

**INDIAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is based on an exploratory study of Indian military leadership that was delimited to the indigenous perspective and veterans' own interpretations of effective military leadership when preparing and leading soldiers into combat. The primary aim is to present our initial findings based on the analysis of the first wave of eight interviews with mainly senior Sikh veterans. A secondary aim is to describe the development of a codebook as an analytical platform for the initial and subsequent interviews. Thirty-codes emerged from the qualitative analysis, which were associated with military leadership in India. Five of the codes were identified as a local or 'emic' construct: *welfare of the men, regiment pride, an explicit religious orientation, importance of religion in motivation, and the preference for blind obedience by the jawans (soldiers)*. Additionally, a codebook was developed that consisted of 14 parent nodes and 24 child nodes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is based on the expert, informed interviews of eight Indian military leaders who experienced combat. The primary aim is to present our initial findings based on the analysis of the first wave of interviews with mainly senior Sikh veterans. A secondary aim is to describe the development of a codebook as an analytical platform for the initial and subsequent interviews. To our knowledge, our paper is the first academic study on Indian military leadership, which contrasts starkly with the established stream of Western research on military leaders. Rigorous, scholarly research on Western military leadership arguably began with Otis' (1950) study of US soldiers during the Korean War. Similar scholarly work on Indian military leadership is missing, despite the wealth of military memoirs and biographies (e.g., Issar, 2009; Rao, 2001; Sing, 2013) that have been published.

In tackling this complex topic, our paper responds to a call for indigenous research to help extend literature beyond the acknowledged Western hegemony on leadership studies (Panda and Gupta, 2007). The central issue in the study of leadership in different societies is the issue of universality (i.e., etic) versus cultural contingency (i.e., emic) of leadership effectiveness (House and Hanges, 2004). The treatment of culture tends to be bipolar with etic and emic reflecting different philosophical approaches regarding the generalizability of variables across different settings (Morris et al., 1999). Universalists argue that certain leadership behaviors are comparable across cultures, while culture-contingents believe that effective leader behaviors are culture specific. We see “indigenous research” as a bridge between the local context and extant literature as it generally refers to studies about local phenomena that contains concepts or variables that are *unique* to the local context (Li, 2011).

Second, the study of military leadership has been a rich source of theoretical development for the civilian sector in the U.S. (e.g., Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco, and Wau, 1999; Bass and Avolio, 2000; Beng-Chong and Ployhart, 2004). As discussed in Harvard Business Review's spotlight on *Leadership Lessons from the Military* (November 2010), the leadership lessons that can be learned from the military are both important and highly relevant, thus we argue that the study of military leadership in India would contribute to the understanding and development of Indian leadership for the private sector. Other studies have identified this need and have focused their attention on examining leadership in extreme situations (Weiss, 2010) or crises (Groysberg, 2010; Fraher 2011).

Third, this paper responds to the major criticism that there is limited research to date that uses a qualitative approach to examine leadership in context (Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002). Contemporary researchers in international management are being urged to go beyond the 'context-sensitive' approach used to extend or generalize existing (and mainly U.S. based) studies in non-Western contexts (Panda and Gupta, 2007; Tung, 2003). Tsui (2004) further argues that contextualization must be a "deliberate aspect of the theory and research process" (p. 498). This qualitative study of military leadership in a natural setting adds to the theoretical underpinnings of leadership research.

Finally, research in the Indian context may yield insight for both organizations and their leaders, within and beyond India's borders. India has emerged as the fourth largest economy globally with a high growth rate and has steadily improved its global ranking in terms of per capita income (Hindu, 2012). India is also a nation beset with several problems: unstable

neighboring countries, a steady in-flow of illegal immigrants, and active insurgencies, in addition to rampant, local corruption.

To summarize, there has been little research on Indian (military) leadership, a notable shortcoming given that India is a large, vibrant democracy with a globalized economy, in addition to a long-standing Western ally. Moreover, much of the leadership research, in general, is Western-centric and has been quantitative or conducted within an academic setting, thus examining a context-specific phenomenon embedded in a real-world environment greatly increases the utility of research findings, and enhances communication with a particular audience (Blair and Hunt, 1986).

Since our research is an exploratory study of indigenous leadership, it is essential to capture *emic* constructs through the use of qualitative data, while not ignoring the rich theoretical development already available in military leadership. Accordingly, researchers suggest that combining *etic* and *emic* perspectives can offer a synergy in stimulating meaningful research, while the integration of both perspectives helps overcome limitations of modeling culture (Morris, Leung, Ames, and Lickel, 1999). Moreover, integration of these two diametrically opposed approaches may also help address the increase in the degree of fragmentation of leadership research, thus the study adopted an integrated *etic-emic* approach.

We begin by first providing a brief overview of the extant literature on military leadership and ethos, followed by a discussion on the available studies on Indian (military) leadership. Next, we describe our method and the development of the codebook. In our discussion, we present our findings, along with limitations and directions for future research.

## ***MILITARY LEADERSHIP***

First, it is necessary to clarify what does and what does not constitute "military leadership research" (Wong, Bliese, and McGurk, 2003). The most common approach focuses on studies that use military samples to test theories that have relevance across a wide range of organizations—or what Blair and Hunt (1986) call a context-free orientation. The second approach is to leverage the unique characteristics of the military and focus on studies that explore leadership within a military context. This is a context-specific orientation (Blair and Hunt, 1986), which requires more in-depth knowledge of the military and is more likely to reflect the essence of what constitutes military leadership.

