CHAPTER - II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

2.0 Introduction

Theories of leadership come in all shapes, sizes and formats. Some theories attempt to be elegant and try to explain a good deal with as few variables as possible whereas other theories are universal and try to consider all factors for being comprehensive.

This chapter sets up a framework for discussing theories that will be used for analyzing the study. For each theory of leadership, the following aspects are briefly discussed.

❖ What is the background of the theory and what have researchers tried to explain?
❖ What factors does the theory emphasize?
❖ What are the strengths and weaknesses of the theory or approach?

There are several reasons for studying the theories of leadership for the current study. Since leaders affect us so profoundly on both a grand as well as a personal scale, it is important to understand how leadership functions. By studying various theories of leadership, one recognizes the types of leaders in terms of their strengths and limitations. By studying the leadership theories one becomes a better analyst of leadership development.
2.1 Approaches to Leadership

2.1.1 Trait Approach to Leadership

Some popular statements like ‘He is born to be a leader’ or ‘She is a natural leader’ imply the trait perspective toward leadership. The trait perspective suggests that certain individuals have special innate or inborn characteristics or qualities that make them leaders, and it is these qualities that differentiate them from nonleaders.

Trait approach was one of the first systematic attempts to study leadership. The theories developed in the early 20th century were called ‘great man’ theories because they focused on identifying the innate qualities and characteristics possessed by great social, political and military leaders. It was believed that people were born with these traits and only the ‘great’ people possessed them.

The following table provides a summary of the traits that were identified by researchers from the traits related to leadership.

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Trait approach does not lay out a set of hypotheses or principles about what kind of leader is needed in a certain situation or what a leader should do, given a particular set of circumstances. Rather this approach emphasizes that a leader with a certain set of traits gives effective leadership.

Trait approach has several identifiable strengths. It is built on the premise that leaders are different; and their difference resides in the special traits they possess.

Another strength of trait approach is that it highlights the leader component in the leadership process. Leadership is composed of leaders, followers and situations but the trait approach is devoted only to the leaders.

Lastly, the trait approach has given us some benchmarks for what we need to look for if we want to be leaders. Based on the findings of this approach, personality and assessment procedures can be used for information about strength and weakness of supervisors and managers.

In contrast, the trait approach has several weaknesses as well. It delimits a list of leadership traits. Another criticism is that the trait approach has failed to take situations into account. People who possess certain traits that make them leaders in one situation may not be leaders in another situation. In other words, the situation influences leadership, and it is therefore difficult to identify a universal set of leadership traits in isolation.
Research on traits can also be criticized for failing to look at traits in relationship to leadership outcomes. In trying to ascertain universal leadership traits, researchers have not tried to link leader traits with other outcomes such as employee satisfaction or work culture.

A final criticism of the trait approach is that it is not a useful approach for training and development for leadership.

To sum up, despite its shortcomings, the trait approach provides direction regarding which traits are good to have if one aspires to a leadership position. People can gain insights into whether they have certain traits deemed important for leadership.

### 2.1.2 Skills Approach to Leadership

Skills approach to leadership shifts thinking from a focus on personality traits which usually are viewed as innate and largely fixed to an emphasis on skills and abilities that can be learned and developed.

Researchers have studied leadership skills directly or indirectly for a number of years. However, the classic article by Robert Katz addresses leadership as a set of developable skills.

In Katz's three skill approach, effective leadership depends on three basic personal skills: technical, human and conceptual.
In the 1990s, Mumford and colleagues presented a skill-based model of leadership which delineated five components of leader performance: competencies, individual attributes, leadership outcomes, career experience and environment influences. The leader competencies at the heart of the model are problem-solving skills, social judgment skills and knowledge. These competencies are directly affected by the leader's individual attributes like leader's general cognitive ability, crystallized cognitive ability, motivation and personality.

There are several strengths in conceptualizing leadership from skills perspective. First, it is a leader-centered model that stresses the importance of the leader's abilities and skills. Second, the skills approach describes leadership in such a way that it makes it available to everyone. Skills are competencies that we all can learn to develop and improve. From a wider perspective, skills approach provides a structure for leadership education and development programmes that include creative problem solving, conflict-solution, listening and teamwork.

In addition to the positive features, there are also some negative aspects to the skills approach. First, the breadth of the model seems to extend beyond the boundaries of leadership, including for example, conflict management, critical thinking motivation theory and personality theory. Second, the skills model is weak in predictive value. It does not explain how a person's competencies lead to an effective leadership performance. Third, the skills model claims not to be a trait approach, but individual traits such as cognitive abilities and personality play a large role in the model.
To conclude, in spite of these shortcomings the skills approach works by providing a map for how to teach effective leadership in an organization. This approach can capture many of the intricacies and complexities of leadership not found in other models.

2.1.3 Style Approach to Leadership

Style approach emphasizes the behavior of the leader. This distinguishes it from the trait approach which emphasizes the personality characteristics of the leader and the skills approach which emphasizes the leader's capabilities. The style approach focuses exclusively on what leaders do and how they act.

Researchers studying the style approach determined that leadership is composed of two general kinds of behaviors: (1) task behaviors and (2) relationship behaviors. How leaders combine these two types of behaviors to influence others is the central focus of the style approach.

Style approach originated from three different lines of research. Researchers at Ohio State developed a leadership questionnaire which identified initiation of structure and consideration as the core leadership behaviors. The Michigan studies provided similar findings but called the leader behaviors production orientation and employee orientation, whereas Blake and Mouton developed a practical model for training managers that described five major leadership styles: authority-compliance, country club management, impoverished management, middle of the road management and team management.
The style approach has several strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, it has broadened the scope of leadership research to include the study of behaviours of leaders rather than only their personal traits or characteristics. Second, the style approach is valuable because it underscores the importance of the two core dimensions of leadership behaviours i.e., task and relationship.

