

Role of transformational leadership in strengthening the spirit of self-reliant India

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Abstract

The country's self-reliance is dependent on its progress in various sectors, spear-headed by dynamic leaders who have the vision, courage and goal-setting capabilities to lay down the roadmap to a successful future, who can catapult it to the glorious echelons of power and glory, which has been its true destiny. This paper delineates the achievements of all those heroes not only in public life but also in private spheres too, who give wings to the creative power and innovative forces of a person, by investing faith in their abilities and capacities. Furthermore, transformational leadership has a strong, and significant effect on people's normative and affective commitment which positively influence innovative success. This country of overwhelming youth population is in a tearing hurry to achieve its material goals, which will lift millions to a better standard of living and to a more fulfilling life.

Keywords: Self awareness, swadesh & swaraj; self- reliance

1. Introduction

“Young men and women are to build-up a strong character. A nation's greatness was reflected in the character of her people. If it was sullied by selfishness, such a people could not prosper or achieve great things. Selfishness had its place in life as everyone had to look to his own needs and that of his family, but it could not be made the be – all and end – all of life.”

— Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

A true leader is one who thinks beyond himself and for a purpose greater than himself, one who triggers self - actualization in followers by unlocking their own true potentialities and making them feel worthy. The idea of leadership and self-reliance has its essential seed in the process of child-raising. The growing child needs to emulate the values of standing on one's own feet and fending for itself, from a very young age, so that the twin qualities of

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resilience and innovative spirit is instilled in its psyche early on. The role of parents and teachers has to be underlined here who are the first leaders that a child looks up to as role-models. The transformation of the character of a person, therefore, while still in the initial growing up phase, is determined by holistic, education which plays a positive role in incorporating self-reliance in an individual person.

Professor Gianpiero Petriglieri, leadership expert, has stated, *“a leader has the courage, commitment, ability and the trust to articulate, embody and help realize the story of possibility- for a group of people, at a point in time.*

2. Transformational Leadership (TFL)

Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders encourage, inspire and motivate followers to innovate and create change that will help grow and shape the future success of the organization. This is accomplished by setting an example at the executive level through a strong sense of corporate culture, employee ownership and independence in the workplace.

Transformational leaders have a purpose and a vision. They can define who you are, what is important and what is success and they make confidently an aspirational statement of the future. They inspire and motivate their workforce without micromanaging. They trust trained employees to take authority over decisions in their assigned jobs. They have the right balance of hard and soft skills and are both people-oriented and task-oriented. It is a management skill that is designed to give employees more room to be creative, look to the future and find new solutions to old problems. Employees on the leadership track will also be prepared to become transformational leaders themselves through mentorship and training.

- i. Transformational leaders inspire and excite followers to high level of performance. Transformational leadership explains how leaders change teams or organisation by creating, communicating and modelling a vision for the organisation or work unit & inspiring employees to strive for that vision.
- ii. James McGregor Burns, advocate of this approach said that leadership involves organisational change.
- iii. Inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the organization; they can have a profound and extraordinary effect on followers.

Bass (1985) stated that transformational leaders focus on followers' demands, motivate followers to realize the goals of the organization and encourage followers to pursue group interests and self-development. Recent research has found that mindfulness can positively influence TFL by fulfilling leaders' need for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Decuyper et al., 2018). Essentially, there are four factors to transformational leadership, (also known as the "four I's"): idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Leaders with charisma and idealized influence earn followers' respect by setting good examples, and encourage subordinates to follow these examples through strong beliefs and high moral standards. In addition, leaders interact with followers to establish common goals that can shape and strengthen followers' sense of mission. For example, transformational leaders who emphasize green (environmentally friendly) values may strengthen followers' green identity by triggering value congruence (Wang et al., 2018). Through inspirational motivation, leaders encourage and guide followers to confront difficulties and challenges, realize their goals and meet high expectations, they inspire followers through affective and hortatory statements. Leaders with these transformational capabilities are sensitive to environmental changes and aware of individual needs, enabling them to steer collaboration and partnerships in global context (Kumar, 2019). Such leaders also engage in intellectual stimulation, encouraging followers to question the current situation and conventions, think independently and be actively creative. Through individualized consideration, transformational leaders tailor their guidance to followers' particular characteristics and situations.