A second important distinction is the critical distinction between military and civilian leadership in that subordinates may be asked to risk their lives and to possibly take lives to achieve organizational goals (Prince and Tumlin, 2004). With this *sine qua non* of military service comes an enhanced and profound accountability of military leaders who are deemed responsible for everything that their unit does or fails to do. In military vernacular, this is called total or unlimited accountability. The paradox for military leaders is that while they are tasked to protect their soldiers from harm, they are also required to achieve operational goals, regardless of the potential life-or-death consequences for some of their soldiers (Langtry, 1983). Due to space constraints, a thorough review of the various knowledge, skills, and abilities (i.e., competencies) that have been associated with effective military leadership is not possible. However, a competency profile (See Table 1) was developed by Penwell and Nicolas (1990) in a meta-analysis of the ideal leader in extreme conditions such as found in the Antarctic (e.g., Palinkas

and Suedfield, 2007), mountaineering (e.g., Bonington, 1987), and among combat air crews (e.g., Halpin, 1954) .

Insert Table 1 about here

Wong et al. (2003) note that due to the large number of soldiers that direct leaders command, military studies typically aggregate unit ratings of performance as a way of studying leadership effectiveness. Thus in a military context, leadership efficacy is based on the cohesion of the unit, or what sociologists call the ‘primary group’, meaning “those small social groupings in which social behavior is governed by intimate face-to-face relations” (Janowitz and Little, 1974:93). Although unit outcomes are not examined as the specific focus of this study, a unit’s fighting power as measured by its cohesion in combat is a central measure of leader influence and associated efficacy. These constructs have been introduced briefly to provide a clearer understanding of the follower motivation implicit in military leadership. The leadership environment influences the members of the entire unit where relations of dependency and total mutual responsibility connect individuals into a human task-driven whole (Gal, 1986; Popper and Ronen, 1992), and is a reflection of a strong culture where a clear set of norms and expectations permeate the entire organization (House and Hanges, 2004). This strong culture is closely associated with a military ethos, which in turn helps shape and defines what is considered effective military leadership within a Western context.

### ***Military ethos***

A professional ethos is defined as that “set of normative self-understandings which for the members define the profession’s corporate identity, its code of conduct and, for the officers

in particular, its social worth” (Burk, 1999:52). As Huntington (1972:61) further notes, “the management of violence” as legitimated by society is the key principle underlying the military ethos. At the individual level, military service is an immersion experience that can affect the personality, skills, aspirations, goals, and career directions quite broadly at a transitional and formative time of life (Cohen, Segal and Temme, 1986:303). Moreover, the combat unit experience also fosters certain personal behavioral features such as taking initiative, risk taking, flexibility, fast adaptation to a new environment, team building, mutual support, and self-efficacy (Avrahami and Lerner, 2003). Additionally, subordinates are expected to carry out the lawful orders of their superiors without question. As Huntington (1972:79) makes clear, the military ethic holds that “war is the instrument of politics, that the military are the servants of the statesman . . . and exalts obedience as the highest virtue of military men”.

In a Western military, ethical principles stem from concepts of personal integrity, duty, honor, and country. The laws of war can be traced back to practices which emerged during the latter half of the middle ages and as mitigated by medieval laws of chivalry and by the influence of Christianity (Carr, 1978). These concepts are horizontally manifested informally through personal, collegial, and “brotherhood” linkages between professionals, while the vertical or bureaucratic linkages act as formal control mechanisms. Within a total institution such as the military (Goffman, 1961), earlier sources of socialisation (e.g. family, religious and education institutions) may be overridden by professional dictates. Huntington (1993) argues, however, that the professional military ethic is both timeless and global, as long as the inherent nature of the military function remains the same. However, cultural studies suggest that the interpretation of what is ethical varies across cultures (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2000; Triandis, 1972).



Although studies of cultural values of different nationalities in military academies confirmed differences existed (Soeters, 1997; Soeters and Recht, 1998), a supranational military culture was also found which, compared to business, is “relatively bureaucratic (specifically: hierarchical) and institutional (that is relatively less inclined towards income, career and private life)” (Soeters and Recht, 1998:183). The implication is that military personnel of different nationalities should be able to work together with relatively few conflicts (Soeters and Bos-Bakx, 2003). Other studies also suggest that a shared military professionalism seems to provide a framework of understanding that can—to a certain extent—help overcome cultural differences (See Moskos 1976/1998; Elron, Halevey, Ben-Ari, and Shamir 2003; and Elron, Shamir, and Ben-Ari 1999).

### ***INDIAN LEADERSHIP***

There has been scant examination of the Indian military leadership in the field of management scholarly studies, thus our literature review was broadened to include studies of Indian leadership that explicitly focused on an indigenous context. The investigation of indigenous leadership in India may be traced back to the 1980s when scholars became interested on the impact of Indian culture on management practices (Panda and Gupta, 2007). One approach attempted to reinterpret insights from religious and ancient writings (e.g., Chakraborty, 1987; 1991), while another approach was oriented in sociological and anthropological studies (e.g. Chattopadhyay, 1975; Sinha, 1977) that were related to cultural diversity within India. In the 1990s, several cross-locational studies were conducted by Sinha and his associates, which identified locationally invariant (pan-Indian) cultural constructs (See Sinha et al., 1994; 2001; 2002; 2003).

