Chapter IV

Leadership as Propounded in *The Mahabharata*

Introduction

Section 1: The Structure of the Epic, *The Mahabharata*

Section 2: The Texts and the Contexts in *The Mahabharata*

Section 3: Ruthless Leadership: Kanika’s Tactics

Section 4: Bhishma’s Sermon on Leadership

Section 5: *Vidura Niti*: The Values of Leadership

Section 6: Leadership as propounded in *Bhagavad Gita*

Summary of Chapter IV

Works Cited
Introduction to Chapter IV

Leadership as Propounded in *The Mahabharata*

The six sections of this chapter identify the quotients of Leadership propounded in the epic *The Mahabharata*. They are categorized, listed and discussed as under:

The major portions of the epic that directly deal with leadership are:

1. Kanikavakya
2. Vidura Niti,
3. Bhagavad Gita, and
4. Bhishma’s Raja Niti.

The six sections of this chapter discuss:

(i) The structure of the epic
(ii) The texts and contexts of exposition of leadership
(III) Minister Kanika’s counsel to King Dhritarashtra, called Kanikavakya
(IV) Bhishma’s Raja Niti, otherwise called Raja Dharma
(V) Vidura Niti, Vidura’s counsel; to his elder brother King Dritharashtra, and
(VI) Bhagavad Gita, a metaphysical text. It is discussed as translated by Jack Hawley, an American commentator.

Leadership quotients are listed as Qualities of the Heart, Qualities of the Head; the ordained Functions are discussed as those Transparent and Discreet. Among them the cultivable and eschewable ones are identified so. Throughout the emphasis is that the qualities of the man in the leader makes one a good leader.
Chapter IV

Section 1: The Structure of the Epic - The *Mahabharata*

The Sanskrit epic *The Mahabharata*, with nearly a hundred thousand stanzas, carrying stories within stories, is a flashback in 18 cantos (parvas) on the feuding first cousins of a royal dynasty over devolution of powers among them. Messages on life, manhood, love, valour, virtue and a host of quotients of leadership are conveyed through numerous episodes, debates and counsels. The long epic is a well-knit work of stories within stories.

Its unravelling occasion is also anecdotal. Whether these stories were of Vyasa’s own, or gathered from other sources including folklore, whether the author’s real name was Vyasa or a given one as the Sanskrit term Vyasa means editor/compiler, whether the events narrated were part of history or sheer fiction, when and how long did Vyasa live and the related issues are beyond the purview of this research. The researcher’s concern is leadership as propounded in the epic; nothing less and nothing more.

The protagonist who opens the epic Ugrasrava, surnamed Sauti, son of scholar Lomaharshana, is a mendicant story-teller. Meeting an assembly of ascetics at the Naimisha forest he asked them if they were interested in listening to the lore of Vyasa’s stories, as related by Vaisampayana at King Janamejaya’s court. Vaisampayana was Vyasa’s disciple and Janamejaya was the grandson of Vyasa’s grandson King Parikshit.

The following are the 18 *Parvas*, cantos, of the epic:


(These *Parvas* have several *sargas*, sections carrying the plot forward.)
Chapter IV

Section 2: Texts and the Contexts in The Mahabharata

The Mahabharata’s plot is woven around the theme leadership from its failure to success, through catharsis and nemesis.

Once on a stroll along the banks of Yamuna, king Santanu saw an exceedingly beautiful lady. She was from the fishermen community; the king fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. It was not easy. The lady’s father imposed a condition that the king promised to crown the son born to her. Because King Santanu had a son, Devavrata, by his wife goddess Ganga, he did not accept the condition for matrimony and returned to the palace. Devavrata who found his father sad, learnt from a minister what was in his mind. He told his father he was willing to surrender his royal rights to his would be half brothers. He held a promise to the fisherwoman and her father that he would remain a celibate so that his progeny would not stake claim to the throne later. Thus were born of Santanu and the fisherwoman Satyavati the two sons Vichitraveerya and Chitrangata. And now about Santanu:

If king Santanu had the requisite combination of a good man within a good leader, he would not have been enamoured of a fisherwoman and married her, denying his eldest son his lovely youth and the legitimate crown, to feed his own carnal cravings. Vichitraveerya and Chitrangata, Dhritarashtra and Pandu would not have been born then. The sagacious and valorous Bhishma would have become the king of the Kuru dynasty.

The first leader met in the epic, King Santanu, failed in his role as a man/father. Thus the epic opens with a king who failed in discharging his filial duties and proceeds with numerous other characters who demonstrate leadership’s omissions and commissions.

The irony is, the failed king’s son who declined the throne and remained a celibate imparts the king-to-be the quotients of leadership for a householder and ways of discharging royal duties. The king’s failure from his personal angle affected the
nation and the citizens besides his progeny. Its spill over hit two generations and most part of the third generation. The epic’s major players are: king Santanu’s grandson, the blind king Dhritarashtra, his brother Vidura, his son Duryodhana, the five Pandava brothers, Yudhishtra, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, their wife Draupadi, the sagacious warrior Bhishma, Lord Krishna, and the author Vyasa.

Lessons on leadership are ingrained in many episodes of the epic. The first specific reference to leadership is *Kanikavakya*, which could be taken more as provisions of emergency rule, than normal governance.

Kanika, a minister to Dhritarashtra, knew that the king sought his counsel only for concurrence to what he was musing. A mind reader for his own good, Kanika told king Dhritarashtra of the ruthless ways to tackle enemies. Kanika speaks out not ethics, nor his mind, but what his boss, given his moods and intents, wanted him to say. He considered it wise to gladden his boss, rather than guiding him. Directing him to good by sane advice was not his disposition then. Keen to hold to his office, without incurring the king’s displeasure, Kanika did not bother to tell what was right or what was wrong. Only some portions are relevant beyond the context.

