true self to their men cannot get away with it for long. The modern soldier will smash through any such barricade to see for himself what his leader is worth. Even otherwise social equality is the order of the day and no leader can remain divorced from this healthy change that has come about in the nation. Social equality does not mean indiscipline as believed by some. Other Armies of the world are living examples of discipline flourishing within social equality among all ranks. A word of caution may be given here in that the leader must correctly gauge the change and move with it. It is as dangerous to run ahead of time as it is to lag behind it.

### **The Investment**

Leadership in its practical form amounts to building up of a reputation by the leader for himself – a reputation for knowing his job, possessing moral courage, for remaining true to his men and possessing physical courage for facing dangers and accomplishing his task. Apart from the fact that the men in general feel proud of their leader if he has high reputation, it is this reputation of the leader among his men that gives a sense of security to his men while they follow him blindly. Reputation however cannot just be taken out of the hat when required. It is built up over a period of many long years as a continuous process, starting from the time an Officer is commissioned. An Officer is always under constant observation of his men and every action of his, whether in private life or official, contributes towards his reputation. Every action of his in the right direction, therefore, amounts to an investment towards his leadership. Heavier the investment the more liberally can he draw on it at the time of need. It will, however, do well to remember that reputation is more easily marred than made. The leader must, therefore, be ever conscious of this fact in whatever he does both in his official as well as private life.

## **Sacrifice**

Sincerity and love which form the moral bond between the leader and the led is gauged by the amount of sacrifice a leader can make for his men. Considering what a leader expects his men to perform for him, no amount of sacrifice on the part of the leader can be considered too great. Apart from the fact that they trustingly hand over their very lives into the hands of their leader, military discipline binds them to such an extent they literally eat, talk, laugh, sit, stand rest only when their leader permits them to do so. This in itself should be sufficient to arouse motherly affection for the men in the heart of the leader. A leader's sacrifice for the men should, therefore, be of a motherly nature. What would a mother not do for the sake of her children? While living with his men he must deny to himself what is being denied to his men. The effect of this self-denial is quite out of proportion to the sacrifice made. During the Italian campaign, the removal of his boots by Napoleon, because his men were without them, contributed as much towards to his success as his superior tactics.

## **Self-Discipline**

One of the very important functions of a leader is to maintain discipline among his men so that they remain receptive to orders at all times. Only disciplined troops will react favourably to the qualities of leader. Discipline, however, does not come to man naturally. It has to be acquired. Discipline forced on the men through fear of disciplinary action tends to loosen as soon as the rod of authority is removed. This would obviously not be the type of discipline that a leader should imbibe in his men. What he needs in his men is self-discipline whereby they would do the correct thing just because it is correct and needs to be done. Under self-discipline a man is under constant watch of his conscience which is impossible to deceive. This is the highest form of discipline which forms the basis for military leadership.

The only way to induce men to adopt this voluntary discipline is for the leader to practise self-discipline of the strictest form himself. No other form of persuasion can do the trick. The term self-discipline here is intended not only to include voluntary obedience of military rules and regulations but also the qualities of honesty, integrity, truthfulness and other qualities of character practiced voluntarily; not for fear of punishment but because of strong belief in their goodness.

Whereas professional standards among leader will vary in each according to his rank and service, the standard of character and self-discipline expected of juniors and seniors is the same. The junior officer, therefore, cannot justify his weaknesses just because his senior has those weaknesses. After all it is the junior who becomes a senior at a later date. Where a junior finds little guidance from his seniors he must follow the dictates of his conscience. In deciding what is right and what is wrong the guiding principle should be that he must set for himself a much stricter standard than what he expects from his subordinates.

## **Command and Control**

The essence of good command and control is to ensure that orders are obeyed. This, however, does not mean that the leader issues orders at random and then ensures through exercise of his authority that they are obeyed. The leader must be very considerate while issuing orders. He must make sure that orders are, firstly, necessary for achieving his over all aim and, secondly, they are within the performing capability of the men. Such orders could be made to be obeyed through personal example, reason and creating the necessary interest among the men rather than resort to the use of authority. The use of authority may have to be resorted to sometimes by every leader but this should be done sparingly and as a last resort, as this is the worst form of leadership. Supervision over the men may be possible to a great extent during

peace but a leader must train his men to carry out orders even without his supervision as may be required many times during war.