As typical, there have been some attempts to take Western leadership theories and to test them in an Indian context. For example, Singh and Krishnan (2007) used grounded theory in the

first stage of a three-stage study to develop a measure of transformational leadership in India. The combined studies found support for universal constructs, but also identified unique cultural dimensions, such as ‘personal touch’. This factor is similar to the individualized consideration factor of Bass (1985), but in India, managers demonstrate transformational leadership by “taking an interest in the whole person...both personal as well as official aspects of the subordinate’s life” (Singh and Krishnan, 2007: 232).

Over the past 25 years, a number of leadership styles have been identified as contextually appropriate in India. For example, Guptan (1988) identified paternalism as an effective for superiors to relate emotionally to subordinates. A ‘*Karta*’ (head of a traditional Indian family) model of transformational leadership was proposed by Singh and Bhandarkar (1990). Similarly, Kalra (2004) identified a ‘consultative style managerial leadership’ that was also based on the concept of *Karta*. Finally, the ‘nurturant task leadership’ style was suggested by Sinha (1980, 1990) as effective in the Indian context.

Seminal research led by Sinha (1980) is interesting in that it challenged early leadership studies in India that supported the notion that Indian culture is authoritarian; therefore, an authoritarian leader would be more effective ( Meade, 1967). Sinha (1980) found a strong preference for an authoritative (not authoritarian) leader who is strict and demanding but who also takes a personal interest in subordinates’ wellbeing and growth. Other characteristics of Indian leadership include a cultural preference for power combined with dependency needs (Sinha, 1995), pervasive use of ingratiating behavior (Pandey, cited in Kakar, Kakar, Kets de Vries, and Vrignaud, 2002 ), high status orientation (Singh and Bhandarker, 1990), and a preference for personalized interactions (Garg and Parikh, 1995). Despite the extensive exposure

to Western management concepts and practices, more recent research (Kakar, Kakar, Kets de Vries, and Vrignaud, 2002) argues that “the influences of Indian culture on the senior managers’ perception of top leadership has not disappeared” (p. 240).

### ***Indian Military Leadership***

To understand the collective psyche of the Indian military leadership of today, it is important to briefly recapture the prolonged and deep influence of the British Military culture on the current Indian Military Leadership ethos. Pre-British India was a conglomeration of many geographically and ethnically distinct kingdoms and principalities, most having their own armies or militias. Each was distinctive, based on the local societal culture. There is no evidence of a pan-Indian ‘shared military culture’ per se from this era. Subsequent to the arrival of British, three geographically separate British led small military forces were formed in India under the East India Company, essentially to safeguard British trade in India. These military forces were merged in mid-19th century, and placed under the direct control of the Crown (Bhatia, 1992). British Indian Army, restructured in its current organizational form, came into being in early 20th century through the amalgamation of all Indian forces in India (Young & Lawford, 1970; Beckett & Chandler, 1996). That organizational structure has generally continued to endure till this day.

Till India’s independence in 1947, the British Indian Army was primarily led by British Officers, who were trained at the Royal Military Academy (RMA), Sandhurst (U.K.). Subsequent to opening up of the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun in 1935, a second cohort of Indian Commissioned officers (ICOs) started emerging. Meanwhile, a small group of select Indian officers also continued to be commissioned at RMA. Such British supervised

training, both at RMA and the IMA, deeply imbued the Indian military leaders with typically British military leadership ethos and provided the ideological bedrock for the new generations of officers who were commissioned in the post-independence era (Roy, 2013). Notably, even seven years after Indian independence, the prestigious Defence Services Staff College at Wellington (Nilgiris, India) continued to be commanded by a senior British officer (Maj Gen Lantaigne) due to non-availability of senior Indian officers (Rao, 2001).

The British model of officer-subordinate relationship was based on professionalism, and entrenched in the fundamental values of trust, fairness, and leading from the front (Masters, 1956). Officers were expected to maintain a secular and apolitical facade. Even a discussion relating to politics or religion was eschewed in the Officer Messes. It was these two pillars of secularism and non-partisanship that were largely responsible for a smooth division of the British Indian Army into two parts (India and Pakistan) at the time of Indian independence in 1947. As argued here, the current mindset of the military officers is a legacy of traditions passed from one generation of officers to the next. Issar (2009), in his biography of General Shrinagesh, provides valuable insights on the transition of the Indian Army from a colonial to a national Army, and the development of relationship between Indian officers and the men under their command, which was closely modelled on the lines of the one that existed between the British officers and Indian soldiers.

