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Perspective Paper

Cultural and Religious Heritage of Servant Leadership in India

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Abstract

Servant Leadership is a contemporary philosophy of leadership suggesting that the most effective leaders serve those around them. It is a philosophy emphasising the prioritisation of serving others over oneself and is particularly aligned with non-Western traditions, especially in India. Servant leadership is interpreted and practised variably in Western and non-Western contexts, mirroring the cultural values and philosophical traditions inherent to these countries. This paper aims to illustrate the presence of a non-Western perspective of servant leadership within the religious doctrines and practices of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism in India. In contrast to Western models that prioritise individual empowerment and organisational achievement, the Indian perspective is profoundly rooted in the nation's spiritual, religious, and cultural heritage, offering significant insights for global leadership practices in an increasingly interconnected world. Future studies may investigate the integration of indigenous leadership concepts into modern global leadership frameworks.

Keywords: Cultural Lineage, Leadership, Religious Lineage, Servant Leadership, Servant Leadership in India
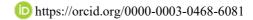
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Introduction

"Good leaders must first become good servants."

– Robert K. Greenleaf

The conception of leadership happened right at the beginning of the human evolution process. Without any scientific enquiry, the word 'leadership' was integrated into the technical vocabulary of organisational theory (Yukl, 2010). Leaders play a very important role in the success and failure of any team. Leadership is defined as a capability to influence a group towards the accomplishment of goals. Leaders are no longer taking the role of a solo or a hero leader, rather than leading from the front they must be able to be a servant serving their followers (Bolden et al., 2003). Leadership can be termed as a process which involves non-coercive influence by the leader on the followers for the accomplishment of desired goals (Greenberg, 2011). One of the great verses of the Bhagavad Gita as mentioned below also illustrates that the greatest individuals are those who recognize the inherent equality of all living things and treat their fellow humans' pleasures and sufferings as though they were their own:

ātmaupamyena sarvatra samaṁ paśhyati yo 'rjuna

sukhaṁ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṁ sa yogī paramo mataḥ

(Bhagavad Gita 6.32, trans. Easwaran, 2007)

The same leadership philosophy is evident in servant leadership, which emphasises the importance of addressing the needs of followers rather than focusing on the leader's personal interests. Robert K. Greenleaf first instituted the term 'servant leadership' in a seminal paper titled 'The Servant as Leader' (Greenleaf, 1970). This leadership style introduces a unique aspect to contemporary leadership literature by prioritising service as the primary goal. Servant leadership prioritises the leader's role as a servant (Greenleaf, 1977). It offers a thoughtful examination of the intricacies involved in leadership dynamics. It can be considered one of the earliest examples of leadership, as is fitting for all major religious founders.

Several studies have concentrated on elucidating servant leadership within certain cultures, predominantly those linked to the Western perspective. While servant leadership is most impactful in the United States, its global popularity is increasing in modern times (Merino, 2016). Merino (2016) examined the perspectives and implementations of servant leadership in Latin America and the United States, asserting that servant leadership is a leadership style that has garnered increased interest due to the advantages it offers within a community or organisation. The Bible

articulates the servant leadership concept, highlighting that those who aspire to greatness must prioritise serving others. It emphasises that those who wish to be first must embrace the role of a servant, as exemplified by the Son of Man, who came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10 : 43–45, The Holy Bible, 2011). There are numerous contemporary publications where servant leadership is linked to the Christian faith (Banks & Powell, 2000; Blackaby & Blackaby, 2001; Ford, 1991; Sanders, 1994; Wright, 2000; Sendjaya et al., 2008). In conjunction with a Latin America study, Han et al. (2010) undertook additional research, recognising that servant leadership exists in both Western and Chinese cultures, and analysing its practice through a cultural lens, grounded in empirical evidence.

Although the conceptualisation of servant leadership was done by Greenleaf in 1980s, the concept has been present for a long time. In most religious perspectives, selfless acts are closely related to servanthood. It reverberates with fundamental principles and values found in many faiths, and traditions, and it has connections with numerous religions. The concept of servant leadership has been evident in a variety of religious and non-religious perspectives (Fry, 2003; Hicks, 2002). The concept of service is a fundamental principle of all main religions (Sendjaya et al., 2008). For example, in 'Journey to the East,' Hesse (1956) alludes to the Bhagavad Gita.