Contrarily, Bhishma’s sermon on *Raja Niti* is not time-bound. It transcends the given context. Bhishma did not have narrow ulterior motives. He was not obliged to anybody in his dying days, nor earlier; though he could be faulted for not valiantly opposing the evil designs of king Dhritarashtra and his son Duryodhana. To the readers and researchers the context matters. Though *Vidura Niti* and the *Bhagavad Gita* are also contextual sermons, they stand out as independent didactic treatises.

There are also other variables. Kanika did not appear to have taken to arms, except that he was an opportunist counsellor, currying the favour of the king. But Bhishma did take to arms in favour of the Kauravas, despite his soft corner for the Pandavas. His stomach and heart served different patrons. Vidura and Krishna were conversant with weaponry, but they did not bear arms in the Kurukshetra war. While Vidura remained unarmed, Krishna, chose to be an ethicist only at the start of the war, while parking his chariot at a vantage point on the battlefield to preach the *Gita*; once he started charioting, he turned out to be a strategist, whetting his disciple’s valour.
The three occasions, Vidura’s counsel to Dhritarashtra on man/leader and virtuous path - Lord Krishna’s emboldening the dithering warrior Arjuna – and Bhishma’s sermon to the reluctant Yudhishtra on being the right type of ruler, are crucial stages in the epic. The first is to avert war; the second is right on the battlefield and the third is after the war’s heavy toll. These crucial contexts have their situational significance.

(i) On all occasions there is one addressee and one addressee. They are relatives, except in the case of Kanika.

(ii) The second is a private parley, between a blind king and his counsellor-brother. Only the two are present.

The hearer asks the teller as to — What to do?

(iii) The third is on the battlefield where a hesitant warrior is emboldened by the charioteer who is his brother-in-law. Many were around, and some within a hearing distance. The hesitant hearer asks – Why to do?

(iv) The fourth is a grandfather’s sermon to his grandson. also one to one, though many were around. The hearer was the king-to-be, declining the throne; the giver was the king-to-have-been, who sacrificed his crown on a vow to serve his father’s carnal desires and remained a celibate all along. The hearer submits – I shall not do.

Moods and responses vary; but there is universality in the sermons. King Dhritarashtra summoned his brother Vidura for counsel because his emissary Sanjaya did not disclose the outcome of his mission, the peace talks with the Pandavas, though it was a blatant breach of protocol. But the blind king had to bear it. Anxiety over the held-over information left him sleepless. He wanted somebody’s company during those anxious moments. Vidura, his brother, was handy, residing close by. He thought summoning his brother would not evoke any curiosity anywhere at that juncture.

Further, Dhritarashtra was also eager to know if Vidura had been privy to the other end’s affairs. His solicitous disposition - what to do - was feigned. So, when Vidura spoke, Dhritarashtra heard; did not listen to. Whoever had told him anything, Vidura or even God, the inwardly blind Dhritarashtra, who had an impermeable wall between his ears and mind, would not have cared to listen. His mind was genuine
night and it could not admit any ray of light. As it turned out, the *Vidura Niti* is of interest more to the reader than to the epic character who heard it. In contrast, Arjuna was genuinely interested in hearing Lord Krishna who delivered the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna was in a mood to hear; he heard and adhered.

With regard to Bhishma’s counsel, Yudhishtra, joined by his brothers, politely shot queries, having valiantly shot arrows on him in the foregone war. Everyone raptly listened to him on the duties of a man and a ruler. Though tinged with grief over the loss of life on either side in the 18-day war, the atmosphere was serene because the venerable sage, literally also in his last pins, lying on a bed of arrows, was giving a sermon on statecraft to the ruler-to-be who was denied of his dues for long. The time factor on the three occasions also calls for analysis. Once past the sleepless night, Dhritarashtra turned indifferent to the advice. The night folded up; the words of Vidura lapsed.

On the other hand, with the conches having been blown and the countdown on, when Lord Krishna energised Arjuna with his pep talk; his disciple was all ears. Matched with the teller’s erudition was the taker’s intellect to grasp the metaphysical truths. The third occasion was more pathetic and poignant than the preceding two. It was the end of a beginning and the beginning of an end. The seeker of advice and his brothers were grief-stricken, having lost their near and dear; the giver of the sermon was virtually on his deathbed.

This portion of the epic on leadership commands more *slokas* than the rest. Full of Bhishma’s sermons, the epic’s plot does not progress much in the Shanti Parva and Anusana Parva. The subject touched upon – the statecraft - conditioned the length and pace of this section of the epic. Despite his own discomfort, the sermoniser related in his own leisurely pace, fables and anecdotes. Yudhishtra was intelligent enough to grasp what was told; yet there were others among the hearers to whom Bhishma wanted his sermon intelligible. Further he touched upon leadership’s supportive quotients too, which also needed a fictional format, to be intelligible to others.

The fictional part also bears relevance to the modern audience. An ensemble is given towards the close of this thesis, with associated ideas from modern writers.
Chapter IV

Section 3: Ruthless Leadership, Kanika’s Tactics

Of the critical context of Kanika’s counsel literary critic Krishna Chaitanya who has done an excellent character study of the personae in the epic, based upon Vyasa’s verses and their implications, comments,

“He (Dhritarashtra) becomes very jealous of them (his nephews). He does not consult Vidura, his brother and chief minister, but calls a Machiavellian junior minister, Kanika. Since his very opening remark admits his jealousy about the increasing prosperity of the Pandavas, Kanika understands that the king no longer identifies himself with his nephew and heir-apparent and gives the advice which he knows would be to the liking of the monarch.”