Similar to the US civil-military relations, the Indian Armed Forces are intimately linked to, and function within the broader Indian societal culture. However, the role of caste, so omnipresent in India as a measure of social hierarchy, has surprisingly little impact on the immediate officer-subordinate relationships within the somewhat insular culture of military

(Singh, 2013) for at least two reasons. Firstly, the officers, as a group, enjoy social superiority vis-a-vis the other ranks, an equation that substitutes the need for caste based importance or power. They function on a set of assumptions and expectations that are common to them as a group. Even while being caring leaders of the men they command, they are still socially distant (Kala, 2003) from their subordinates. Other ranks (NCOs and soldiers), on the other hand, still have their own distinct 'regimental' uniqueness (which is further linked to their common ethnicity) as a group. This is, at least partially, due to the method of their recruitment and training, a point discussed in more detail below. Secondly, once an officer is commissioned into a combat unit, he stays affiliated to the unit (barring short breaks for staff jobs) for an extended period of nearly 15 years. The officer learns the ethnic peculiarities of the men and the regimental culture, even to an extent modifying personal behavior, so as to successfully train and lead the troops in combat. For example, Gurkhas are ethnically substantially different (e.g., displaying traits of unquestioned obedience but immense sensitivity to harsh words from officers: Masters, 1956) from soldiers belonging to some other ethnicities (e.g., Sikhs). Recognizing such ethnic differences, the self-behavioral change mentioned above becomes salient given situations such as when a Gurkha officer could be commanding Sikh troops or conversely, a Sikh officer may be put in command of Gurkha troops.

In a sociological study of the Indian military, Gautam (2008), provides insights into the inherent strengths of an army modeled along ethnic lines, and argues that such 'class' based units have an important role to play in achieving motivation and combat effectiveness. This distinction was also recognized by the British (known as 'Martial Race Theory': Mason, 1974) wherein certain races (such as Gurkhas, Jats, Sikhs and Pathans) were considered more eligible for

soldiering. Despite a gradual shift in creating more mixed caste units within the Army, the tradition to have ethnically distinct regiments has continued to endure (Gautam, 2008).

Currently, a majority of the twenty Infantry Regiments in the Indian Army are ethnically named (e.g., Sikh Regiment, Kumaon Regiment, etc.: See the official website of the Indian Army).

This caste-based organization provides a major platform for motivating the soldiers through regimental pride and facilitating unit cohesion. The regimental ‘izzat’ is one of the key motivational factors in the army. ‘Izzat’ means “honour and much more . . . a person who loses his ‘izzat’ loses face and respect’ (Jacob, 2011, p 11). Older units, re-designated many times since their inception in the British Indian Army (some are older than 200 years), continue to preserve and be inspired by their unit’s images of valor and sacrifice (Singh & Ahluwalia, 1987). Typically, a unit’s tradition is transmitted and reinforced through a ‘Regimental Center’. Regimental Centers, while performing the main function of enrolling and training new soldiers for assignment to battalion within the Regiment, have an equally important mandate to safeguard and perpetuate the shared history of the regiment.

Closely linked to the caste-based categorization of the Army, is the relevance of religion, which plays an overarching role in the life of Indian society. As brought out earlier, officers are professionally expected to maintain a secular attitude, and practice their personal religious beliefs privately. However, the enlisted ranks (NCOs and soldiers) are not only allowed to, but also encouraged to, perform regular religious ceremonies. Officers, notwithstanding their personal religious beliefs, are mandated to be part of such ceremonies. In mainly single caste units (such as Dogra, Sikh or Gurkha Regiments), religion plays a major motivating role in combat (the battle cries of such infantry units are invariably religion related). In mixed caste

units, religious functions of all castes are given equal importance. To symbolically create religious equality, many garrisons have unique four cornered buildings designed to house each major religion within the same building.

The current Indian military doctrine emphasizes that the profession of arms is a calling (Indian Army Doctrine, 2004). It emphasizes that the hallmark of a good soldier entails having a sense of responsibility, professional expertise and loyalty to the nation and the army. The moral codes sets forth principles and ideals, and exhort every man in uniform, but most importantly the officers, to abide by duty without regard to personal safety. Indian Army officers, on being commissioned as officers from the Indian Military Academy (IMA), are inspired by the Chetwode Motto (inscribed outside Chetwode Hall, IMA):

The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, comfort and welfare of the men you command comes next. Your own ease, comfort and safety, come last always and every time.

This ethos forms the bedrock of the Army's preparedness in peace and is the key to its effectiveness in war (Indian Army Doctrine, 2004).

This review of the literature highlights the disparity of scholarly work that has been conducted to date between Western and Indian military leadership. Specifically, scholars still have little empirical data on the 'military mind' of an Indian military officer. We do not have a clear understanding on how he motivates his soldiers, nor the quality of his interactions with his superiors, how unit morale is cultivated, and what is considered ethical. Our study has two aims. The first is to identify which elements of Western military leadership constructs are applicable in

the Indian construct. The second is to identify any new, emergent military leadership constructs that are indigenous to the Indian context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative, inductive research design is appropriate when exploring research questions that necessitate “examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (Berg, 2004: 7), and for building knowledge and extending the theory in an underdeveloped area (Crabtree and Miller 1992; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Similar to other interpretivist researchers, we view leadership as socially constructed (Dachler & Hosking, 1995) and culturally contingent (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Social constructionism sees leadership as embedded in context—person and context are interrelated social constructions made in ongoing local–cultural–historical processes (Dachler, 1988; Dachler and Hosking, 1995), while culture-based theorists see leadership as culturally contingent, where effective leadership, among other things, depends on whether or not a leader's style is congruent with his or her organizational culture (Bryman, Stephens, and Campo, 1996) or national culture (Hartog and Dickson, 2004; House and Hanges, 1999). House and Hanges (2004:17) suggest that “the attributes and entities that differentiate a specified culture are predictive of organizational practices and leader attributes and behaviors that are most frequently enacted and most effective in that culture.” Key findings from Project GLOBE encompass both paradigms, reporting that various leadership attributes were found to be (1) universally endorsed as outstanding leadership (i.e., etic), (2) universally rejected as undesirable, or (3) culturally specific or contingent (i.e., emic) (Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg, 2004). Nonetheless, research shows that people’s behaviors in leadership roles do not



always differ according to their ethnicity or country of origin only—it is acknowledged that large individual differences do exist (den Hartog et al., 1999).