On the negative side, researchers have not been able to associate the task and relationship behaviours with outcomes such as morale, job satisfaction and productivity. In addition, researchers from the style approach have not been able to identify a universal set of leadership behaviours that would consistently result in effective leadership.

Overall, the style approach offers a means of assessing in a general way the behaviours of leaders. It reminds leaders that their impact on others occurs through the tasks they perform as well as in the relationship they create. In some situations, leaders need to be more task oriented, whereas in others, they need to be more relationship oriented. The style approach gives the leader a way to look at his or her own behaviour by subdividing it into two dimensions.

In essence, the style approach provides a mirror for managers that is helpful in answering the frequently asked question, ‘How am I doing as a leader?’ The style approach applies to nearly everything a leader does.
2.1.4 Transformational Approach

Transformational approach to leadership is a broad-based perspective that encompasses many facts and dimensions of the leadership process. This approach stresses that leaders need to understand and adapt to the needs and motives of followers. Transformational leaders are recognized as change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to meet higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them.

Transformational leaders set out to empower followers and nurture them in change. They attempt to raise the consciousness in individuals and to help them to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of others. They listen to followers and are not intolerant of opposing viewpoints. It is common for transformational leaders to create a vision. The vision emerges from the collective interests of various individuals. Transformational leadership has intuitive appeal. The transformational perspective describes how the leader is out front advocating change for others and this concept is consistent with society's popular notion of what leadership means.

Critics are of the view that it lacks conceptual clarity. As it covers such a wide range including creating a vision, motivating, being a change agent, building trust nurturing and acting as a social architect, it is difficult to define exactly the parameters of transformational leadership.
2.1.5 Leader - Member Exchange Theory

Most of the leadership theories emphasize leadership from the point of view of leader (e.g. trait approach, skills approach and style approach) or the follower and the context (e.g. situational leadership, contingency theory and path goal theory). Leader Member Exchange theory (LMX) takes still another approach and conceptualizes leadership as a process that is centered on the interactions between leaders and followers, the central point of the leadership process.

Before LMX theory, researchers treated leadership as something leaders did towards all of their followers. This assumption implied that leaders treated followers in a collective way as a group using an average leadership style. LMX theory challenged this assumption and directed researchers' attention to the differences that might exist between the leader and each of her/his followers.

The leader forms an individualized working relationship with each of his/her subordinates. The exchanges (both content and process) between the leader and subordinate define their dyadic relationship.

Researchers found that high-quality leader-member exchanges produced more positive performance evaluations, higher frequency of promotions, greater organizational commitment, more desirable work assignments, better job attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, greater participation and faster career progress.
In essence, the aforementioned findings clearly illustrate that organizations stand to gain much from having leaders who can create good working relationships. When leaders and followers have good exchange, they feel better and accomplish more and the organization prospers.

2.1.6 Contingency Approach

Contingency theory represents a shift in leadership research from focusing on only the leader to looking at the leader in conjunction with the situation in which the leader works. It is a leader match theory that emphasizes the importance of matching a leader's style with the demands of a situation.

Within the framework of contingency theory leadership styles are described as task motivated or relationship motivated. Task motivated leaders are concerned primarily with reaching a goal, whereas relationship motivated leaders are concerned with developing close interpersonal relationships.

The strengths of contingency theory lie in the fact that it is the first leadership theory to emphasize the impact of situations on leaders. Contingency theory argues that leaders should not expect to be able to lead in every situation. It matches the leader and the situation but does not demand that the leader fits every situation.

Contingency theory has been criticized because it fails to explain fully why people with certain leadership styles are more effective in some situations than in others. A final criticism of contingency theory is that it fails to explain adequately what organizations should do when there is a mismatch between the leader and the situation in the workplace.
Contingency theory has many applications in the organizational world. The theory can be used to predict whether a person who has worked well in one position in an organization will be equally effective if moved into a quite different position in the same company.

2.1.7 Path Goal Theory

Path goal theory was developed to explain how leaders motivate subordinates to be productive and satisfied with their work. The basic principles of path goal theory are derived from expectancy theory which suggests that employees will be motivated if they feel competent, if they think their efforts will be rewarded. A leader can help subordinates by selecting a style of leadership (directive, supportive, participative or achievement oriented) that provides what is missing for subordinates in a particular work setting.

There are some positive features of this theory. It provides a theoretical framework that is useful for understanding how directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented styles of leadership affect productivity and satisfaction of subordinates. It also provides a practical model that underscores the important ways in which leaders help subordinates.

However, path-goal theory is very leader oriented and fails to recognize the transactional nature of leadership. It does not promote subordinate involvement in the leadership process. This theory suggests that it is important for leaders to provide guidance and direction for subordinates. The potential difficulty in this type of ‘helping’ leadership is that the subordinates may easily become dependent on the
leader to accomplish their work. The theory places a great deal of responsibility on leaders and much less on subordinates.

2.1.8 Situational Approach

One of the more widely recognized approaches to leadership is the situational approach, which was developed by Hersey and Blanchard.

As the name of the approach implies, situational leadership focuses on leadership in situations. The premise of the theory is that different situations demand different kinds of leadership. From this perspective, to be an effective leader requires that a person adapt his/her style to the demands of different situations.

Situational leadership classifies leadership into four styles:

$S_1$ is high directive-low supportive

$S_2$ is high directive-high supportive

$S_3$ is low directive-high supportive

$S_4$ is low directive-low supportive

Situational leadership describes how each of the four leadership styles applies to subordinates who work at different levels of development. i.e.