3. Political and spiritual antecedents of self-rule

At the turn of the 20th Century, India prided itself on having some of the greatest leaders to lead herself not only socio-politically but spiritually, to assert its glorious past and to remove herself from the shackles of the imperialistic masters. In fact, a study of such icons is a transformative lesson in itself, in order to achieve political self-reliance or independence from a colonial regime.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, led from the front, and propagated on the principles of non-violence and compassion for all. He was able to fire the imagination of millions of Indians, who willingly sacrificed their self-interests in a bid to achieve freedom from political masters. He was a leader who, till date, has no parallel, anywhere in the world. As Einstein said about him, "*Generations to come will scarce believe that such a person as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth,*" Self-rule was stressed up by another great freedom fighter, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who roared, "*Swaraj is my birth-*

right and I shall have it.” Therefore, Indians have been imbued with the flavor of self-reliance, in the political sphere by numerous such transformative leaders during the independence struggle. Now, a vibrant democracy has been laid down for posterity on this hallowed Motherland, with regular, free and fair general elections conducted by the Election Commission every five years at the Centre and State levels. Each citizen is proud to uphold the Constitution, which bestows individual, enforceable rights on individuals.

Swami Vivekananda was another great saint, who exhorted his co-patriots, *“Arise, awake, my countrymen.. and stop not till the goal is reached.”* *Awake from this hypnotism of weakness: None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him.”* So each individual, Swamiji urged, if he desired the good of the country as a whole, should try, whatever might be his walk of life, to build character and acquire such virtues as courage, strength, and self-respect, and practice the national ideals of renunciation and service. Sri Aurobindo, a nationalist and later a seer-mystic, also guided people to transform themselves spiritually and evolve their consciousness to supramental levels.

These idolized men with exemplary ideals, had a clear vision about the glorious destiny of their Motherland and how she can be freed from the various ignominies that beset her before independence. In the process, they were able to guide millions of ordinary men and women to believe in themselves and in the actions they needed to carry out to reach the highest good for the country. The new visions of the self-reliant nation from Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi and their lessons for the current age of the coronavirus, is very pertinent. Whatever happened in early 2020, of one thing we can be certain: it is an emergent New World. What we are experiencing today as the coronavirus pandemic spreads around the world is a call for extraordinary transformative leadership, a call that mixes urgency and agency. These are paths of service and progress for all, Sarvodaya, with the goal of Swaraj, the freedom of self-rule. As freedom fighters, Mahatma Gandhi and Aurobindo Ghose were keenly aware of and fought for these, what we would now call “Transformative Leadership and Sustainability”. What we are looking for is a revolution in consciousness, an awakening into a new consciousness that combines Yoga and Dharma as Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi envisioned and by re-learning and reimagining spirituality with Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi. The nation to awaken into a new, emboldening consciousness, has to reinvent itself and as Swami Vivekananda instructed boldly, has to draw a delicate and harmonious balance between the material and spiritual life, to become Atmanirbhar in the true sense.

4. Prevalence of self-reliance in various spheres through dynamic leadership

The idea of self-reliance is inherent in the spirit of all Indians. Gandhiji introduced the concept of “Swadeshi”, and called for boycott of all English manufactured goods. Indeed, India’s rural and cottage industry gets a leg-up if the Indians take pride in the “Made in India”, goods. The latest invocation of self-reliance by governments in India and elsewhere is primarily about economic self-reliance but like in the Indian case, it is more specifically about self-reliance in manufacturing sector. The current P.M. of India, Shri Narendra Modiji, has followed the same principle of Swadesh most comprehensively, by coining the slogan, ‘Vocal for Local’. Elevating the manufacturing sector into a competitive, world-class hub that can serve not only both Indian and global markets, has the potential to leapfrog the country’s self-reliance goal.