What we see as lacking from the leadership literature are richly contextualized indigenous interpretations on the nature of military leadership. Thus, in line with Strauss and Corbin (1990), we adopted an iterative approach with a planned series, or waves, of interviews to ensure theoretical saturation. Our aim is not to achieve results that are generalizable to the broader domain of leadership studies, but to develop a conceptual model of Indian military leadership that is context-specific, and with rich insights on what is shared and what is dissimilar between the Indian military man and his Western counterpart.

### ***Data Collection***

***Theoretical sampling.*** The initial set of interviews was conducted in the Punjab region of India in the summer of 2011. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews of eight Indian military veterans consisting of one Major General, two Brigadiers, three Colonels and two non-commissioned officers (See Table 2). All of the interviewees were Sikh and had experienced

Insert Table 2 about here

combat during the Indo-Pakistani wars. Six interviews were conducted in English and two were conducted in Punjabi (a language spoken in the northern state of Punjab). The Indian-born researcher was able to conduct interviews in both English and Punjabi. Interviewees were asked to focus on their combat experiences while answering questions focused on combat. (See

Appendix A for the detailed interview protocol). The average length of these interviews was about 65 minutes.

We chose to interview Sikh veterans from the Indo-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971 for our first wave of interviews for a number of reasons. First, veterans from the Indo-Pakistan war had experienced combat, but were still young enough to be in good health and accessible for interviews. Second, it is also acknowledged that members of a fraternity such as the military are frequently reluctant to talk with outsiders (Williams, 1964); however, we believe that by focusing on interviewing combat veterans of the Indo-Pakistani conflict that enough time had elapsed for the officers and NCOs to speak more openly and freely than if we had interviewed veterans from more recent conflicts. Third, during the 1970s, Sikhs were one of the largest recruited communities in the Indian Army and represented a fifth of Indian Army officers (c.f; Khalidi, 2001). Fourth, we argue that an historical perspective is a productive avenue for the eventual development of an indigenous model of military leadership in India. As noted, leadership does not exist in a vacuum, but is socially constructed over time (Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002), thus history matters by revealing valuable information about behavioral characteristics, situations, and outcomes of leadership.

Consistent with the iterative approach required for theory-building research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), the first wave of interviews was used to generate a codebook, which will be refined in future sampling. Subsequent waves of interviews will incorporate non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and other ethnicities in order to insure theoretical saturation (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). This iterative approach is essential to developing a rich, nuanced understanding of indigenous military leadership in a specific context.

**Data coding and analysis.** Multiple sources of evidence is the first principle and is instrumental in creating converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation that makes any finding or conclusion more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2003). Tsui (2004) also suggests that high quality indigenous research requires local researchers who are familiar with the socio-cultural nuances such as language, politics, history, and religious influences. Our analysis was conducted by three academics with complementary backgrounds that uniquely qualified us to undertake this particular research study. The lead author is American-born and served twenty years in the US armed forces. The second author is Indian-born and has studied and worked in the US for over 10 years and the third author is a retired Indian army officer who is pursuing his post-graduate work in Canada.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using the software program QSR NVIVO. Although qualitative analysis software such as NVIVO is incapable of comprehending the meaning of text, using such a tool greatly facilitates the classifying and sorting of field notes, interviews, and documents, and the subsequent coding of themes and visualization of relationships (Berg, 2004; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Our data analysis further addressed the issue of preconceptions by staying ‘close to the data’. For example, the use of “thick description” (Denzin, 1989) was employed to help retain the meaning and experiences as related by the informants. Denzin (1989:91) describes a full, or complete, thick description as “biographical, historical, situational, relational, and interactional”. Thick description, in turn, leads to “thick interpretation” (Denzin, 1989:91), which attempts to reveal the conceptual structures implicit within an informant’s behavior while recognizing that multiple meanings will always be present in any situation. To reiterate, we sought to capture the *inside*, or emic, perspective, thus reflecting the informants

subjective experiences (and reality) (Morris et al., 1999), providing rich insights into military leadership in India.

***Development of the codebook.*** The initial analysis was an important first step in the development of a codebook, which is essential in qualitative research in ensuring a consistent framework for the dynamic, iterative analysis of textual data (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Miles and Huberman 1994). Codes are the building blocks for theory or model building and the foundation on which the analyst's arguments rest and embody the assumptions underlying the analysis. In our approach, the codebook functions as a "framework that the analyst constructs in order to systematically map the informational terrain of the text" (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein, 1998:3). It also can improve intercoder agreement among multiple researchers (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein, 1998). The integrity of analysis can then be assessed in terms of the sensitivity and specificity of the codes, the richness of the text, and the validity and reliability of the constructs associated with them. As described here, the central challenge of systematic qualitative analysis lies within the coding process.