$D_1$ - low in competence and high in commitment

$D_2$ - moderately competent and low in commitment

$D_3$ - moderately competent but lacking commitment

$D_4$ - great deal of competence and high degree of commitment
The four major strengths to the situational approach

1. It is recognized as a standard for training leaders.

2. It is a practical approach that is easily understood and applied.

3. This approach sets forth a clear set of prescriptions for how leaders should act.

4. Situational leadership stresses that there is not one best style of leadership.

Unlike many other leadership theories, this approach does not have a strong body of research findings. It is not clear in explaining how subordinates move from low development levels to high development levels.

The fluid nature of situational leadership makes it ideal for applying to subordinates as they move forward or go backward (regress) on various projects.

2.1.9 Tao Leadership

For more than two thousand years, political and business leaders have drawn inspiration from the ancient Chinese classic Tao Te Ching. It has endured because its principles about the patterns of living systems, the flow of energy that occurs in the natural world as well as in families, relationships, business and nations are as true today as they were centuries ago. The Tao acknowledges that the world is constantly changing and a Tao leader must know how to blend these changes into new patterns of harmony.
A Tao leader is not someone who knows all the answers. Instead, s/he is someone who can assess a situation, bring people together, build consensus and discover solutions that draw upon the talents of everyone involved. A Tao leader is a facilitator, communicator and team builder who realizes that our greatest resources are our mind and heart. Tao leaders don’t shrink from the unknown, they embrace it. Living on the edge, leading from the edge, they respond to uncertainty by seeking their balance in dynamic interaction with the challenges of life.

Becoming a Tao leader means daring to take risks. It means making mistakes and then returning to the music. It is the courage to live with integrity, to be honest, to live what we believe in the dozens of choices we make each day.

From Tao's perspective, leadership style at its best is so natural that people hardly know that leaders exist. People follow without thinking that they are following. This does not mean that such leaders are always pleasing and disarming. The key point is that they are able to harness the nature of their people, resulting in the people following willingly and wholeheartedly.

Good leaders are clairvoyant. Tao is about clear mind. Clear mind is the result of tranquility. With tranquility, one can be in tune with orders of the universe. We all have a crystal ball in us. Our sights for the future however are often marred by our ego, our eagerness and desires. The moment we are in tranquility, the moment when we can let go and stay detached, our vision for the future emerges.
To sum up, The Tao of leadership pulls together three basic concepts that exist in most successful leaders. They are self awareness, capability and reinforcement. The best leaders are those the people hardly know exist. The next best is a leader who is loved and praised. Next comes the one who is feared. The worst one is the leader that is despised.

2.2 Space Travel in the Galaxy of Leaders: Charisma and Competence

On the matter of whether leaders are born or made, perhaps it is more accurate to say that leaders have to be born like everyone else, but everything after birth is cultural and interactive (or ‘made’)

Portraits of leaders from biographies, autobiographies, diaries, journals and other sources reveal that leaders engage in a purposive construction of self, that is they actively engage in creating the persona they want to become.

Here leadership acumen of several successful entrepreneurs and leaders in different fields are mentioned. These are: Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Elaben R. Bhatt, Vinoba Bhave, Narayan Murthi, Azim Premji, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Dhirubhai Ambani, JRD Tata and Kumar Manglam Birla.

Aung San Suu Kyi is one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in Asia in recent decades. She has become an important symbol in the struggle against oppression. In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize for 1991 to Aung San Suu Kyi, the Norwegian Nobel Committee wished to honour this woman for her unflagging efforts and to show its support for the many people throughout the world who are striving to attain democracy, human rights and ethnic conciliation by
peaceful means. When Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi received her Nobel Peace Prize and addressed the House of Commons in England, it marked a historic moment for Southeast Asia. Never before had an opposition politician been bestowed with such honors.

Through thick and thin, Suu Kyi has shown that she is a transformational leader in character, playing by the rules and following pacifist ways to win over her adversaries. She is different from some power-hungry Southeast Asian leaders who go after economic growth as the only redemption for their tight-fist rule that often trumps human rights and democracy.

**Nelson Mandela** has never wavered in his devotion to democracy, equality and learning. Despite terrible provocation, he has never answered racism with racism. His life has been an inspiration. In South Africa and throughout the world, to all who are oppressed and deprived, to all who are opposed to oppression and deprivation. Mandela personifies struggle and he led the fight against apartheid with extraordinary resilience and vigor after spending nearly 3 decades of his life behind bars. He has sacrificed his private life and his youth for his people, and remains South Africa's best known and loved hero. Mandela is one of the great moral and political leaders of our time. He is an international hero and is revered everywhere as a vital force in the fight for human rights and racial equality.

The main image that persists in the public mind about Nelson Mandela is that of the generous old man who, after twenty-seven years in prison, emerges to forgive his
tormentors for the love of his people and the nation, he was able to lead a nation nearly
liberated from the prejudices of the past, he raised the consciousness of his followers by
appealing to their higher ideals and values, whilst in prison he helped many to learn
how to survive behind bars, by encouraging them to educate themselves.

Elaben R. Bhatt is known as the ‘gentle revolutionary’. She has dedicated her
life to improving the lives of India’s poorest and most oppressed women workers.
Fighting for the cause of women’s rights on behalf of the Textile Labour Association
in Ahmedabad, India, in 1972, Ela Bhatt founded the Self-Employed Women’s
Association (SEWA) – a trade union which now has more than 1,000,000 members.
She is the Founder Chair of the Cooperative Bank of SEWA. She is also founder and
chair of Sa-Dhan (the All India Association of Micro Finance Institutions in India)
and founder-chair of the Indian School of Micro Finance for Women.