Krishna Chaitanya exposes both Dhritarashtra and Kanika as seeker and giver of advice. Most counselors are prone to tell their principals not what is right, but what is desired. Asked of strategies, Minister Kanika tells Dhritarashtra thus:

“Kings should ever be ready with uplifted maces, to strike when necessary. They should ever increase their prowess.

“Carefully avoiding all faults themselves, they should ceaselessly watch over faults of their foes and take advantage of them.

“If the king is always ready to strike, everybody fears him. Therefore the king should ever have recourse to chastisement in all he does.

“He should so conduct himself that his foe may not detect any weak side in him. But, if he detects weakness in his foe, he should pursue him to destruction.

“He should always conceal his means and ends like the tortoise concealing its body. He should always keep his own weakness unperceived by others.

“And having begun a particular act, he should ever accomplish it thoroughly. Behold a throne, if not extracted wholly, it produces festering sore.
“The slaughter of a foe who does thee evil is praise-worthy. If the foe is of
great prowess one should always watch for the hour of his disaster and kill him
without any scruples.

“If he should happen to be a great warrior, his hour of distress also should be
watched and he should be induced to fly. The enemy should never be scorned;
however, contemptible.”²

Kanika who seems harsh is practical and apparently without scruples. His call for
readiness on the part of the leader to strike cannot be faulted. Striking comes only
when one is attacked or about to be attacked.

That is why nations keep their armies in preparedness. While a leader should
avoid faults is a valid advice for virtue, noticing the fault of the enemy is a strategy.

To chastise is an ordained duty of the king. The leader should not have any
weakness. If he has any, he should so conduct himself that his enemies do not
perceive them. That is a valid point.

Kanika wants the king to be secretive, wait for the right time to vanquish his
enemy. That is also not wrong. An action taken must be pursued to the end. This is
acceptable.

The finale is noteworthy. Says Kanika,

“The enemy should never be scorned; however, contemptible.”

It is one thing to challenge the enemy in war, another to scorn him. To scorn is to
cause mental agony. Kanika shrewdly states that insulting an enemy is more
dangerous than injuring him; hence it should be avoided.

Modern leaders shall note this in handling their rivals. The implied, missing and
unsaid aspect is that the action pursued should have been contemplated and the means
to pursue should be righteous.

Kanika tells Dhritarashtra tactics and not didactics.
Chapter IV

Section 4: Bhishma’s Sermon on Leadership

Bhishma is a venerable but curious combine of a sage-cum-warrior. He was born to King Santanu and goddess Ganga. But for the vow he took to remain a celibate to please his father’s non-royal second wife, to give way for her progeny to rule the land, he was to have been the king in place of Pandu or his brother Dhritarashtra. Still, Bhishma remained the clan’s prime warrior, teacher of martial arts and the grandmaster. He threw his lot with king Dhritarashtra and his sons before and during the war. Yet, he had a soft corner for the Pandavas and a special liking to the eldest, Yudhishtira, who much like him, was both sattvic and rajasic - wise and valorous.

The Pandavas won the war. Duryodhana and his brothers, including Karna, half-brother of the Pandavas, were killed. The rule of the land, long overdue for the Pandava brothers, was passed on to them as the war’s gain. Having lost his relatives Yudhishtira declined the bloodstained throne. After performing rituals for the dead kith and kin, the grief-stricken Yudhishtira chose to decline the throne. Then Bhishma advised him not to take to renunciation, as that would be shirking his responsibility as a leader. He added,

“It has been laid down that a life of renunciation should be adopted only in times of distress, by kings overcome with decrepitude or defeated by foes.”

Worst of all, the grievously wounded Bhishma was on a bed of arrows. He held his breath because of a boon enabling him to lay down his mortal coil as and when he wished.

It was then that he gave the sermon on statecraft – Raja Niti.

Though the seeker of advice was Yudhishtira and the master was Bhishma, the post-war situation turned out to be different. On the earlier occasions - Vidura’s counsel to his brother and Krishna’s advice to Arjuna, there were only two, the teller and the hearer. The Bhishma upadesa occasion was to be different. Besides the
master and the disciple, many had gathered around, eager to hear the sermon. Others too shot questions at Bhishma.

There is yet another difference. On the earlier occasions the sermonisers, Vidura and Krishna, like Bhishma, were sattvic and rajasic. However, both had taken vows not to take to arms, for different reasons. Bhishma, on the other hand, was the Field Marshal of a large army that braved the Pandavas; yet the dying old man spoke on ideal leadership, armoured by virtues.

To follow General Bhishma through Shanti Parva is to allude to several episodes and fables. The oft-quoted passage on rulership is Bhishma’s 36-point manifesto for kings. He dwells at length subsequently on the same components. His self-explanatory manifesto for kings is applicable to modern leaders of the boardrooms and legislatures too. It presents the factors contributing to one’s personality development covering duties and responsibilities.