For the initial analysis and development of a codebook, the interview transcripts were coded independently by each researcher. Coding is generally seen as conceptualizing and reducing data, elaborating categories, and showing relationships (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Similar categories and themes were combined to form "parent nodes" that held associated "child nodes". An example is the parent node, 'Why Men Fight', which contains three specific sub-themes: national pride, regiment pride, and Sikh identity. Nodes that are not associated with sub-themes are referred to as "free nodes" such as the node 'loyalty'. Through engagement with this continuous process of re-reading and reviewing (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), themes may emerge,

patterns are identified, and conceptual frameworks may be developed based on the research question.

Once the independent coding was completed, themes were compared and disagreements resolved in order to develop a codebook. It was in through this process that our mutually exclusive insider-outsider insights facilitated a nuanced and insightful analysis of the data. For example, the second author's insider role as the daughter of an Indian Air Force Officer led her to code "relationship with superior" and "relationship with followers" as two distinct themes. The second author also identified tensions between the "old guard" and the "new guard" with respect to the shifting role of some enlisted soldiers from 'man-servant to senior officers' to strictly working in a soldier capacity. Similarly, the first author who served twenty years in the U.S. military was able to identify themes that are singular to the military, such as the use of alcohol and sports to bond across ranks and other differences that can be found in most military units (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). Equally important, the third author was able to act as a peer reviewer (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) in his role as an informed expert on the Indian Army. Once agreement was reached on each of the themes, a codebook was developed that consisted of 14 parent nodes and 24 child nodes (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

## ***PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION***

The analysis of the narratives of the eight officers interviewed for our study generated thirty-eight codes associated with military leadership in India. Thirty of the themes that emerged (such as taking care of soldiers, leading by example, courage, etc.) have been identified in prior

research on combat leadership in western contexts (See Gal, 1986; Langry, 1983; Janowitz and Little, 1974). These etic constructs give support to prior research on the existence of a ‘supranational’ military culture (Soeters, 1997; Soeters and Recht, 1998), which is intriguing given that Soeters’ sample of academies was limited to Western nations. Soeter’s (1997) original work suggested was that the institutional aspects of military life are much stronger in contrast to the civilian sector and that personal values tend to converge within military organizations. Future analysis may confirm that India’s military shares many of the same characteristics of Western military institutions, thus providing empirical support for the etic nature of specific military leadership constructs. This seems reasonable given the presence of the British in India for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.

In addition, five emic constructs emerged that have not been previously identified in the western military leadership studies: *welfare of men*, *regiment pride*, *an explicit religious orientation*, *importance of religion in motivation*, and the *preference for blind obedience by the jawans (soldiers)*. Due to space limitations, these themes are only briefly presented below.

***Welfare of Men***: One of the dominant themes that emerged during our interviews is *welfare of soldiers*. Almost all the officers reported that to be an effective leader one must look after his men. Although, this construct has long been identified in Western military research (Marshall, 1947)), our analyses reveal that it has some ‘emic’ properties as well. To be an effective leader in the Indian Army, one is not only expected to understand the needs of the follower, but to also understand the responsibility of the subordinate to his collective in-group. This emic perspective is captured in the following comment:

*Their welfare is also important and to show sympathy to their problems. For instance, if some one's child is sick . . . as a commanding Officer or a Superior officer you have a word of sympathy or help him to get his child treated.*

The personal needs of an individual tend to be broader in India's collectivistic context as the "self" is construed in an interdependent fashion (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In other words, in collectivistic contexts, self is defined by important roles, relationships and group memberships (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Accordingly, leaders in Indian Army are expected to identify and acknowledge relational interdependence of their followers. In addition, our analyses suggest that a leader in Indian Army is expected to be interested, engaged, and empathetic to a soldier's needs whether personal or professional. The following scripts from our interviews highlight the importance of this personalized relationship between leaders and followers:

*Our saab (superior) will sit with us if we had to work late nights. Although he was not doing anything, his presence will motivate us. He will bring nuts and almonds for us and talk to, that really made us feel good.*

At the same time, the informants reported that it was important for good discipline to maintain a professional relationship with one's subordinates at all times as revealed in following statement: "Well you have to maintain a respectable distance. What you can be with your peers and seniors you can't be the same with your followers". Collectively, the preceding comments suggest that in the Indian Army a leader must balance a personal relationship with professional distance with their followers. This is congruent to the nurturant-task style of leadership suggested by Sinha (1980) which focuses on nurturing the followers by having personalized relationships but at the same status difference between leader and follower are maintained.

**Regiment Pride.** The long history of regiments in Indian Army has instilled pride and become a source of identity to the members of the unit (Roy, 2001). Our analyses reveal that one of the reasons for ‘why men fight’ is to maintain their regiment’s honor. In the following quote, an officer in the Corps of Engineers elaborated on a combat incident where due to failure of mechanical equipment, soldiers had to risk their lives to complete the task on hand:

*Since the land was sandy and mechanical equipment was taking too long, we used bare hands to comb for mines. Although it was against our training, we did it because if waited for mechanical equipment to work it would have taken too long and we might not have been successful. Although our lives were at risk, we did it otherwise our regiment’s name will get a black mark.*

Similarly, a Brigadier General from a Punjab Regiment recalled how his men were motivated to fight with limited resources for their regiment’s honor in the Battle of Longewala during the Indo-Pak War of 1972. These findings give empirical support to the anecdotal evidence of men fighting in the Indian Army for their regiment’s honor (Kaushik, 2010; Singh & Ahluwalia, 1987).