Ms. Ela R. Bhatt, the co-founder of Self-Employed Women’s Association (the
forum of 1 million women entrepreneurs in India), was awarded the Entrepreneur of the
World Award in the “Social Entrepreneur” category in recognition of her impressive
ability to mobilize poor populations around entrepreneurial goals, by the World
Entrepreneurship Forum. Bhatt was one of the founders of Women’s World Banking, and
a founding member of The Elders, a group of world leaders initiated by Nelson Mandela.

Vinoba Bhave was one of India’s best-known social reformers and a widely
venerated disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. Bhave was the founder of the Bhoodan Yojna
(Land-Gift Movement). Bhave’s idea of the land-gift movement was conceived in
1951, while he was touring villages in the province of Andhra Pradesh, when a landholder offered him an acreage in response to his appeal on behalf of a group of landless Dalits (members of the lowest castes, formerly called ‘untouchables’ and now officially named Scheduled Castes). He then walked from village to village, appealing for gifts of land to be distributed among the landless and relating the act of giving to the principle of ahimsa (nonviolence), which had been adopted by Gandhi. According to Bhave, land reform should be secured by a change of heart and not by enforced government action. His critics maintained that Bhudan Yojna encouraged the fragmentation of land and would thus obstruct a rational approach to large-scale agriculture, but Bhave declared that he preferred fragmented land to fragmented hearts. Later, however, he encouraged gramdan — the system whereby villagers pooled their land, after which the land was reorganized under a cooperative system.

Narayan Murthy is credited to have started the IT industry revolution in India. He started Infosys Technologies in one of the rooms of his two bedroom apartment in 1981 with a capital of Rs. 10,000. Today the company has multi-billion dollar sales turnover. More importantly, when very few in India saw any potential in the computer software business, he doggedly stuck on it and made a huge success of it.

Azim Premji took over the reins of WIPRO at the young age of 21 and turned the company from a very modest manufacturer of vegetable oil products to an Indian giant in computer hardware and software among other business.

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw is the quintessential pioneer amongst Indian business persons. She led the biotechnology business revolution in India from the
forefront. She chose to do business in a new field starting out from a garage in her house. Today, her Biocon India is a top biotechnology firm in India and she is the recipient of prestigious awards like ET Business Woman of the Year, Best Woman Entrepreneur, Model Employer etc. Government of India also felicitated her with Padmshri (1989) and Padma Bhushan (2005).

**Dhirubhai Ambani**, who started his entrepreneurial career by selling 'bhajia' to pilgrims in Mount Girnar over the weekends and worked as a gas-station attendant later built India's largest private sector company. In 1992, Reliance became the first Indian Company to raise money in global markets. Reliance is the first Indian company to feature in Forbes 500 list. He is remembered as the one who rewrote Indian corporate history and built a truly global corporate group.

**JRD Tata** was one of the most enterprising Indian entrepreneurs to build one of the largest industrial houses of India. He provided wings to India by building Tata Airlines, which ultimately became Air India. Under his guidance, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust established Asia's first cancer hospital, the Tata Memorial Center for Cancer, Research and Treatment, Bombay in 1941. He also founded the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 1936 (TISS), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 1945 (TIFR), and the National Center for Performing Arts.

Tata Steel Township was also selected as a UN Global Compact City because of the quality of life, conditions of sanitation, roads and welfare that were offered by Tata Steel.
He received the Padma Vibhushan in 1957 on the eve of silver jubilee of Air India. He also received the Guggenheim Medal for aviation in 1988. In 1992, because of his selfless humanitarian endeavors, JRD Tata was awarded India's highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna—one of the rarest instances in which this award was granted during a person’s lifetime. In the same year, JRD Tata was also bestowed with the United Nations Population Award for his crusading endeavors towards initiating and successfully implementing the family planning movement in India, much before it became an official government policy.

Kumar Mangalam Birla is the Chairman of the Aditya Birla Group. The group is India’s third largest business house. The group also has its presence in various countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Egypt, Canada, China and Australia.

Under Kumar Mangalam Birla's leadership, the Aditya Birla Group, apart from consolidating its position in existing businesses, also ventured into sunrise sectors like cellular phones, asset management, software and BPO.

Kumar Mangalam Birla also holds several key positions on various regulatory and professional boards, including chairmanship of the advisory committee constituted by the ministry of company affairs for 2006 and 2007, membership of the Prime Minister of India's advisory council on trade and industry, chairmanship of the board of trade reconstituted by the union minister of commerce and industry, and membership of the Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India.
Kumar Mangalam Birla has won honours like The Business Leader of the Year - 2003 by The Economic Times, Business Man of the Year - 2003 by Business India, and The Ernest & Young Entrepreneur of the Year - India in 2005.

There are certain aspects that are common among these legendary leaders.

These are the kind of people who see changes much before they occur.

They sense capabilities and constraints and spot pathways and hurdles much ahead of others. Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Elaben R. Bhatt, Vinoba Bhave are social entrepreneurs. They are individuals who worked as catalysts for social transformation. They engaged themselves in the process of effecting sustainable social change. These social entrepreneurs are different from for-profit entrepreneurs in theory of life. Their values and beliefs about human nature, the kind of society they envision and how they achieved it mark them as extraordinary leaders. Personal ambitions and aspirations of true leaders match with and merge into societal well-being.

In the 1970s when Narayana Murthy and Azim Premji look the business with computers, computers were hardly known in India. They saw opportunity decades before others could experience it. These two men approached the budding field from two different directions - Murthy was into software while Premji was into printers and other computer hardware and made a huge global success of it. Kiran Mazumdar saw the potential of the virgin field of biotechnology more than two decades ago. Dhirubhai Ambani started trading in yarns in the back alleys of Mumbai, and then
went on to set up a large modern textile mill. From these the Ambanis moved into becoming the modern manufactures of polyester yarn in a big way trading it globally.