**Bhishma’s 36-point manifesto for kings**

1. A king should observe his duties without wrath or malice.

2. He should not abandon kindness.

3. He should have faith.

4. He should acquire wealth without persecution and cruelty.

5. He should pursue pleasure without attachment.

6. He should with cheerfulness, utter what is agreeable, and be brave without brag.

7. He should be liberal, but should not make gifts to persons that are unobserving.

8. He should have prowess without cruelty.

9. He should make alliance, avoiding those that are wicked.

10. He should not act with hostility towards friends.
11. He should never employ persons not devoted to him as his spies and secret agents.
12. He should never obtain his objects by persecution.
13. He should never disclose his purposes before persons that are wicked.
14. He should speak of the merits of others but never his own.
15. He should take wealth from his subjects but never from those that are good.
16. He should never employ or take the assistance of persons that are wicked.
17. He should never inflict punishment without careful enquiry.
18. He should never disclose his counsels.
19. He should give away, but not to persons that are covetous.
20. He should repose confidence on others but never on those that have injured him.
21. He should not cherish malice.
22. He should protect his wedded wives.
23. He should be pure and should not always be melted by compassion.
24. He should not indulge much in female companionship.
25. He should take food that is wholesome and never that which is otherwise.
26. He should without pride pay regards to those that deserve them, and serve his preceptors and seniors with sincerity.
27. He should worship the Gods without pride.
28. He should seek prosperity, but never do anything that brings infamy.
29. He should wait (upon his seniors) with humility.
30. He should be clever in business but should wait for the proper time.
31. He should comfort men and never send them away with empty speeches.
32. Having favoured a person he should not abandon him.

33. He should never strike in ignorance.

34. Having slain his foe, he should never indulge in sorrow.

35. He should display temper, but should never do so when there is no occasion.

36. He should be mild but never to those that have offended.

Other leadership traits advocated by Bhishma like compassion, righteousness, love, modesty, charity, sweet-speech, bravery, friendship, espionage, and trust are listed under Thought and Word and Deed in the following pages.

Leadership’s Qualities and Functions

While explaining to Yudhishtra the code of governance, Raja Niti, Bhishma touches upon at length the quotients of Thought, Word and Deed. Under Thought covering the Heart and Head he lists the following five cultivable qualities (heart): modesty, capable desires, loyalty, compassion and charity and points out two eschewable qualities: malaise and slander. Bhishma’s list of the qualities of head is longer. The following are the twelve cultivable qualities: learning, wisdom, judgement, self-control, impartiality, foresight, forethought, truth, patience, resoluteness, righteousness and honour. The eschewables (head) are three: ignorance, covetousness and pretension.

Under Functions - deeds good for rulers - Bhishma lists the following twelve: discharging duties, being proactive, counsel from elders, scriptures, scrutiny, strategy, promptitude, recruitment, handling enemies, reposing trust, espionage and right governance. Functions that do go good to others are five: fostering unity, chastising, mildness, creation of wealth and financial management. Functions that cause bad turns for a leader are three: shirking duties, indulging in petty disputes and unmerited sternness. Being sweet-tongued is the prime mode of communication insisted upon.

A hundred quotes on leadership selected from Bhishma’s sermon in the words of translator Kisari Mohan Ganguli, are taken up for analysis under 44 heads - Qualities
(22) and Functions (22). Of the 22 qualities that Bhishma prescribes for leaders, seven are heart-based and 15 relate to the head.

**Qualities of the Heart**

Modesty, Capable Desires, Loyalty, Compassion, Charity and being free from Malice and being free from Slander.

**Qualities of the Head**


With Bhishma the head scores over the heart. Naturally. He was not a householder, but he gave sane advice on the duties of a householder, the home to be illuminated by the right type of wife and the responsibilities of a father.

All his leadership quotients emanated only from his head, as he was a resolute sage whose heart was at the command of his head.

Says he of his sermon:

"The code of right living in which I have instructed you is not derived only from the Vedas. It has been arrived at by personal experience through awareness of the world and through reason. One cannot fulfill the trajectory of one's life by merely acting according to the prescriptions in books. The way of integrity dawns in the reason. One has to think deeply about good and bad and adhere finally to the good."5

Roman numerals in this list of Quotes from Shanti Parva refer to the epic’s section numbers and Arabic ones to Page numbers in Ganguli’s translation.

**Qualities of Heart**

1. Be Modest

That virtue, in consequence of which an intelligent man, contented in mind and speech, achieves many goods and never incurs the censure of others, is called modesty. (CLXIII – 353)
2. **Entertain capable desires**

Desire, which is incapable of gratification, cannot, in deed, be filled in the course one’s whole life. (XVI – 30)

3. **Be loyal, command loyalty**

A king can conquer the whole earth with the help of even a small force, if that force be loyal, cheerful and devoted to good. (CXXXII – 284)

4. **Be compassionate**

Behaving with kindness towards even the children in the womb, make thy subjects glad and happy and rule the earth. (XXXIII – 70)

5. **Be wisely charitable**

The duties of domesticity are observed by persons practicing charity by abstaining from injuries of all kinds, by casting off desire and wrath, by being engaged in protecting all creatures, by observing the excellent duty of charity. (XIX-34)

If a gift be made out to one who always accepts gifts, or to the one that is possessed of pride, that gift becomes bootless like clarified butter that is poured upon a forest conflagration. (XVIII – 33)

There are the two faults connected with wealth even when acquired, viz., gift to an undeserving person and abstaining from giving unto him that deserves. (XXVI – 48)

6. **Cast aside malice**

In behaving with his subjects, he should always be free from malice. (CXL – 312)

7. **Keep away from slander**

Slander should never be spoken; if spoken, should never be heard and when slanderous converse goes on, one should close one’s ears and leave the place outright. Slanderous converse is the characteristic of wicked man. It is an indication of depravity. (XXXII – 285)
Qualities of the Head

1. Take to true learning

The man of true knowledge should find out for himself the morality laid down for good. (CXLII – 321)

Those decrying knowledge of others proclaim the superiority of their own knowledge. They have words for their weapons and words for their arrows. They are traders in learning and rakshasas among men. (CXLII - 321)

2. Beware of the consequences of ignorance

Ignorance is the spring of misery. Ignorance has its origin in covetousness. (CLIX – 348)