We contend that being part of a regiment imparts a group/collective ideology. This ideology is likely to reinforce beliefs and values of the regiments and provide norms of the individual. This set of collective values and beliefs are consistent with collectivistic values prevalent in Indian society. In collectivistic cultures, one is likely to emphasize group goals and is willing to sacrifice or subordinate personal goals for the benefit of the group (Triandis, 1995). Collectivists are also likely to identify strongly with shared vision and have strong loyalty to



their group (Jung, Bass, & Sosik, 1995). In western militaries, however, soldiers fight for their buddies or mates (Little, 1964). Importantly, this finding challenges prior Western military lore and studies which hold that willingness to expose oneself to danger in combat is largely dependent on the closeness of “buddy” relations (Little, 1964). For the Indian soldier, the motivation to fight does not come from ‘to prove one’s worth’ or ‘self achievement’ but to protect the honor of the collective (i.e. regiment) in this case. Therefore, the concept of regiment identity and pride becomes more salient for Indian soldiers who are likely to emphasize beliefs that imbibe interdependence and collective action.

**Religion.** During our interviews religion emerged as an important aspect of a soldier’s life. The specific themes that emerged are: *an explicit religious orientation and importance of religion in motivation*. Our interviews revealed that some officers often alluded to religion in developing and maintaining morale of the unit. One of our informants from a Sikh Regiment mentioned that he often used religious quotes and stories to motivate his men and boost their morale as illustrated below: *Since we Sikhs have the tradition of fighting particularly after the 10th Guru raised an Army we have inherited those fighting qualities from our ancestors*”. This explicit religious orientation also emerged during interview of an officer who leads a mixed class unit: *“Religion binds people, it also relieves you [provides solace] to a certain extent depending upon your faith (and) how you take it”*. This explicit religious consciousness can be interpreted based on the institutionalization of religion in the Indian Army from the pre-British era when regiments were formed based on caste, religion etc. In the modern Indian Army, many combat regiments of the Indian Army are still based on religion and caste. The war cries of these regiments reflect a deep faith in one’s religion. For example, the war cry ‘*Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat*

*Sri Akal'* (Victory belong to those; Who recite the name of God with a true Heart) comes from Sikh scriptures, while the war cry of the Rajput Regiment, '*Bol Bajrang Bali Ki Jai*' (*Victory to Lord Hanuman*) refers to a Hindu deity. As noted by the informants, religion was—and still is—emphasized heavily in Indian Army. For example, it is compulsory for officers and men of many units to attend religious ceremonies every Sunday. In addition, spiritual teachers (with rank and uniform) from all different religions are hired by Indian Army to give spiritual guidance to soldiers, as it is believed that religion can provide solace and act as a stress buster during tough times (Guha, 2005).

Although reliance on one's faith is emphasized in Indian Army, it must be noted that religious harmony and tolerance are also emphasized. During the training period, troops are required to attend religious ceremonies of all faiths to foster religious harmony and tolerance. Our analyses reveal that officers who lead mixed-class units referred to religion as a private thing, and emphasized the importance of respecting and honoring every religion in their unit. The quote provided below by a Sikh commander of a mixed-class unit reflects this sentiment:

*We have a common religion, (that) is to deliver to the nation... otherwise we follow individual religion, we respect all the religions, like I have been going to the mosque, and I have been going to the church, I have been going to the Mandir (a Hindu temple) everywhere. So we respect all the religions and every where the religion is same they profess the same thing.*

**Blind Obedience.** One of the emic themes that emerged in our analyses is that in the Officer ranks, a good follower (i.e., an enlisted soldier) was categorized as one who follows orders unquestioningly and blindly takes on the tasks issued by the leader. This construct is

differentiated from the broader etic construct of ‘following orders’. The emic nature of this theme is made clear in the following response made by a Major General who was asked to describe a good follower: “Want to know really, he should be dumb, one who doesn’t ask any questions.” This expectation of high levels of obedience from one’s follower comes from the high power distance, which is a facet of Indian national culture (Hofstede, 1991). In such cultures, leaders tend to be directive and authoritative and do not value participation from followers (Dickson, Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). Due to this, followers not only accept but also expect direction from their leaders. In a comparative study between China, Taiwan and the U.S., it was found that Chinese employees had strong tendency to accept direction when compared to their US counterparts (Bu, Criag, Peng, 2001). The strong hierarchical culture of Indian military (Parmar, 1994) is likely to further accentuate preference for blind obedience from followers.

In summary, our analyses provide good insights into developing an understanding of Indian military leadership. Nonetheless, given the varied experiences of the military units, even within the “same class” or ‘mixed class’ regiments, subsequent interviews may reveal additional themes. In qualitative research, enough data is needed in order to achieve “saturation” which occurs when no new themes emerge from the data (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). Once saturation has been achieved, then researchers can be assured that any additional data gathered will simply reinforce the existing conceptual framework. Even so, like codes, codebooks are developed through an iterative process that may necessitate revising definitions as the researchers gain clearer insights about the interview data (Cho, 2008).