It was striking to find that while each of these persons was in a different field, they showed certain common aspects to leadership. The most striking aspect has been the transcendental nature of their approach to lead the business. They were so committed to their goals that they transcended the boundaries of self and their business companies. These leaders exhibited a high clarity of the vision of the goal/task. Leadership phenomenon could also not be separated from task at hand, since it was the task that generated the high commitment level resulting in high leadership effectiveness.

2.3 Qualitative Research

Leadership scholars seeking to answer questions about culture and meaning have found experimental and quantitative methods to be insufficient on their own in explaining the phenomena they wish to study. As a result, qualitative research has gained momentum as a mode of inquiry. This trend has roots in the development of the New Leadership School, (Conger, 1999; Hunt, 1999), on the recent emergence of an approach to leadership that views it as a relational phenomenon (Fletcher, 2002), and on the increased recognition of the strengths of qualitative inquiry generally.

Shank (2002) defines qualitative research as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning". By *systematic* he means ‘planned, ordered and public’, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By *empirical*, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience.
Inquiry into meaning says researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claim that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The advantages of doing qualitative research on leadership include (Conger, 1998; Bryman et al, 1988; Alvesson, 1996):

- flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and explore processes effectively;
- sensitivity to contextual factors;
- ability to study symbolic dimensions and social meaning;
- increased opportunities
  - to develop empirically supported new ideas and theories;
  - for in-depth and longitudinal explorations of leadership phenomena;
  - for more relevance and interest for practitioners.

2.3.1 The Contribution of Qualitative Designs

Transformational leadership scholars attend to the management of meaning as an important dimension of leadership (Calás and Smircich, 1991; Yukl, 1994, 1999; Meindl, et al 1986). Neo-charismatic scholars view charisma as a social phenomenon that requires in-depth examination of context and actors over time. Conger (1998) argues that quantitative research alone cannot produce a good understanding of leadership, given “the extreme and enduring complexity of the leadership
phenomenon itself”. Leadership involves multiple levels of phenomena, possesses a
dynamic character and has a symbolic component, elements better addressed with
qualitative methodologies, he argues. Likewise, favoring grounded theory, Parry
(1998) claims that quantitative methods are insufficient to theorize successfully about
the nature of leadership, understood as a social influence process.

The high sensitivity of leadership to context is well established in the
literature. Quantitative researchers incorporate contextual variables in their models
but conceptualize them abstractly (i.e. ‘task structure’ or ‘position power’), obscuring
the impact of context-specific forces. Qualitative researchers are well positioned to
open this ‘black box’. Qualitative studies about circumstances associated with
organizational types or occupational settings have provided new insights into the
dynamics of leadership (Bryman et al, 1996). Some new leadership scholars have also
used a mixed approach to understand contextual variables such as culture. For
example, in their international research program, House and his associates use both
methods to study leadership in 170 countries (House et al, 1999). Others argue for
process-focused studies to better understand the how’s and why’s of transformational
and charismatic leadership (Bass, 1995; Lowe and Gardner, 2001).

Bryman (1986) identifies two forms of qualitative research in the New
Leadership literature. One distills lessons from portraits of successful leaders to
illustrate particular ideas. The other, more ‘academic’, explore several research
designs: case studies using participant observation, semi-structured interviewing and
document analysis; multiple case study design, adding comparative analysis; and
interview studies asking leaders about their practices and orientations, or inviting
individuals to discuss other leaders or leadership practices (Bryman et al., 1996). Other qualitative designs found in the literature include ethnography, narrative inquiry, action research and grounded theory (Tierney, 1996; Schall et al., 2002; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Parry, 1998).

Contemporary emergent approaches view leadership as a meaning making process in communities of practice (Drath, 2001) or as a set of functions and relationships distributed rather than concentrated around a single individual (Pearse and Conger, 2002). These new theoretical lenses call for qualitative designs. For example, Gronn’s (1999) study of a famous mountain school campus in Australia explored the relational dynamics between two leaders credited for this school’s success. Analyzing correspondence, school council records, alumni files, archival material and newspapers, he shifted the unit of analysis away from methodological individualism to consider collective forms of leadership.

2.3.2 The Nature of Qualitative Research

While quantitative and qualitative inquiries represent two legitimate ways to investigate leadership, researchers using one or the other tackle empirical research differently. Everet and Louis (1981) clarify the assumptions that ground each by distinguishing two research stances: ‘inquiry from the outside’, often implemented via quantitative studies and ‘inquiry from the inside’ via qualitative studies.
These approaches differ in the degree of the researcher's immersion in terms of experiential engagement, direct contact with the subjects, and physical involvement in the setting. In the ‘inside’ or qualitative approach, the researcher aims for a holistic picture from historically unique situations, where idiosyncrasies are important for meaning. The researcher uses an inductive mode, letting the data speak. In contrast, traditional ‘outside’ or quantitative researchers aim to isolate the phenomenon, to reduce the level of complexity in the analysis and to test hypotheses derived previously.

Shank uses two metaphors to differentiate these ways of ‘seeing’ in research. One metaphor is the ‘window’, to look through to get an accurate view of a subject. Microscopes are windows that help to do inquiry from the outside. The researcher tries to correct for smudges (to avoid bias) or to clarify in what ways the window is flawed (to identify error). This image corresponds to mainstream leadership research, and requires simplification and standardization of complex observations. In contrast to the window, the ‘lantern’ metaphor helps “shed light in dark corners” (Shank, p.11). This image characterizes qualitative researchers as “discoverers and reconcilers of meaning where no meaning has been clearly understood before”.