3. Do not covet

From covetousness proceeds wrath; from covetousness flows lust, and it is from covetousness that loss of judgement, deception, pride, arrogance, and malice, as also vindictiveness, shamelessness, loss of prosperity, loss of virtue, anxiety, and infamy spring, miserliness, cupidity, desire for every kind of improper act, pride of birth, pride of learning, pride of beauty, pride of wealth, pitilessness for all creatures, malevolence towards all, mistrust in respect of all, insincerity towards all, appropriation of other people’s wealth, ravishment of other people’s wives, harshness of speech, anxiety, propensity to speak ill of others, violent craving for the indulgence of lust, gluttony, liability to premature death, violent propensity towards malice, irresistible liking for falsehood, unconquerable appetite for indulging in the passions, insatiable desire for indulging the ear, evil-speaking, boastfulness, arrogance, non-doing of duties, rashness, and perpetration of every kind of evil act, - all these proceed from covetousness. (CLVIII – 346)

4. May wisdom stand by you

No man would ever be called wise if he is indulging in pride. (XXXVII – 75)

A person of wisdom and deep intelligence does not stand in the need of counsels or instruction. (CXX – 258)

Kings should gather wisdom from various sources. (CXLII – 320)
A ruler possessed of wisdom should frustrate all the endeavours and objects of his enemies.  
(CXX – 260)  

Real wisdom is never to be angry with creatures. (CL- CLI – 331)  

A weak-minded king can never display wisdom.  
(CXLII – 320)

5. **Be perfect in your judgment**

The king should be well versed in the arts of conciliatory policy, he should be possessed of wisdom, and should be able to do what should be done and avoid what should not.  
(CXX – 258)  

6. **Have self-control**

There is only one fault with self-control. No second fault is noticeable in it. A person who has self-control is regarded as weak and imbecile.  
(CLXI – 351)  

7. **Always be impartial**

With thorough impartiality, he should practice the qualities of goodness if he is to earn felicity.  
(CXX - 257)  

8. **Have foresight**

He should always be heedful in respect of those gates through which dangers may come and overtake him.  
(CXX – 257)  

A king should ascertain all future dangers, when they are present, he should conquer them.  
(CXL – 311)  

9. **Act with forethought**

These two, the person of foresight and the person of presence of mind have been declared by the rishis to be the foremost of men.  
(CXXXVII - 292)  

10. **Observe truth**

Righteousness and power associated with truth can rescue men from peril.  
(CXXXIV – 288)  

One should always practice forgiveness and devotedness to truth.  
(CLXIII– 353)
11. Avoid pretences

Having shaved their heads clean and adopted the brown robe, men may be seen to betake themselves to a life of wandering mendicancy, though bound by various ties though ever on the look out for bootless wealth. (XIX - 314) 28

12. Demonstrate patience

A king possessed of patience and without any fault, may, if he likes, obtain the fruition of all his wishes, with the aid of even a small force. (CXX – 259) 29

13. Be resolute

How can happiness be had from despondency? Objects may be won by resolution. (CLIII- 337) 30

14. Always be righteous

That which is morality and duty is righteousness. (CXX –264) 31

Righteousness sometimes takes the shape of unrighteousness. The latter also sometimes takes the shape of the former. Comprehend the circumstances under which righteousness and its reverse become confused. (CXLII-320-321) 32

15. Lead an honourable life

A life of humiliation and reproach is like death itself. (CXXXIV–288) 33

A life of infamy is equal to death. (CXX – 269) 34

Functions of a leader

1. Be conversant with your duties

Duty must spring from understanding. (CXLII –320) 35

Those persons that are observant of their duties that practice excellent vows and are truthful in speech become objects of great respect in the world, with their own faith exceedingly strengthened. (XI – 19) 36

A king conversant with his duties should assume many forms even as a peacock puts forth plumes of diverse hues. Keenness, crookedness, truth and sincerity are the qualities that should be present in him. (CXX – 257) 37
2. Be pro-active

One should betake oneself to action. The man reft of action can never obtain success. (XI –17) 38

Aided by that intelligence which is sharpened by the scriptures, one can settle his courses of action. (CXX 258) 39

The king should always exert for acquiring greatness. (CXXXIII –266) 40

3. Shirking is not renunciation

It has been laid down that a life of renunciation should be adopted only in times of distress, by kings overcome with decrepitude or defeated by foes. (XI–16) 41

4. Be simple in food habits

Simple food and drink obtained without effort and luxurious food procured with fear widely differ from each other. (CXI -P.242) 42

5. Seek the guidance of elders

He must assume that particular hue or form which is beneficial in view of the particular object, which he seeks to accomplish. (CXX –257) 43

Thou should accomplish all those high duties, which thy seniors and preceptors would indicate. Thou art sure to obtain great blessing through the grace of thy seniors and preceptors. (CXX–269) 44

6. Scrutinise before you decide

By judging of different courses of action in his own mind, he should, by exercising his own intelligence arrive at conclusion. (CXX – 258) 45

One that does everything after reflection and scrutiny, one that avails himself of proper means for the accomplishment of one’s objects, always succeeds in achieving much. (CXXX VIII – 293) 46

7. Be guided by scriptures

That king who, guided by an understanding based upon the scriptures and disregarding lust and wrath, behaves impartially, like a father towards all his subjects never incurs sin. (XXIV – 43) 47
8. Have promptitude

Thou should always exert promptitude, for without promptitude of exertion, mere destiny never accomplishes the objects cherished by kings. (LVI – 114) 48

The man of procrastination is lost. (CXXXVII – 291) 49

9. Be wise in recruitment, placement and promotion

May a king succeed in subjugating the whole earth if he has for his ministers men possessed of courage, wisdom, great learning and high birth. (CXIX – 256) 50

Ministers should be appointed for offices for which they are fit and should possess such qualifications needed for their respective occupations. (CXIX 255) 51