In Table 3, the codebook provides a representative example of the textual data associated with each code. Our current analyses reveal interesting themes that will guide us in conducting future interview to identify both emic and ethic constructs in Indian Military Leadership. The revised codebook will be used as guide for the analysis of future interviews to promote consistency by the researchers and a thorough, sensitive identification of both etic and emic constructs. As these are preliminary findings, additional analysis will help confirm or challenge the initial findings. Additionally, the salience of a particular construct may be evaluated through the number of sources and frequency of citation within the data.

## ***CONCLUSION***

Our study focuses attention on the context in which leadership is conducted. The data revealed shared behaviors and norms with Western military leaders; however, the data also suggested context-specific behaviors and norms that are indigenous to the Indian military. For example, while the British army reflects a strong vertical orientation (large power distance and relatively low concern for others) (Soeters et al., 2001), our findings suggest that the most effective Indian military leaders maintain a strong vertical orientation with a relatively high concern for others. These context specific behaviors provide important groundwork for future research on leadership in a non-Western context. The development and refinement of a codebook, which is derived from an emic-etic approach is also significant. The revised codebook will provide a more robust and nuanced analysis of the remaining data and is an important step in the future development of an indigenous model of military leadership in India.

### ***Limitations and directions for future research***

Although this study has made a distinct contribution to the body of knowledge within leadership studies, there are acknowledged limitations as with all research. Since our study was conducted in the northern region of India, our sample is dominated by Sikh respondents. There may be factors which are uniquely Sikh in respect to national or military culture which impacted on informants understanding of events or behavior. Although this is a limitation of the study, our sample resembles the demographic composition of Indian Army during 1970s as Sikhs were one of the largest recruited communities in the Indian Army and represented a fifth of Indian Army officers (c.f; Khalidi, 2001)

Issues regarding recall must be acknowledged as the primary data were solicited from veterans who were recalling events that occurred over forty years ago. Most research supports the *trauma superiority argument* which states that trauma may enhance memory rather than impair it (Peace and Porter, 2004). Every effort has been made by the researchers to verify the accuracy of events through triangulation with independent sources, such as historical books and memoirs on the Indo-Pakistani wars.

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**Table 1. Attributes of "Good" Leaders in Extreme Settings**

<b>Attributes of "good" leaders in extreme settings</b>
<p><b>Personal Attributes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly task oriented and industrious</li> <li>• Aggressive</li> <li>• Self-reliance and self-confidence in the lonely responsibility of command</li> <li>• High need for dominance</li> <li>• Emotional control</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Impartial</li> </ul>
<p><b>Task management and leadership style</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible, though predominantly democratic</li> <li>• Able to tolerate intimacy and status leveling without losing authority or respect of the group</li> <li>• Able to delegate responsibility and trusts followers</li> <li>• Encourages discussion and involves others in decision making as appropriate</li> <li>• Defines and reinforces expected norms</li> </ul>
<p><b>Group maintenance skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works to maintain harmony in the group</li> <li>• Concern for subordinates' overall well-being</li> <li>• Sensitive to clique rivalries</li> <li>• Frequent contact with subordinates</li> <li>• Liked by followers</li> </ul>

Note: Source from AIAA Paper 90-3766 "Leadership and Group Behavior in Human Spaceflight Operations", by L Penwell and J. Nicholas, 1990, AIAA Space Programs and Technologies Conference Proceedings, Huntsville, AL. Copyright 1990 by the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. Adapted with permission.

**Table 2. Descriptive Table of Informants**

<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Rank Retired As</b>	<b>Army Division</b>	<b>Tenure in Indian Army</b>	<b>Awards</b>
Wave I	Brigadier	Artillery Regiment	35	Shaurya Chakra Seva Medal
	Brigadier	Punjab Regiment( Infantry )	32.5	Maha Vir Chakra, Vishist Seva Medal
	Colonel	Corps of Engineers	29	
	Colonel	Artillery Regiment	36	
	Maj. General	Sikh Regiment (Infantry)	38	<i>Yudh Seva Medal</i> <i>Ati Vishisht Seva Medal</i>
	Colonel	Punjab Regiment (Infantry)	Unknown	
	Master Warrant Officer	Indian Air Force	33	
	Subedar	Food Services	Unknown	

**Table 3. Codebook**

<b>Parent node</b>	<b>Child node</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	Disciplinary Action
<b>Followership</b>	Blind obedience **
<b>Ineffective leadership</b>	
<b>Leadership</b>	Calm and cool; Decisive; Lead by example; Importance of preparation; Role of trust; Take care of men***
<b>Loyalty</b>	
<b>Military culture</b>	Hierarchical; Physical fitness; Pragmatic; Warrior - military ethos
<b>Relationships</b>	Mentoring; NCO relationships; Officer relationships
<b>Role of courage</b>	
<b>Role of morale</b>	
<b>Role of religion</b>	
<b>Role of socializing</b>	Drinking; Sports
<b>Stress</b>	Stress Causes; Techniques to relieve stress
<b>Training</b>	Leadership training; Type of training
<b>Why Men Fight</b>	National Pride **, Regiment Pride **, Role of Sikh identity**

\*\*Designates an emic construct