This paper explores servant leadership from an Indian perspective. Spears (2010) delineated ten essential elements of servant leadership, as articulated in Greenleaf's writings: listening, empathy, healing, persuasion, awareness, conceptualisation, stewardship, foresight, commitment to the development of others, and community building. These attributes are profoundly embedded in Indian philosophy and traditions, and they are intricately linked to various facets of Indian culture. In the 4th Century B.C., an Indian scholar articulated that the king, in his capacity as a leader, serves as a compensated servant who allocates the state's resources to the populace (Rangarajan, 1992). The Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' translated as the world is one family appears in both the Rig Veda and the Maha Upanishad.

India's culture primarily exhibits servant leadership through a variety of customs, especially humility and altruism. Humility means being humble. A leader can accept mistakes and learn from others irrespective of the position and designation being held by him. In India, many of the greatest leaders in the past as well as in the present times have practised Servant leadership through the display of humility (Mishra & Mahapatra, 2018). Swami Vivekananda defined a leader as someone who has a bigger picture and makes sure that those under him advance with him. He claims that if one

does not consider the growth of others, one cannot grow (Chaudhuri, 2016). He was the originator of the Vedantic philosophy, which holds that humans are special among all creatures and that God resides in all of them (Chaudhuri, 2016).

Another most pronounced characteristic of Indian culture is altruism, which is expressed in willing subordination. This is a selfless act done for the benefit and service of others (Carroll & Patterson, 2016) describing the sharing nature among the Indian community which displays the altruistic nature of Servant Leadership. Mahatma Gandhi is known for practising this characteristic of Indian culture. His approach of humble living and serving others while guiding the populace exemplifies the Servant Leadership model (Qadir, 1939). He is considered a paragon of leadership within Indian culture.

Despite extant literature affirming the consistent presence of servant leadership within India's religious and cultural context, there remains a substantial opportunity for further discussion to establish a robust non-Western view on this topic. Hence, this perspective paper aims to establish a theoretical alignment between existing literary work and research papers to identify the existence of servant leadership in India's cultural and religious practices. The paper commences with an introduction to servant leadership from both Western and non-Western perspectives, considering a comprehensive review of the existing literature, and subsequently examines its roots in India's long-standing cultural and religious heritage. The paper provides a novel viewpoint on the non-Western perspective, which challenges the prevalent discussions in the existing literature that align the concept of servant leadership with Western cultures.

Theory of Servant Leadership

The philosophy of servant leadership emphasises the well-being, empowerment and development of followers over the leader's own interest. To introduce the concept of Servant Leadership, Greenleaf (1970) stated that "The servant leader... begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve... Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 7). 'Journey to the East' written by Hesse (1956) in which the servant, Leo, eventually rises to leadership and demonstrates his dedication to others during a spiritual journey, influenced Greenleaf's understanding of 'servant leadership'. The story of Leo demonstrates that within the seemingly contradictory and illogical coexistence of leadership and service, a strong sense of leadership occurs that starts with the innate desire to serve first. Greenleaf asserted that the core lesson of the work is that an exemplary leader must initially serve and acquire experience as

a servant, which is vital to their greatness (Spears, 2010). Servant leadership is founded on the notion that the servant-leader recognises a moral duty not only to pursue organisational success but also to take into account all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and other engaged parties (Greenleaf, 1977).