Today, we need to refocus on the goal of moving up the manufacturing sector’s share of India’s GDP from 17 per cent to 25 per cent. The sector can not only boost the GDP, increase money circulation in the market and generate jobs, but also drive export and revenue growth in the long run. However, refocusing on this goal in these exceptional times also calls for exceptional initiative from both government and industry. Rather than take a piece-meal approach to reinventing Indian manufacturing, we must take a holistic, integrated approach to develop the entire ecosystem and connected value-chain.

Three key themes emerge as we look to renew the sector towards robust and sustainable growth:

- i. **Technology-enabled competitiveness:** The roadmap for the future must include adoption of technology enabled solutions. Technology integration in manufacturing can be a game-changer for India in tapping into future opportunities. A technology-enabled ecosystem doesn’t depend on government initiatives alone, but can be achieved through collaboration between industry, academia and government for programmes that foster innovation. A digital ecosystem can support growth of manufacturing sector given the tremendous advantage of data and insights.

The industry must also capitalize on transformative emerging technologies at this time. Adopting advanced analytics and investing in disruptive technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) enabled machine learning will be key to building a sustainable local manufacturing base, and offering disruptive solutions that have global potential.

- ii. **Resilience for Long-term:** The uncertainty brought on by the pandemic has showed us that adaptability is paramount for sustenance. Businesses need to take proactive measures around new ways of working that increase the organization's resilience, deepen customer relationships and build resilience against unpredictable events in the future. Companies must invest in future-proofing the organisation for the long term including measures to curb spends, secure cash reserves in the short term and build healthy governance.
- iii. **Adapting with Agility:** Disruptions in supply chains and offline buying channels have also made it crucial for businesses to not just adapt, but adapt with agility to survive. It has never been more relevant than today when we are dealing with a high degree of unpredictability and instability. Adapting with agility will help companies read the signals of change quickly, implement short term and long-term operational changes, and access opportunities faster, thus giving business a much-needed competitive edge.
- iv. **Ecosystem for Distributed Manufacturing :** At a recent webinar hosted by Rolls-Royce, the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Indian Government, Dr. K. Vijay Raghavan shared an inspiring idea for creating a distributed manufacturing ecosystem where we can create design in multiple locations, produce prototypes, and export tried and tested designs to multiple locations for manufacturing.

There is significant opportunity to build on this idea and work collaboratively to co-develop design and technologies, and build an ecosystem that enables manufacturing across locations. Political will and effective supply chains can enable all this to become a reality through a connected ecosystem of public-private partnership.

5. A new agenda

A thriving and refreshed manufacturing sector can be the core of building an Atmanirbhar Bharat, where the country can not only build self-reliance but also capture a share of the global market pie with the advantages of a connected economy. To do this, Indian manufacturing needs to shift its approach from cost arbitrage to a value-arbitrage approach. In a technologically enhanced future, cost arbitrage alone will no longer guarantee growth. India's future and the sustainability of the competitive advantage of Indian manufacturing will lie in developing value arbitrage, where we reinvent ourselves to emerge stronger and more resilient than ever .

The Japanese take huge and well deserved pride in the goods made in Japan and this infuses them with a nationalistic fervor, which is matchless in the world. If, we Indians, can do the same, there is no looking back or stopping the juggernaut of India's journey towards 'Atmanirbharta', the clarion call of the current Prime Minister.