The approaches to inquiry described with the window, inquiry from the outside, and by extension, quantitative research, are best known as logical positivism and post-positivism. The lantern inquiry from the inside and qualitative research, represent an approach known as interpretivism (Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Historically, the strong hold of quantitative methodologies in leadership studies can be explained by the dominance of the fields of social
psychology and organizational behavior which have been highly influenced by positivism (House and Adytay, 1996; Parry, 1998; Podsakoff, 1994).

2.3.3 A Variety of Interpretive Communities

All qualitative researchers aspire to illuminate social meaning. However, some use qualitative methods exclusively, others to complement or better interpret numerical data, and others to generate hypotheses for future quantitative studies. Various choices and practices fall along a continuum, where some researchers are closer to positivism and others distance radically from it. Between the poles there is a spectrum of qualitative traditions that stand on their own. Different traditions represent different ‘interpretive communities’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Close to positivism, post-positivists accept the limits of positivism, talk about probability rather than certainty and consider the limits of objectivity (Crotty, 1998). For them, qualitative research becomes an important complement to quantitative methods when these fall short. On the opposite side of the continuum is post-modernism, seeking to replace positivism with inquiry stances that capture multiple voices and perspectives in local contexts. Post-modernists assume that theories only provide partial views of their objects and that every representation of the world is filtered through history and language, so it can not be neutral. In contrast to the realism of post-positivists, post-modernists explore how language, power and history shape human views of reality, truth and knowledge, aiming to uncover multiple realities. Post-modernists favour critical methods that are intrinsically qualitative (Hollinger, 1994).
A post-modernist approach to leadership research is in its early stages. Rejecting the search for a ‘grand’ theory of leadership, Alvesson (1996) invites researchers to take seriously the ambiguity of ‘leadership’ itself. Knowledge about leadership cannot emerge through fixed procedures organized to arrive at abstract conclusions, he argues. Researchers must create more open forms of inquiry, focus on local patterns and acknowledge that meaning is jointly constructed with participants. Likewise, Tierney (1996) discusses five tenets of post-modernism (culture and difference; language and meaning; individual constraints and possibilities; power and politics; subjectivity and objectivity) and their implications for research on leadership.

New Leadership qualitative scholars tend to embrace post-positivism and use qualitative research to complement or extend quantitative findings. Scholars from emergent perspectives of leadership, often characterized by post-modernist sensibilities, view qualitative inquiry as the way to frame and address questions that cannot be answered by way of quantification.

Examples of qualitative studies anchored in post-positivism abound. Conger (1992) studied leadership development programs in the US by joining training programs as an actual participant, supplementing participant observation with extensive interviewing. He found four instructional paradigms and explored how each influenced participant and program outcomes as well as the implications for training. He argued that had he used a traditional survey, he would have missed these differences entirely.
Bryman and his colleagues (1996) studied transformational leadership in the British police service. They conducted semi-structured interviews with police officers and chief inspectors (middle managers), exploring the concept of transformational leadership. Highlighting context and the actors’ perspective in research, they attributed the unexpected finding that charisma was less prominent than instrumental leadership to conditions of public service in the UK at the time of the study.

Located in the middle of the qualitative spectrum, Huxham and Vangen (2000) used an action-research project about public and community-based partnerships in Scotland to explore the role leadership plays in collaboration. Drawing from work interventions with practitioners involved in partnerships, they used phenomenology and a derivation of grounded theory to develop themes about collaboration. They defined leadership as ‘making things happen’ in the collaboration, and found that the context of leadership – structures, processes and participants – is not entirely within the control of participants, highlighting the paradox that collaboration requires resource-intense individual efforts.

If multiple stances toward inquiry along the continuum produce different forms of qualitative research, sometimes researchers combine assumptions from various approaches. For example, in their design, Ospina and her colleagues (2003) drew from three interpretive communities, critical theory, constructionism and participatory inquiry. Considering leadership as meaning-making in communities of practice, they invited a selected group of community leaders in the US to do participatory, action-oriented research. The team used narrative inquiry, cooperative
inquiry and ethnography to explore how leadership happens in communities engaged
in social change.

2.3.4 The State of Qualitative Research on Leadership

Mirroring the diversity within interpretive communities, the work of
qualitative researchers studying leadership covers the spectrum from post-positivism
to postmodemism. There is however, no consensus about whether qualitative research
is yet sufficiently valued within the more academic leadership literature. Bass (2003)
says that more and more “there are efforts to ‘triangulate’ quantitative and qualitative
research for increasing confidence in both” (personal communication). Parry (1998)
agrees that there is a growing appreciation about the need for both methods in
leadership research. But he also reports that so far, ‘pure’ qualitative research has
received very little attention in the field. Conger (1998) and Bryman (2003), personal
communication) believe that qualitative research continues to be underutilized in the
field.

So far, most work on leadership falls within the more traditional side of the
qualitative spectrum. Lowe and Gardner’s (2001) content analysis of the 188 articles
published in Leadership Quarterly until 1999 report what they call a ‘healthy mix’ of
quantitative (71%) and qualitative (39%) methods, and a small subset of mixed
studies. In terms of analytical methods, about one half of the studies used content
analysis, a little less than half case studies and about one fifth, grounded theory. These
methodologies are favoured within the post-positivist interpretive community.
Nevertheless, interest in other forms of qualitative research to study leadership keeps
growing and they are slowly gaining currency in the field.
2.3.5 **Reasons to Use Qualitative Research**

- To explore a phenomenon that has not been studied before (and that may be subsequently developed quantitatively)

- To add rich details and nuances that illustrate or documents existing knowledge of a phenomenon, generated quantitatively

- To better understand a topic by studying it simultaneously (triangulation) or concurrently with both methods (mixing quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time or in cycles, depending on the problem)

- To advance a novel perspective of a phenomenon well studied quantitatively but not well understood because of the narrow perspectives used before

- To try to ‘understand’ any social phenomenon from the perspective of the actors involved, rather than explaining it (unsuccessfully) from the outside

- To understand complex phenomena that are difficult or impossible to approach or to capture quantitatively

- To understand any phenomenon in its complexity, or one that has been dismissed by mainstream research because of the difficulties to study it, or that has been discarded as irrelevant, or that has been studied as if only one point of view about it was real.