In the present organisational context, there is found to be significant improvement in employee performance via the use of servant leadership traits as a means to maximise follower potential (Liden et al., 2014). Servant leaders deliver both evident and emotional support to their followers, enabling them to achieve their full potential (Liden et al., 2014). Luthans (2002) asserts that servant leadership embodies positive organisational behaviour. Beck (2014) identified a correlation between altruism and servant leadership, emphasising that servant leadership involves a dedication to serving others. Vân Dierendonck (2011) established a correlation between servant leadership and increased employee loyalty, sense of fairness, and trust. Empirical data indicates that a servant leader's leadership style favourably correlates with organisational success, employee productivity, creativity, and customer service orientation, while adversely correlating with turnover intentions (Liden et al., 2014). Despite the diverse vocabulary employed in many definitions of servant leadership, three primary traits initially articulated by Greenleaf (1977) consistently serve as foundational elements of the notion. These are:

Service. Servanthood towards followers, an organisation, or a community. This component may include service orientation, follower development, organisational stewardship, follower empowerment, covenantal relationships, responsible morality, facilitating subordinate growth, and prioritising subordinates, as detailed in the alternative descriptions of servant leadership.

Humility. Prioritising the well-being of followers over the leader's self-interest. Alternative formulations of servant leadership may encompass relational power, emotional healing, altruistic calling, moral love, credibility, altruism, authentic self, voluntary subordination, transcendental spirituality, and ethical conduct as essential elements of this dimension.

Vision. Possessing both vision and the capacity to persuade others to share it and help an organization establish a common vision. The aforementioned alternative servant leadership formulations' concepts of talents, influence, credibility, transformation of influence, wisdom, and producing value for the community are all included in this dimension.

Countries in the southern Asian cultural clusters, such as India, favour leaders exhibiting charismatic or value-based leadership, but simultaneously highlighting a self-protective approach to leadership that prioritises status and maintaining a face (House et al., 2004; Northouse, 2013). This discrepancy indicates that Patterson's (2003) servant leadership approach may be influenced by and dependent on cultural contexts (House et al., 2004).

Following Greenleaf's death, Larry Spears took on the position of President and CEO of the Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership. He delineated eight prominent attributes of servant leadership. These are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, and stewardship (Spears, 2010). The following is the comprehension of how these attributes manifest in servant leadership practices:

Listening. A good leader understands the value of being a good listener. Historically, servant leaders have been regarded for their skills in behaviour and communication. Servant leaders make sure that they listen to their followers intently and absorb what they can offer. Listening encompasses both verbal and nonverbal communication. Listening, along with reflective intervals, is crucial for the development and welfare of the followers (Spears, 2010).

Empathy. Servant leaders are believed to be understanding and empathising with others. Everyone enjoys having their distinct spirits acknowledged and appreciated. Even when followers aren't giving their best efforts, servant leaders can still recognise when they have the best of intentions (Spears, 2010).

Healing. The human heart is fragile and time and again individuals may feel hurt and frustrated at work due to various reasons including the leader's behaviour. When emotionally hurt, employees may create serious obstructions to the goals and objectives of the organisation. Servant leaders can identify those in need of emotional support and assist them in the process of recovery. A nuanced message is conveyed to those being served and guided when, within the agreement between servant-leader and follower, there exists a mutual recognition that the pursuit of completeness is a shared endeavour (Greenleaf, 2002). This fosters ties among team members, allowing them to operate cohesively.

Awareness. A key attribute of servant leaders is general awareness, specifically self-awareness. An understanding of the moral, ethical, and value-based aspects of

organisational climate allows a leader to better grasp conflicts of interest. This is a distinctive quality of a leader if he can empathise with others. According to Greenleaf, awareness does not provide comfort; instead, it serves as a counterpoint that represents a remarkable administrative skill inherent in servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977, 2002). It serves as both a disruptor and a catalyst for awareness. Effective leaders tend to be highly alert and appropriately concerned. They do not pursue comfort. They possess an intrinsic sense of tranquillity (Greenleaf, 1977, 2002).

Persuasion. Servant leaders believe in constant persuasion rather than the use of authoritative power (Spears, 2010). Servant leaders believe that effective group concurrence is essential for facilitating change. The foundation of collaboration is the ability to influence others to align with the prevailing consensus without the use of coercion. This represents a subtle yet significant distinction between a servant and a traditional leader. Servant leaders are aware that persuasion is key, but they avoid using power to coerce others into doing anything.

Conceptualisation. Servant leaders possess a broad perspective and the ability to see far beyond the current circumstances (Liden et al., 2008). This can act as a catalyst for decision-making or problem-solving in a crucial situation. Sometimes, it seems unpractical to see beyond the day-to-day operational objective, and those with this approach are not trusted often. Servant leaders are known for being able to maintain a careful balance between abstract thought and a practical approach.