By dismissing a servant who is incompetent to render service one is not bounded by sin. (XXXV –72) 52

A king who desires to possess accomplished servants should never appoint persons that are destitute of intelligence, that are low-minded, that are without wisdom, that are not masters of their senses and that are not of a high birth. (CXIX –256) 53

Kings never entertain a servant that is destitute of learning and sincerity and wisdom and great wealth. Those men that are devoted to the services of their master are never stopped by any impediments. (CXIX -256) 54

Persons that are possessed of humility, ready in the performance of their duties, tranquil in disposition, pure in mind, adorned with diverse gifts of nature and are never the objects of calumny in respect of the offices they hold should be the immediate associates of the king. (CXIX – 256) 55

Kings should always speak in soothing terms unto those servants that are always engaged in doing good to their master (CXIX-256) 56

Beholding his servants employed in acts which each is fit, the king should act in conformity with all of them like the strings of a musical instrument stretched to proper tension, according to their intended notes. (CXX - 258) 57
Servants should according to ordinance be appointed to offices for which each is fit. That foolish king who, transgressing precedent, appoints servants to offices for which they are not fit, fails to gratify his people. (CXIX - 256) 58

A king who confers on his servants offices for which each is fit, succeeds in consequence of such merit, to enjoy the happiness attaching to sovereignty. A Saraba should occupy the position of a Saraba, a lion should dwell with the might of a lion, a tiger should be placed in the position of a tiger; and a leopard should be placed as a leopard. (CXIX-255) 59

Men that are honest, possessed of high birth, brave, learned, destitute of malaise and envy, high-minded be appointed as ministers. (CXIX 256) 60

A lion should always make a companion of a lion. If one that is not a lion becomes the companion of a lion, one earns all of the advantages that belong to a lion. That lion, however, while engaged in discharging the duties of a lion, has a pack of dogs, only for his associates, never succeeds in consequence of such companionship, in accomplishing those duties. (CXIX-256) 61

10. Protect your staff from disintegration
He should protect his ministers from disunion and destruction (CXL313) 62

11. Be judicious in penal action
Chastisement is at the root of everything. Upon chastisement rests the heaven that men desire, and upon it rest this world too. (XV – 27) 63

If the king be regarded as competent to wield the rod of chastisement he should be regarded as equally competent to pardon. (XXIII - 41) 64

The king must assume that particular hue or form which is beneficial to in view of the particular object, which he seeks to accomplish, keenness when he punishes and harmlessness when he shows favour. (CXX –257) 65

12. Avoid petty disputes
The kings should never indulge in fruitless disputes. (CXL 12) 66
13. Handling foes

There is no separate species of creatures called foes or friends. Persons become friends or foes according to the force of circumstances. (CXL 312)

The king should always honour the foes of his foes. (CXL 311)

When the roots of a tree are cut away, how could the branches live? A king possessed of wisdom should cut away the very roots of his foe. He should then win over and bring under his sway the allies and partisans of that foe. When calamities overtake the king he should without losing time counsel wisely, display his prowess properly, fight with ability and even retreat with wisdom. In speech only should the king exhibit his humility, but at heart he should be sharp as a razor. He should cast off lust and wrath and speak sweetly and mildly. When the occasion comes for intercourse with an enemy, a king, possessed of foresight should make peace, without reposing blind trust on him. When the business is over, he should quickly turn away from the new ally. One should conciliate a foe with sweet assurances as if he were a friend. One, however, should always stand in that fear of that foe, as living in a room within which there is snake.

(CXL - 310)

One should bear one’s foe on one’s shoulders as long as time is unfavourable. When, however, an opportunity has come, one should break him into fragments like an earthen jar on a stone.

(CXL 310)

Having incurred the animosity of a person possessed of knowledge and wisdom, one should not draw comfort from the conviction that one is at a distance from the foe.

(CXL - 313)

That should not be sought to be crossed which is really uncrossable. That should not be snatched from the foe, which the foe would be able to recover.

(CXL - 313)

An insignificant foe when he becomes powerfully exterminates a king.

(CXX-259)

A foe becomes a friend and a friend becomes a foe. The course of human actions, through the combination of circumstances, becomes very uncertain.

(CXXXVIII-293)
One should never strike him whose head one wouldn’t cut off. (CXL – 313) 75

The king should never disregard foes for their powerlessness. (CXX – 259) 76

14. **Know mildness is a virtue and a strategy**

By mildness should the mild be cut. By mildness one may destroy that which is fierce. There is nothing that mildness cannot effect. For this reason mildness is said to be sharper than fierceness. That king who becomes mild when the occasion requires mildness and who becomes stern when sternness is required succeeds in accomplishing all his objects and in putting down his foes. (CXL - 313) 77

15. **Sternness is not always a virtue**

The king who commences with sternness burns the whole world. (CLII - 332) 78

16. **Be sweet but discreet in your speech**

He should conceal his counsel; he should speak little, and the little he speaks should be sweet. (CXX – 257) 79

Sweetness of speech never fails of its purpose while at the same time it never pains any heart. Even gifts not made with agreeable speeches do not delight the recipient. (LXXXIV – P. 185) 80

17. **Be wary in reposing trust**

A prudent king will never repose his confidence upon one individual, however much accomplished. (XXIV – 43) 81

The king should not trust the person that does not deserve to be trusted nor should he trust too much the person that is deserving of trust. (CXL 312) 82

18. **Create wealth**

Kings should always with great care look after their treasuries. Indeed, kings have their roots in the treasuries. A king should always seek to swell his treasury. (CXIX -256) 83

All great kinds of meritorious acts flow from the possession of great wealth like a mountain from wealth springs all religious acts, all pleasures. (IX –12) 84