Scholars inclined toward the post-positivist side of the qualitative continuum favour the first four reasons. They see qualitative research as an inductive approach to develop theories that then must be tested deductively via quantitative models.
Scholars inclined toward the post-modernist side favour the last four reasons. They see qualitative research as an approach to inquiry that stands on its own and best allows a researcher to attain ‘a glimpse of the world’.

2.3.6 Empirical Research Practices in Leadership Research

Empirical research practices on leadership studies can be categorized by how researchers combine, at the methods level, qualitative and quantitative data with qualitative and quantitative analysis (Parry, 1998). Practices fall within the following categories.

- **Quantitative analysis of quantitative data**: This is the traditional practice in leadership research, with surveys and experiments as the most favoured methods. Quantitative practices usually reflect a positivist stance to inquiry.

- **Quantitative analysis of qualitative data**: This is the preferred qualitative practice in leadership research, with content analysis of text as the most favoured method. This practice may reflect a positivist or a post-positivist stance to inquiry.

- **Qualitative analysis of quantitative data**: This practice is not used in the leadership field but has potential (e.g. using ethno-statistics or discourse analysis to deconstruct quantitative leadership studies). This practice would reflect an interpretivist and post-modernist stance to inquiry.

- **Qualitative analysis of qualitative data**: In this practice qualitative research stands on its own. This “pure” type has taken many different forms in leadership research. This practice may include both a post-positivist stance (grounded theory, traditional ethnography and case studies) and an
interpretivist stance (phenomenological life stories, narrative inquiry and action research) to inquiry.

- **Qualitative and quantitative data and analysis**: While not used consistently, some efforts to mix methods have developed in the leadership literature. Because the quantitative component drives the research, this practice reflects a post-positivist stance.

### 2.4 Auto/biography: A Torchlight for Educational Leadership

Human beings are storying creatures. We make sense of the world and the things that happen to us by constructing narratives to explain and interpret events both to ourselves and to others. The narrative structures and the vocabularies that we use when we craft and tell our tales of our perceptions and experiences are also, in themselves, significant providing information about our social and cultural positioning.

Roland Barthes commented, “The history of narrative begins with the history of (hu) mankind; there does not exist and has never existed, people without narratives” (1996:14). Indeed somewhat playfully it has been suggested that here is a case for revising the term ‘homo sapiens’ to ‘homo fabulans’ the tellers and interpreters of narrative (Carrie 1998)

Narrative research is research that is concerned with stories. Indeed, as Denzin (2000) argues "the study of narrative forces the social science to develop new theories, new methods and new ways of thinking about self and society."
Researchers who use auto/biographical approaches collect and work from narrative accounts.

For the present study, auto/biographies of selected leaders are studied and their leadership development is derived.

Understanding leadership involves more than a simple calculus of behaviours or results of recurrent themes based on surveys. They are too limited to provide much more than a mechanical narrative, however statistically accurate or patterned.

To affect any improved understanding of leadership as a field of study, what must be restored to it are the lives, intentions, interactions and contexts in which leaders act, and an understanding of the objectives they were pursuing.

The possibilities of understanding leadership from life writing i.e. auto/biography depend on how the leader views them. Life writing is about context and the interaction between a perceiving human being and his/her context. The richness of context is a necessary ingredient to begin differentiating forms of leadership. Variety of context in auto/biographies can be matched with various arrays of decisions and subsequent actions and outcomes that follow them. To make sense of leader's actions one must understand the context in which the leader was working. A full consideration of the advantages of auto/biography as important sources in understanding leadership will involve a serious reconsideration of how leadership has been reduced to a select set of social science variables.
The study of autobiography is also connected to an author's quest for voice. Autobiography allows writers to define themselves as individuals, distinct from those images fostered by society or by cultural stereotypes. Writers of autobiography tend to bring to light the connections between work, social class, education etc. As witnesses of private dialogues and personal experiences, young leaders are given a model for self-acceptance.

Leadership is both enabled and constrained by social context, including the people within it. It is, therefore, intimately connected with responsibility (in common usage responsibility refers to human struggle to reconcile one's individual will with accountability). What is badly needed in educational institutions at present is to better understand the critical role that context (the sum of situational, institutional and socio-cultural circumstances that constrain leadership) plays in the construction of an ideal leadership. Auto/biography put context back into the study of leadership. Hence the perspective advanced in this study is that the study of leadership through auto/biography ought to be reconsidered as a viable means of studying leadership in educational set up because it affords a better influence an individual's actions, behaviours and style of leadership.

Previous approaches to study of educational leadership decontextualized not only the decisions but also the 'process' involved in developing them. Auto/biography can restore the 'wholeness' of the entire act of leadership.

If one examines past educational leadership research beginning in the 1960s, one cannot help but notice that some practitioners in educational set up advocated the
use of biography because it would allow leadership researchers to look at greater number of variables than scientific inquiry such as the cultural or environmental aspects of situations, the goals and motivations of leaders in various situations, the role of subordinates or how leaders use resources and array organizations and their members to achieve results.

According to Gronn and Ribbins (1996) there are at least three ways in which biographies facilitate theorizing about leadership.

1. As detailed case histories, biographies may be examined for evidence of the development and learning of leadership attributes.

2. Biographies afford ‘analytical balance sheets’ on the goals to which leaders have directed their attributes throughout their leadership careers within the shifting demands and options available to them.