Foresight. Conceptualisation is closely associated with foresight. A visionary servant leader can better understand the lessons of history, the current realities, and the possible consequences of future decisions. It relates to intuition.

Stewardship. This characteristic is essential for leaders, as they are accountable for the organisation's effectiveness or otherwise. Stewardship refers to the responsibility of managing something on behalf of another party (Block, 2016). Like stewardship, servant leadership is predicated on addressing the needs of others. It is a dedication to prioritising persuasion and transparency over dominance. Like stewardship, servant leadership is based on delivering the needs of others. It is a dedication to prioritising persuasion and transparency over dominance.

Commitment to the Growth of People. The principal aim of servant leadership is to promote the development of each team member. Servant leaders believe in the 'intangible' value of every performer other than their 'tangible' work-related

performance (van Dierendonck, 2011). Therefore, servant leaders feel the responsibility to nurture the professional as well as personal development of every employee (Liden et al., 2008).

Building Community. Community is an expression of the real workforce that operates outside the confines of the corporate premises. Servant leaders oppose the shift from localised communities to large institutions as the main influence on human existence (Spears, 2010). They suggest that entrepreneurs partner with other organisations to create an authentic community that benefits all stakeholders.

Non-Western Perspective of Servant Leadership

As stated by Farling et al. (1999) and Spears (1995), servant leadership has been primarily investigated and analysed in the American context. Various biblical explanations of servant leadership, as articulated by Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), indicate that the concept is fundamental to Judeo-Christian theological discourse. Jesus Christ was seen as a servant leader. Servanthood defines servant leadership, a concept traditionally cited in the Bible, where seven significant Greek terms—*diakonos, doulos, huperetes, therapon, oiketes, sundoulos, and pais*—are frequently used to signify ''servant'' in connection with leaders (Getz, 1984). As a result, many contemporary discussions on servant leadership exhibit a distinctly Christian perspective (Ford, 1991; Sanders, 1994; Banks & Powell, 2000; Wright, 2000; Blackaby & Blackaby, 2001). Despite the plenty of extensive research on servant leadership in the West, there is a paucity of studies examining the reception of its principles among Indian and other Asian populations. The philosophies of ancient Chinese and, Indian civilisations encompass the foundational concepts of servant leadership dating back over 2,000 years (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2010).

According to a study on Eastern Chinese women and entrepreneurial leadership, the majority of women adopted an achievement-oriented leadership style that was characterised by high initiating structure and high consideration (Li et al., 2013). Eastern cultural values, which perceive society or organisations as a collective entity, are consistent with this (Li et al., 2013). These Eastern beliefs assert that harmony and homogeneity are generated by a rigid structure. A collectivist ideal emphasises prioritising employee relationships. This study exhibits the influence of collectivist culture on leadership theory and practice.

Laozi (1963), a Chinese philosopher, developed the notion of servant leadership in the fifth century B.C. He asserted that the one who diverts attention is the ultimate

authority: he stated that the sage is humble and succinct in discourse. Upon the fulfilment of his objective, the populace declares, 'We have achieved it alone.' Confucian ethics in Chinese culture, which includes principles such as *ren* (humaneness), *yi* (appropriateness), *li* (ritual), *zhong* (conscientiousness), and *shu* (mutuality) (Cheng, 1991), have created a normative behavioural framework for individuals (Zhang et al., 2010; Cone, Everett & Elkin 2010). The Confucian notion of ren, denoting the assistance of others in asserting their positions (thereby enabling the leader to adopt a preferred stance) and guiding them towards a shared objective (which the leader also seeks to accomplish), effectively encapsulates the fundamental principle of servant leadership: serving others to realise the organisational aim.