Good deeds are very rare in those that amass riches. (XXVII 49) 85
If a person becomes destitute of wealth, he becomes destitute of virtue and pleasure which objects are obtainable by wealth. (CXX-260) 86

Steadiness, cleverness, self-restraint, intelligence, health, patience, bravery and attention to the requirements of time and place - these are eight qualities that lead to increase of wealth, be it small or much. (CXX - 259) 87

Let thy barns be filled with corn. And let their keep be entrusted to honest servants. Seek to increase thy corn and wealth. (CXIX – 256) 88

In seasons of distress, however, one’s duties are of a different kind. The king, therefore, in seasons of distress incurs no fault by oppressing his subjects for filling the treasury. (CXXX281-282) 89

19. **Be an expert in financial management**

A king conversant with the ways of acquiring wealth should always employ in his acts such men as are mild in disposition, possessed of wisdom and courage and great strength. (CXX–258) 90

Even when he hears that his income and expenditure are great, he should not disregard the small items. (CXX–259) 91

The king who fills his treasury by having recourse to fraudulent devices, certainly falls away from righteousness. (CXXXIII–285) 92

The treasury cannot be filled by acting with purity and righteousness, nor by acting with heartless cruelty. It should be filled by adopting a middle course. (CXXXIII –286) 93

The treasury must be filled, it should be carefully protected by putting a stop to all useless expenditure and even sought to be increased. (CXXXIII – 287) 94

The unpaid balance of a debt, the unquenched remnant of a fire and the unslain remnant of foes, repeatedly grow and increase. Debt, which always grows is certain to remain unless wholly extinguished. Same are defeated foes and neglected maladies. (CXL – 313) 95
20. Choose the right spies/envoys

The king should take his own spies as agents employed by his foes. The king should see that his own spies are not recognized by his foe. He should make spies of atheists and ascetics and send them to territories of his enemies. (CXL -311-312)

The envoy should possess these seven accomplishments – he should be high-born, of a good family, eloquent, clever, of sweet speech, faithful in delivering the message, which he is charged and endues with a good memory. (LXXXIV. P. 187)

21. Right governance brings no reproach

The king who does not protect his subjects, whose passions are ungovernable, who is full of vanity, who is stained with haughtiness and malaise, incurs sin and earns the reproach.

22. Gain glory through fortitude

He is the best of kings whose conduct even after his death, is applauded by inhabitants of the city and country and by his counselors and friends. (XXVI – 47)

That virtue owing to which one remains unchanged in happiness and misery is called fortitude. That wise man who desired his own good always practices this virtue. One should always practice forgiveness and devotedness to truth. That man of wisdom who succeeds in casting off joy, fear and wrath succeeds in acquiring fortitude.
Chapter IV

Section 5: Vidura Niti: The Values of Leadership

Like the Bhagavad Gita, Vidura Niti, part of The Mahabharata is taken in isolation, read and imparted because of its didactic import. The sagacious Vidura is the younger brother of king Dhritarashtra. His counsel to his elder brother is called the Vidura Niti. It calls for ethical values in ruling a country.

Vidura mentions the following ten are cultivable Qualities of leadership, prompted by head and heart: wisdom, intelligence, judgement, patience, self-control, humility, equanimity, righteousness, endurance and tolerance. The 14 eschewable qualities are: anger, theft, womanising, infidelity to friends, pride, folly, insolence, treason, base company, sleep, fear, indolence, procrastination and quarrelsomeness.

As for Functions that do good to a leader and others, Vidura’s list covers the following: taking healthy food, being cautious and discreet in expressions, realising the importance of time, place, perseverance, creation of wealth, sharing wealth, wise counsel, being discreet, handling foes and espionage.

Vidura, an incarnation of Dharma

Vidura is the younger brother of king Dhritarashtra, living under his care. As he was soft to the five Pandava brothers on moral grounds, the enraged Duryodhana once insulted him,

“You have your belly for our palace and your heart for the Pandavs.”

Vidura was cursed to suffer such an insult. So it came to be: Vidura was born to the author of the epic, Vyasa and a palace maid over a conjugal exigency. Vyasa was fisherwoman Satyavati’s son through sage Parasara who wanted to get at what he considered a holy time to beget an erudite son. So was born Vyasa, Bhishma’s half-brother. Born black in a lonely island, he was named Krishna Dwaipayana. Vyasa is the name he acquired later because of his career as a composer/compiler/editor.

When King Vichitraveerya’s young widows Ambika and Ambalika, were obliged to procreate with the brother of the deceased king, to perpetuate the royal lineage per
the custom, the king’s brother, Bhishma declined to do so, having already taken a vow of celibacy. Sage Vyasa was then called in, who conjugated with the queens. Ambika closed her eyes then, her son was born blind. That was Dhritarashtra. Ambalika turned pale at the sight of Vyasa hence her son Pandu was born pale.

Satyavati, the disappointed mother-in-law of the widowed queens, then persuaded Vyasa to get the royal dynasty a normal son. The unwilling queen Ambalika sent in her guise her maid. Vyasa who sensed the impersonation disclosed it to Satyavati. He also added that the son born would be a righteous and respected person. So was Vidura born, as an incarnation of Dharma. How? There is a past to that past, which is interesting, as it is characteristic of the Mahabharata - stories within stories.