3. A comparative analysis of leaders’ career paths as revealed in biographies would answer broader institutional-level questions, such as whether a particular set of leaders share common attributes.

In other words, biography can be used to generate more holistic, contextually grounded theories of leadership.

Similarly, autobiography gives a researcher an opportunity to see description of social situations made by a narrator and his/her attitudes and action in these situations. Moreover autobiographies elucidate the participation of an individual in social processes as they develop over time. The life events presented in autobiographical story are naturally connected and associated with one another.

46
Moreover, the 'life picture' presented in autobiography is more coherent, clear and lucid than the one which emerges from questionnaires or standard interviews.

Autobiographical approaches deal with stories of lives with an aim to expand understanding about aspects of the social world. In the words of Jerome Bruner, “An autobiography is not and cannot be a way of simply signifying or referring to a life as lived. It is a way of constructing experience and reconstructing until our breath fails us." (Bruner, 1993)

2.4.1 Five Reasons to Read Auto/biographies

1. They allow the reader to stand on the shoulders of giants. In the 1670's. Sir Newton wrote in a letter to his friend Robert Hooke "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." That is exactly what reading auto/biographies can do for the reader-allowing the reader to see further because of what these people have achieved. However, even if the person the reader is reading about is despicable and not worthy of praise or admiration, there are still many lessons to be gleaned from their life experiences and behaviours-even if most are ‘things you don't want to do.’

2. They remind that history repeats itself. Reading about the real experiences of others gives context for the decisions and consequences that we all will face. History (recent or distant) will repeat itself because those who are making history were and are human beings.

3. They promote self discovery: A good self-help or professional development book will outline specific steps, tools, techniques and approaches to try. These
can be valuable shortcuts to help one make improvements and get results in most areas of one’s life. One discovers ideas and approaches on one’s own through the stories and experiences of others. This discovery learning process is often far more satisfying, and always more lasting than reading a list of steps.

4. They allow the reader to see the world in new ways. Rather than being completely focused on one’s professional disciplines, looking at the way professionals always look at things, reading about someone from a different era, a different background or totally different set of life experiences gives one a new perspective. In reality, most great innovations come from taking an idea from one situation, discipline or industry and adapting it to another.

5. They are like mentors at a distance. Lives of Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, Churchill, or anyone else provide a glimpse into their mind and an advantage of ‘knowing’ them. These people can become mentors at a distance, if understood rightly. Choosing to read auto/biographies is a great way to expand one’s horizons, find new mentors and learn vicariously. Learning in this way can transform both our enjoyment of and benefits from reading.

To sum up, auto/biographies truly can be considered torchlight for studying leadership because "Life that is not some kind of story is unthinkable or more unlivable" (Carr, 1985).

2.5 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience. It is increasingly popular with researchers in many fields.
A life story is a personal account in the teller's own words. They tend to be selective, contingent upon remembered events that are amendable to being told and "provide a clear and ordered record of a personal truth that, of necessity, consists of both 'fact' and fiction (Atkinson, 1995)

What makes a narration of lived experience a life history? Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) conclude in their edited collection on life history and narrative that 'an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of life story into a life history'.

By locating stories of experience with descriptions of the contexts in which they occur, we build a sense of how lives are not free floating but socially constructed so as 'not to come to terms with an individual cohesive identity, but rather to see the greater complexity that exists across societies, across individuals' (Tierney, 1999).

Life histories allow the inquirer to introduce additional anchor points for understanding the subjective and the structural as mutual informants in understanding our own and other people’s lives.

Bruner (1987) has described how lives take on meaning through the means by which they are told and retold and the successive cycle of interpretation that goes with the continual process of (re) constructing an account of life. In saying that 'narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative'. Bruner is pointing out two things: firstly, that we build our narratives of self around our understanding of the episodic and temporal
qualities of lived experience; and secondly, that human beings live out their lives in ways that can be understood and communicated narratively.

This conceptualization of a mutual relationship between narrative and life is important for storytellers and historians of life because it enables life experience, identity and cultural formation to be epistemically located in a narrative frame. Hence when Richardson (1997) talks about narrative knowing and sociological telling and suggests that 'narrative creates the possibility of history beyond the personal', it is this possibility, the storied weave of the personal and the collective that becomes the narrative business of the life historian.

The life history inquiry is a dialogic event where participants act together in an ongoing, non-linear process that leads towards the construction of an account. Rigid demarcation of inquirer and inquirer roles is blurred in life history enquiry. The flexible boundary between participant roles and the joint construction of the life history through the dialogic interaction between enquiry conversant means that the account often says a lot about the researcher conversant as well.

2.6 Taking up the Challenge of Life History

Life history inquiry faces many challenges. Central among the challenges are those concerned with the authorial expecting of one person to contextualize the life of another for vicarious consumption by unknown readers.

One part of this challenge lies in recognition of the limits to what can be told-and represented-about a life in a text. There are two strands to this. Firstly, do individuals have knowledge about their own lives that lends itself to telling others
and, secondly, there is the equally difficult question of whether inquiries can access such knowledge and construct accounts that have qualities which satisfy the desires of teller, writer and reader for narrative richness and sociological insight? A second part of the challenge of representation, of telling the lives of others, for multiple unknown audiences is attending to ethical responsibilities.

The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily- perhaps not possibly-chronological.

2.7 Summary

As an endeavor in qualitative research, the present study encompasses both the approaches - emic and etic. Emic approach emphasises local perspective, concrete reality and contextual richness. Etic approach emphasizes outside or global perspective. The present study explores local perspective to expand the horizon and arrive at what is universal. The selected autobiographies are studied with this theoretical framework at the backdrop.