This is an era of 'Parivartan' – time for some revolutionary changes. Our Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi has started campaigning for a multicolour revolution referring to a second green revolution with protein-rich pulses, a white revolution with cattle and livestock, a saffron 'energy' revolution with solar energy, and a blue revolution on clean water and the welfare of the fishermen. Among these, Green and White Revolution have already influenced the lives of the Indians to a great extent. As far as food security is concerned, India cannot compromise on food self-sufficiency and a number of short-term as well as long-term initiatives held to be taken. Green Revolution was aimed to increase the production of food-grains that resulted in a drastic reduction in imports. Because of this Green Revolution, shouldered by Dr M.S Swaminathan and agri-scientists, we are now self-sufficient in food-grains and have sufficient stock in the central pool and sometimes in a position to export food-grains also. Green Revolution brought a large scale farm mechanisation which created demand for different types of machines and chemical fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides, weedicides, etc. Subsequently, an agro based industry has created a large number of employments in the country.

White Revolution was led by the iconic efforts of the Milk Man and social entrepreneur, Dr Verghese Kurein. He revolutionized the lives of the rural women through Amul Dairy Cooperative movement. Operation Flood, made dairy farming India's largest self-sustaining industry and the largest rural employment sector providing a third of all rural income. It made India the world's largest milk producer, doubled the milk available for each person, and increased milk output four-fold in 30 years. He also made India self-sufficient in edible oils and fought against the oil kings, who used violent methods to enforce their dominance over the oilseed industry.

Leaders such as Dr Kurein, venture into such spaces, unimaginable at one point, but when conceptualized and fructified realistically, transform the lives and health of millions of fellow countrymen.

In fact, the rural artisans and even the food industry and Indian farmers will benefit a lot if the burgeoning urban middle and upper middle classes, take advantage of their home grown industries. An example in case, is the advice given by the fitness and wellness Guru, Rujuta Diwekar, who in all her talks and videos makes a huge case for the locally grown produce, which is both seasonal and nutritious. The age-old eating practices of our ancestors and our grandparents have proven to stand us in good stead, especially during the trying times

of the pandemic. Our immunity boosters have been the traditional home made drinks and diet, tempered with herbs and spices, turmeric, ginger and garlic. We, as people, can become self-reliant if we learn to transform our lives by following the examples set by such motivating leaders in different sectors .

When the pandemic began, there was no production of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits or COVID prevention vaccines in India. But due to aggressive research , production and a proactive leadership at the top , India became self-sufficient in the production of vaccines and PPE kits. The successful development of an indigenous supply chain of (PPE) kits in mere 60 days is an example for local manufacturers that self-reliance in a high-quality product is an achievable goal.

Dubbed the “pharmacy of the world”, India has now the largest vaccine-production capacity of any country. It therefore has a massive role to play in vaccinating the world. This includes resuming giving doses of Covax, the international vaccine-sharing initiative backed by the World Health Organization, upon which many low- and middle-income countries are highly reliant for supplies. India has started exporting doses through its “vaccine friendship” initiative, a diplomatic programme based around gifting vaccines to lower-income countries .

The Indian embassy in Iran, recently celebrated, the arrival of 1 million doses of Covaxin, a COVID vaccine developed in India by the pharmaceutical company Bharat Biotech. Bangladesh, Myanmar and Iran also recently received a million doses each of Covishield, the version of the Oxford/Astra-Zeneca vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India, the world’s single largest vaccine producer, headed by Adar Poonawallah . 100 crores of vaccination shots could be administered in India due to highly driven and visionary top political leadership backed by hard working scientists , researchers and doctors along with the entire medical fraternity. Being hailed internationally as a “vaccine superpower is no mean achievement and credit goes to all these transformational leaders who stood shoulder to shoulder in the hour of unprecedented health crisis posed by the Coronavirus pandemic.

The national government also seeks to provide a massive push to infrastructure and connectivity, including roadways, railways, waterways, as well as modernisation of ports and industries. The infrastructure revolution of India is in turn being driven by its urbanisation and the need to equip our cities with world class amenities. While the primary objective of the infrastructure push is to provide better quality of life to the country’s citizens, there is also an opportunity in investing in India’s future technical manpower.