Although servant leadership, as a universal concept embodies core principles like compassion, empathy, humility, and integrity which remain consistent globally. However, due to cultural and societal interventions, the application and practice of servant leadership show some unique characteristics in Western and non-Western contexts. In the highly individualistic society (Granello, 2024) in Western countries, servant leadership promotes egalitarianism (Reed et al., 2011). However, in the Eastern perspective, clear significance is displayed towards collective well-being (Li et al., 2013), moral leadership and relational harmony. In this context, this paper discusses some key characteristics of servant leadership in the Indian society

Servant Leadership in the Indian Culture

According to Sinha (1980) "Indian mythology is full of instances where ideals are concretised in terms of what great men did; and the people when in doubt about the appropriateness of their conduct, are advised to look to their supervisors, to seek their guidance, and to follow their directions" (p. 52).

The Arthashastra, an ancient Indian manuscript ascribed to Kautilya (Chanakya) dated approximately 2500 years ago serves as a fundamental source on administration, economics, and politics in ancient India. Chanakya, who served as the prime minister during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya in India had significantly contributed to the augmentation of Chandragupta's authority, facilitating the rise of the largest empire on the Indian subcontinent (Nallisamy, 2023). Although it is recognised for its pragmatic approach to governance, the Arthashastra incorporates aspects of servant leadership, especially on the ruler's obligation to prioritise people's welfare, act judiciously, safeguard the vulnerable, and govern with humility. Kautilya's leadership style, while predominantly strategic and power-centric, reveals that the foundational tenets of service and accountability towards others indicate that

servant leadership is not alien to the Indian heritage, even within predominantly secular and political literature. The esteemed author of Arthashastra, Kautilya, articulated in the fourth century BC that the ruler (leader) ought to regard as beneficial, not what gratifies his own desires, but what satisfies the needs of his subjects (followers) and the monarch serves as a compensated steward, partaking in the state's resources alongside the populace. The Arthashastra is a pragmatic treatise that could only have been authored by an individual who has executed the strategies he advocated (Rangarajan, 1992). Kautilya provided remarkable leadership counsel to King Chandragupta Maurya, who governed North India in the fourth century B.C., serving in the capacity of his minister and advisor. Upon taking on the responsibilities of a monarch, he expressed that his own happiness is intrinsically linked to that of his subjects; their welfare is his welfare. He declared that he would not regard as beneficial what pleases him personally, but rather, he would deem as good that which brings joy to his subjects. The responsibilities are innate to the construct of Servant Leadership.

Servant Leadership and Religion in India

As religion is one of the predominant factors behind any culture, it is assumed that servant leadership can be traced in various religions**.** The culture and traditions of India are significantly influenced by Indian religion (Khanna, 2023). The pious land of India has seen the origination of many world religions. Hinduism is the predominant religion in the country. Gandhi (1947) once mentioned about Hinduism, "it is more than a religion; it is a way of life" (p. 446). Leadership rooted in service has consistently been a fundamental aspect of Indian religion. In India, a leader is regarded as commendable when they exemplify both efficacy and integrity (Mulla & Krishnan, 2012). Devdutt Pattanaik posits that in the context of Indian leadership, a leader should emulate Lord Vishnu or Lord Krishna rather than Indradev, the sovereign of heaven (Pattanaik, 2016). This occurs because Indra seeks personal gratification, whereas Lord Vishnu assumes the position of sustainer and endeavours to fulfil the needs of others (Pattanaik, 2016) which resonates with the principles of servant leadership.

Traditional Indian culture has placed significant emphasis on religion. The notion of dharma (roughly translated as duty, derived from its Sanskrit meaning) has served as a guiding principle for Hindu civilisation in India for millennia. Servant leadership is linked to a diverse array of both spiritual and non-spiritual ideas (Fry, 2003; Hicks, 2002). 'Journey to the East' by Hesse alludes to Eastern religious traditions, with a

particular emphasis on Hinduism (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Kurth (2003) argued that the notion of service is imparted by all significant religions (e.g. Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism) as well as agnostic philosophies (e.g. Moral philosophy, Siddha yoga, Taoism).

Servant Leadership in Hinduism

In India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, two of the most popular Hindu mythologies, are also the most well-known sources for leadership lessons (Pattanaik, 2016). Anupama and Aggarwal (2020), in their study on qualitative analysis of Indian epics, highlight how Lord Rama's traits and actions exemplify servant leadership.