For effective command and control a leader must ensure that nothing that his men do goes unnoticed by him even when it does not warrant his taking official cognisance of. For this he does not need a spy system as some commanders appear to think. All that he has to do is to mix freely with his men and keep his eyes and ears open. If the leader has trained his command well, his subordinates down the chain of command will act as his eyes and ears in his absence. He must, however, always use his sense of judgement before accepting any information from others.

Frustration among troops, if it sets in, cuts at the very roots of command and control. A leader must prevent this at all costs. The main reason why frustration sets in among troops is injustice. That a leader must be just is well known to every leader and hardly needs to be emphasised. Yet injustices do take place. These occur not so much due to a leader lacking a sense of justice as such but mostly due to the following:

- (a) Casualness on the part of the leader.
- (b) Emotions and moods of the leader dominating his sense of judgement.
- (c) Moral weakness in a leader which makes him to seek compromise rather than call a spade a spade.
- (d) Some sort of complex in a leader to overcome which he resorts to high-handedness.

The other reason for frustration could be a commander's neglect in man management of his troops. Military discipline leaves the troops helplessly at the mercy of their commander. If they are not looked after well there is little that they can do about it except feel frustrated. A commander may tend to neglect man management just because his troops don't complain and wake up to it only when they do start complaining. This must never be allowed to happen as it could breed indiscipline. Troops are looked after not because it is their right but because looking after them is the moral and sacred duty of their commander. Once they have faith in the sincerity of the leader and feel that all that can be done for them is being done, they will not complain even when living under miserable conditions.

## CONCLUSION

Leadership is the art of making the men under command to willingly do jobs entailing discomforts and dangers. Undoubtedly the main function of the leader is to ensure that the task allotted to him and his men is accomplished. For this he has been vested with vast powers over his men. More important is, however, the willing participation of his men in the task entrusted to them. Only then will they give off their best which a leader, in fact, strives for. For obtaining his willing cooperation, a soldier needs to be handled psychologically. The main obstructions in the way of his willing participation under trying circumstances can be his lack of determination and the feeling of insecurity. Both these obstructions can be overcome by developing in him three faiths – faith in the Cause, faith in God and faith in the leader. The primary function of the leader is the building up of the troop's faith in him. There are two basic qualities required of a leader: 'Superiority over his men to establish his right to lead and 'Sincerity' to win their confidence so that they willingly surrender to his dictates. Superiority of the leader over his men has to be both mental and physical. Not only has the leader to be superior to his men by virtue of his superior rank and appointment but also superior to them in their trade so as to set a personal example of what he expects his men to do and also to win their admiration. His 'sincerity' has to be two fold:

sincerity towards his work and sincerity towards his men. Sincerity towards the men entails sacrifice on the part of the leader and this is moral obligation. The aim is to arouse the conscience of his men so that they perform with equal enthusiasm irrespective of whether they are being observed or not. One may wriggle out of the clutches of law but it would be difficult for anyone to deceive his conscience.

In practice leadership amounts to the building up of a reputation by the leader: a reputation of his infallibility and trustworthiness. This reputation is obviously not acquired in a day on an as-and-when-required basis. Every action of leader in his day to day life creates an impression on the minds of the Men and contributes towards his reputation, good or otherwise. Reputation is of course easier marred than made.

The Indian military leader needs to reorient his thinking vis-à-vis his relation with his men in view of the country's changed social conditions after Independence. Changes are still continuing and the success of the Indian leader would depend on how accurately he gauges this change; ensuring that while he does not move behind time, he does not run ahead of it either. However, whatever the age through which he passes the cardinal principles of leadership – superiority and sincerity - will become all the more important.

Leadership is indeed a thrilling art. It is most satisfying to see the impact of the force of one's personality. This in itself should be sufficient to induce an officer to bend all his energies towards attaining perfection in leadership. In practice, however, perfection in leadership demands twenty-four hours alertness of the leader and involves a life of dedication, sacrifice and self-discipline on his part, which is easier said than done. No wonder the Officer is tempted to take recourse to an easier form of leadership, (if leadership it could be called), namely extensive use of powers vested in him by law. The apparent effectiveness of such recourse during times of peace and the general shift of emphasis from practice to theory in grading Officers, with regard to leadership qualities, when the real test of war cannot be applied, tends to relegate leadership to the status of an unrewarding hobby rather than an important aspect of an Officer's profession that it is. On the other hand the Officer can ill afford to be lacking in military leadership. For when we fall deficient in "weapon" we can still win the war with the "Man" inspired by superior leadership.