

Leadership*

General Shanker Roychowdhury (Retd)**

It is unusual for the Army to offer one of its official publications for a book review, but I am glad that it has done so in this case. The book itself is unusual as well, in that it attempts (perhaps for the first time in an official publication) to incorporate spiritual philosophies into the concept of military motivation and leadership, something about which the army is understandably gun-shy in its efforts to appear hyper-correct in the present environment. Religion has always been acknowledged as perhaps the greatest single military motivator, and has always been extensively exploited by our traditional opponents through fundamentalist interpretations of religious dogma. For the Indian Army, the spiritual assets of our diverse and varied cultures contain rich sources of military motivation for soldiers of a secular republic, which have generally remained unexplored. These should be utilised. But to achieve synergy of the various inspirations from different religions into a composite motivational doctrine, with the requisite emotional content, to spur soldiers in combat, will nevertheless remain a great intellectual challenge. I am additionally glad, therefore, that with this publication the Army has managed to overcome its fear of the dark.

The publication is in two parts – the first dealing with development of individual leadership, the second with higher command. The central theme is the “Mahavakya” - the Eternal Truth - “TO BE : TO DO: TO SEE: TO TELL”, a philosophy of leadership whose core rests on the timeless principle of “tyaga” or selfless renunciation, (taken from many scriptures, notably the *Bhagvad Gita*) which is uniquely essential and applicable to the military leader, much more so than to leadership in any other form of human activity. To the uninitiated, the enunciation of the theme appears somewhat cryptically hyperbolic at first glance, but as expanded further in the book, it is really a kind of acronym, a check list if you like, for the essential qualities demanded of a military leader. Mahavakya encompasses the aspects of character and knowledge, style of leadership, and the methods of leadership, but to bear fruit, it must first be imbibed and understood fully by the mature practitioner and, more importantly, explained clearly to the neophyte. Prominently allied to it is the thematic presentation of “The Universal Inner Structure of Good Leaders”, a structured behavioural model prescribed for development of leadership through a sustained regimen of practical activity comprising basically of three facets, each of which have been quantified – self development exercises, professional self study, and systemised self-

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**General Shanker Roychowdhury is a former Chief of the Army Staff.

introspection. Indeed the formalised methodology of leadership training is one of the important lessons the publication seeks to convey. The book also expounds the factor of spirituality in the development of character. It is a term apt to be misunderstood and sometimes misapplied in the military context, because it is generally associated with religion. To the soldier, spirituality essentially pertains to faith, which can be both in his personal perception of God as a source of strength and comfort particularly in adversity or, more pertinently, to belief in a cause-comrades, regiment and more generally the nation.

The book is dedicated to the officers of the Indian Army who have sacrificed their lives in battle living up to the credo of the Indian Military Academy. But it is also well to remember that the leadership span in the Army extends seamlessly over the entire spectrum of command, with its sharpest edge at the juniormost level where battles are actually fought and who play critical roles at various levels, especially in these times of officer shortages. Future editions of this book (or others) could specifically address application of the "Mahavakya" theme to this echelon as well.

Which brings me to another issue inextricably connected with motivation in the Indian Army, its unique regimental system. It is essentially a British legacy, now totally Indianised, and gives the combat arms, the sharp edge of the Army, their basic emotional identity and cohesion and is the foundation of *esprit-de-corps*. It has long withstood the test of battle and adversity, but nevertheless remains categorised by region, religion and class. Perhaps the time has now come, when, without disturbing the existing system, intensive professional study and analysis of alternate systems of military motivation require to be undertaken, and their benefits studied and grafted onto the existing doctrine. The ideal model for the Indian Army would be the Azad Hind Fauj of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, a totally indigenous "all class" military entity created during our freedom movement, which even today continues to exercise a powerful emotional appeal to all sections of the Indian society, regardless of religion, caste or region including within the Armed Forces. I think the Indian Army would benefit greatly from the effort.

If the Army is to seriously put its new doctrine of "Leadership" into practice, the main challenge as always, would be in implementation of the process of self development and improvement of its officer cadre (as well as JCO/NCO's). Where will the process commence - from the National Defence Academy, or even earlier at the Rashtriya Indian Military College (RIMC) and the various Sainik Schools? How will continuity be maintained thereafter? Will the Navy and the Air Force accept the publication? Is there a requirement for such a theme to be developed at an inter-Services level, possibly under the aegis of the Integrated Defence Staff? These and many other questions do not have answers yet, but will have to be found sooner or later. The earlier the better. Until that time, the Army should progress implementation of leadership training based on the ARTRAC publication as early as possible.