The servant leadership style encompasses prioritising the needs of others, attending to followers' requirements, and fostering the development of the group. The *Bhagavad Gita*, the revered text of Hinduism, advocates for a humanistic and inclusive leadership that enables leaders to attain a heightened degree of consciousness. The *Bhagavad Gita* (proclaims that persistent dedication to the betterment of the world through selfless action leads one to achieve the ultimate purpose of existence *Bhagavad Gita* 3.19–3.20, Easwaran, 2007). Lord Krishna reiterated that a leader should serve as a mentor and coach, applying his wisdom to direct the well-trained and knowledgeable army of the Pandavas (Chatterjee, 2022). The teachings of the Gita place great emphasis on the tenets of Karma Yoga, or selfless service. It emphasizes serving the greater good and teaches carrying out tasks without regard to the results. The 'Guru-Shishya' tradition in in ancient India used to place a high importance on the mentoring, wisdom-sharing, and reciprocal respect that characterize a relationship between a guru and a disciple. According to Hindu philosophy, every selfless action, Arjuna, emanates from the eternal and infinite divine essence; the divine is inherent in every act of service. According to Easwaran's (2007) translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* (3.15–3.18), those who contravene this principle, succumbing to sensory indulgence for personal gratification while neglecting the needs of others, squander their existence. Consequently, it is advisable for Hindus to partake in acts of service to avert a wasted life.

Several leadership principles, such as *Loksangrah* (referring to "world maintenance" or fulfilling one's responsibilities for the greater social and natural environment) and *Swadhrma* (self-dharma, denoting the duty or work that yields profound happiness and tranquillity of the mind), have been derived from the *Bhagavad Gita* (Easwaran, 2007, 3.15–3.18).

The *Bhagavad Gita* asserts that a leader is a humanist who behaves selflessly and demonstrates profound personal involvement for their followers (Rarick & Nickerson, 2009). The *Bhagavad Gita* characterises an exemplary leader as one who possesses no hatred towards any entity, demonstrates global friendliness and compassion, remains unattached and free from ego, maintains equanimity in both joy and sorrow, and exemplifies forgiveness (*Bhagavad Gita* 12.13, trans. Sivananda, 2000). The *Bhagavad Gita*, as a component of the Mahabharata, includes numerous allusions to self-sacrifice for the collective benefit. It also indicated that effective leaders embody constructive energy and strive to act justly by considering others with empathy and compassion.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also states that innocuousness, forgiveness, resilience, purity, and freedom from malice and conceit are attributes belonging to those who possess divine qualities (*Bhagavad Gita* 16.2, trans. Sivananda, 2000) which are closely aligned with fundamental traits of servant leadership like empathy, humility and emotional healing (Spears, 2010). The *Bhagavad Gita* also identifies foresight and vision, characteristics of a servant leader (Spears, 2010), as essential qualities of a leader (Rarick, 2007; Sharma & Talwar, 2004). Similarly, Hinduism has always valued traditional leaders for their capacity to listen well, another key characteristic of servant leadership (Spears, 2010). Hindu religious leaders illustrate the magnitude of communication in enhancing the decision-making procedure concerning the matters for which they hold responsibility (Gottschalk, 2013). They are committed to paying attention to those who rely on them to guide them spiritually.

Servant Leadership and Buddhism

Buddhism places significant emphasis on selflessness, kindness, and altruism. In Buddhism, the desire to aid others is associated with Right Action, an element of the Noble Eightfold Path that culminates in true enlightenment (Goldstein, 2013). He contends that Buddha defined 'Right Action' as "avoid what is unskilful, do what is good, purify the mind" (Goldstein, 2013, p. 379).