The social media influencers also have set examples by exhorting men & women, to wear garments woven by our creative and prolific weavers. There

have been a sea-change in how we look at Khadi, Tussar, raw silk and other linen, jute materials, which not only are environmentally friendly but also raise the income levels of our poor weavers and artisans.

6. Exemplary leadership attributes of astute Nation Builders

There are at least five attributes of world-famous, transformational leaders which stand out, as in case of Abraham Lincoln, one of the most towering personalities that world has ever witnessed. These personality or character make-up helps in realization of hereto inconceivable success stories in a nation's history :

- i. Know what you stand for— Lincoln spoke against slavery despite warnings that doing so was political suicide. At a time when the nation was divided on the issue of slavery, Lincoln took the unpopular position that *“a house divided against itself cannot stand.”*
- ii. Value diverse opinions—Lincoln assembled a team of rivals, who worked at cross-purposes and yet brought these men onto his team because he believed the country's needs demanded the best talent to address the crisis created by the slavery issue that ignited the Civil War.
- iii. Think things through — Though self-educated, Lincoln was a voracious reader and lifetime learner. His thinking was shaped by his character, his grasp of human nature and his common sense approach that helped him arrive at pragmatic decisions that were aligned with his personal values.
- iv. Communicate clearly, calmly and often — Despite relentless and often conflicting pressure from all sides as a result of adverse conditions throughout his presidency, Lincoln remained calm, focused and unwavering in his vision, which he punctuated with humor to make simple points, win negotiations and lift spirits among his cabinet members, his army generals, the public and even himself.
- v. Learn from your mistakes — Lincoln was sure of himself. He harbored few insecurities and was not obsessed with power or position, which enabled him to admit errors freely, shoulder blame, learn from past mistakes and move forward.

The rich attributes enumerated above, are some of the most important ones that have driven India, in modern times, when political leaders, bureaucrats, captains of industries, common people themselves have tried to change themselves with time and taken India to self-sufficiency in many important sectors

that touch the lives of ordinary Indians. To lead others, one must first understand oneself. The strengths as a leader are anchored in one's core values that define how one thinks and acts as well as shapes future goals with purpose and vision.

7. The road ahead

In the modern, high paced, globalized world based on lightning changes in Information Technology, wizards like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos are known to be transformational and task-oriented leaders. Bezos had been able to help his company, Amazon, grow and expand over time because of his ability to envision and innovate. Similarly, Bill Gates, Microsoft Chief, is known to sit with his teams and make sure that they deliver his vision adroitly.

The youth has also responded well to the Prime Minister's clarion call to innovate, by spearheading start-up businesses. India is developing very fast and there have been many success stories in the past decade. So, this is an outstanding time for startups to flourish in India. There has been a lift in the number of new businesses surfacing in India ascribed to the technological and structural advancement in the nation.

Indian startups are continuing to attract investors from all over the world as business opportunities are rising. Thus, the government of India is also helping by funding the startups, and due to this, job opportunities are increasing. The coronavirus pandemic has shaken the whole world and caused an economic slowdown. But, there are several startups like Unacademy, Zoom which have got the wings amid the coronavirus pandemic and are setting the example of how to fight and survive situations like this. Nykaa, a woman-led start-up that found global-scale success recently, focusing primarily on the Indian market and the purchasing power of women, in a matter of nine years. Nykaa, under its leader, Falguni Nayar, as an Indian woman entrepreneur, has succeeded like never before, storming the bastion of male-headed startups. Its success should inspire many more women to shed their anxieties and brace entrepreneurship, powered by technology. If venture capital funds such entrepreneurs, social attitudes towards women's capabilities and ambitions can change drastically, propelling the Indian society to move closer to gender equality. If 50% of India's population is empowered, women can become self-reliant and self-sufficient.

Therefore, one may conclude that in order to guide India, which is on the threshold of becoming a major economic powerhouse, along with its vibrant democracy, the role of transformational leadership, in any milieu, political or social, is indeed monumental.

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