Servant leadership symbolizes the principles and values of Gautam Buddha. The concepts underlying Buddhism clearly illustrate the fundamental principle of servant leadership. According to Buddha's philosophy, "being" leads to "doing," so Buddhism advocates for the kind of person we should be rather than offering advice on how we should behave. The Buddhist literature includes references to compassion, which is a crucial quality of servant leaders. Servant leadership is intrinsically linked to the idea of exemplifying compassion (*karuna*), a key concept in Buddhism. *Karuna*

is embodied through empathy and healing which are deeply rooted concepts in the Buddhist philosophy (Sharma, 2007). It states that kindness toward others cultivates compassion. In addition, the Buddha forbade stealing, taking a life, lying, being drunk, making false claims, and engaging in sexual misconduct. One comprehends the deeper meaning of Right Action when one thinks about it in the context of serving others. By exploring its various dimensions of service, such as ethics, community engagement, and empathy, people can enhance their comprehension of Right Action.

Servant Leadership in Sikhism

The correlation between servanthood and selflessness is also evident in Sikhism, which asserts that objectives of their lives remain unfulfilled without selfless service; true action resides in service (Adi Granth, 2015). McLeod (1996) defines a Sikh as a 'learner' or a 'seeker of truth'.

Sikhs fundamentally regard all individuals, regardless of gender, as equals (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Their belief system encompasses a profound sense of social duty referred to as 'Seva.' For Sikhs, serving others turns into a means of showing love. Serving others means doing so with prayer. Worship is expressed via service. In Sikhism Genuine service is driven by love. Eliminating fear is only one aspect of serving with love. Eliminating the concept of self is another aspect of it. When Sikhs refer to seva as selfless service, they mean this. Thus, the Sikh concept of seva unites the domains of justice and spirituality. This dates to their early years of operation when they used to have a sizable volunteer-run common kitchen. The term "langar" refers to this custom, which involves providing daily free vegetarian meals to all guests, irrespective of their gender, socioeconomic class, religion, or cultural background (Khalsa, 2017). Sikhs still follow this custom, which they carry out in their places of worship, known as Gurdwaras or temples. In Sikh teachings, many terms like as *simran* (remembrance), *anand* (bliss), and *sahaj* (equipoise) are used to describe this level of realization. This revelation, according to Sikh teachings, is a happy, selfless, and all-consuming kind of deep love which closely corresponds to the traits of servant leadership including selflessness, empathy and inner peace (Spears, 2010). Pattnaik (2013) has also noted a similar correlation between Sikh teachings and leadership principles.

In summary, it is significantly deficient that serving others is deemed a Christian perspective on leadership, and most studies on servant leadership have been conducted inside Western professional, and institutional societies. Although it is a Christian virtue, it is not limited to Christianity. The ancient texts and scriptures of Hinduism highlight essential qualities for effective leadership aimed at societal

benefit, embodying the principles of servant leadership (Ganguly & Majumder, 2022). Sikhism also emphasises the inherent connection between servanthood and selflessness, asserting that without selfless service one's spiritual goals remain unaccomplished (Adi Granth, 2015). In Buddhism, the concept of servanthood is associated with humility to attain deep understanding, indicating that if an individual exploits others for personal gain, they will themselves endure servitude; conversely, if they dedicate themselves to the welfare of others, they will attain a sense of lordliness (Shantideva, 2008).

Conclusion

There is much literary evidence in India indicating that servant leadership has been supported and practised in this nation for an extended period. Servant leadership reflects values ingrained in Indian traditions and philosophy, and it is closely aligned with several aspects of Indian culture and religion. While both Western and non-Western perspectives of servant leadership prioritise serving others, the principal distinctions reside in their foundational philosophical and cultural beliefs. The Western model emphasises individual empowerment and ethical leadership within an egalitarian framework, whereas the non-Western model prioritises communal well-being, social harmony, and moral duty within a hierarchical and spiritual environment (House et al., 2004; Nisbett, 2003). Both methodologies provide significant insights for global leadership practices, prompting leaders to modify their methods according to the cultural and organisational contexts in which they function. The future of research on servant leadership holds significant potential beyond the frameworks of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism in India and the rest of the world. By examining the profound cultural and philosophical traditions of Islam, indigenous cultures, Confucianism, Ubuntu, Taoism, Judaism, and secular paradigms, further research work can enhance the comprehension of servant leadership as a genuinely global and diverse practice. This will enhance our comprehension and elevate the importance of servant leadership in addressing modern organisational, societal, and global challenges.

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