When saint Mandavya was in intense meditation a band of robbers, chased by royal guards, threw the stolen booty near him and went hiding. Seeing the stolen goods by the side of the saint, the guards caught hold of him. The king ordered “Mount him on a sharp trident till his death.” When the sentence was being carried out, the saint stayed alive. Hearing this, the king rushed there, got the saint dismounted from the trident he apologized. The offended saint approached the deity of dispensation of justice, Dharma and asked him the reason for that ghastly punishment. Mandavya was told that as an urchin he had harmed a butterfly by inserting a thorn in her back and he had just paid the price for that prank. Mandavya took it too much of a punishment for a boyish mirth. As the deity of justice went beyond his brief in ordering a punishment grossly disproportionate to the crime, the saint cursed the deity to be born in planet earth and live as a man. That was the advent of Vidura. That was why while many respected him Duryodhana insulted him; he had to bear it.

*Tirukkural*, a later day secular Tamil didactic work echoes, in substance and style, portions of *Vidura Niti*. There is much in common between the two works with regard to evolution of man as a leader and that Tiruvalluvar, author of *Tirukkural*, employs much the same similes, metaphors and imagery.

“*Vidura Niti* is universal, stressing on people’s duties and responsibilities. Its style is direct and simple;” 7

says N. Sridharan, who has translated the work from Sanskrit to Tamil.
Vidura Niti, the occasion

Vidura met his brother Dhritarashtra, who was sleepless, as his emissary Sanjaya had withheld the feedback of his peace mission to the Pandavas, saying he would divulge it at the court next morning, which is a technical breach of protocol but a tactical tiding over of a tricky situation. Vidura tells Dhritarashtra, “Reposing the care of thy kingdom on Duryodhana, on Sakuni, on foolish Dussasana and on Karna, how const thou hope for prosperity?” He means thereby that wrong devolution of powers makes the leader sad and sleepless.

Vidura did not know the agenda when called in. He told his brother the worthy way of living as a man and as a ruler. It is a loose sally of mind. Vidura would appear to be rambling and jumping from topic to topic, but he returns to the base after the meandering. Thematic unity is maintained. May be Vidura thought he would convince his brother through a methodless method; inflicting any purported, crafted sermon might make him stay obstinate, he thought perhaps.

Vidura: leadership qualities to be cultivated
(Page numbers of quotes refer to Ganguli’s – Vol. II)

1. Know the components of wisdom

The marks of a wise man are: Adherence to acts worthy of praise and rejection of what is blamable, faith, and reverence. He whom neither anger, nor joy, nor pride, nor false modesty, nor stupefaction, nor vanity, can draw away from the high ends of life, is considered as (sic) wise. P. 59

He who speaks boldly, can converse on various subjects, knows the science of argumentation, possesses genius, and can interpret the meaning of what is writ in books, is reckoned as wise. P. 60

2. Be intelligent

What anxiety has he, that has intelligence, energy, prowess, strength, alacrity and perseverance? P. 79

Long are the arms, which intelligent persons have by which they can return wrongs for wrongs done to them. P. 81
Intelligence, tranquillity of mind, self-control, purity, absence of harsh speech, and unwillingness to do anything disagreeable to friends, these seven are regarded as fuel of prosperity's flame. P. 83

3. Your judgement matters

He that understands quickly, listens patiently, pursues his object with judgement, and not from desire, and spends not his breath on the affairs of others without being asked, is said to possess the foremost mark of wisdom. P. 59

4. Have self-control

Great prosperity waits upon him who has subdued his senses, the body is one's car, the soul within is the driver, and the sense are his steeds. Drawn by those excellent steeds, when well-trained, he that is wise, pleasantly performs the journey of his life...so one's sense unsubdued, lead only to destruction. P. 66

5. Cultivate humility

He that is graced with every virtue and is endued with humility, is never indifferent to even the minutest sufferings of living creatures. P. 84

6. Be even-minded

He who exults not at honours and grieves not at slights and remains cool and unagitated like a lake in the course of the Ganga is reckoned as wise. P. 59

7. Your perseverance pays

He who strives, having commenced anything, till it is completed, who never wastes his time and who has his soul under control is regarded wise. P. 59

Perseverance is the root of prosperity, of gain. P. 90

8. Be righteous to gain other virtues

Righteousness is the one highest good; and forgiveness is the supreme peace; knowledge is one supreme contentment and benevolence one sole happiness. P. 61

9. Demonstrate patience

That illustrious person who does not grieve when a calamity has already come upon him, who exerts with all his senses collected and who patiently bears misery certainly the foremost of persons and all his foes are vanquished. P. 64
10. Your endurance wins against odds

Gold is tested by fire; a well-born person by his deportment: an honest man by his conduct. P. 70

11. Have good food habits

He that eats sparingly wins these: health, long life, and ease: his progeny also becomes healthy and nobody reproached him for gluttony. Ganguli II—P. 79

The wise praise food that is easily digested. P. 71

12. Bear slander

One should not return the slanderers or reproaches of others for the pain is felt by him who bears silently, consumes the slanderer. Indulge not in slanders and reproaches. P. 72

One is freed from those things from which one abstains and if one abstains from everything he has not to suffer even the least misery. P. 73

That man who never assumes a haughty mien who never censures others, praising himself the while, and never addressees harsh words to others for getting himself is ever loved by all. P. 64

The king should be content with the name he wins and the umbrella that is held over his head. P. 83

Vidura: Leadership Qualities to be curbed

1. Avoid anger, harsh words

Avoid words that are harsh and fraught with anger. Harsh words burn and scorch the very vitals, bones, heart and the very sources of the life of the man. P. 72

2. Eschew theft, womanising and infidelity to friends

One should not at night lurk in the yard of another’s premises, nor should one seek to enjoy a woman to whom the king might make love. P. 79

Great fear springs from three crimes, theft of other’s property, outrage on others’ wives and breach with friend. P. 62
3. **Avoid pride, folly, insolence, treason**

The intelligent man who relinquishes pride, folly, insolence, sinful acts, disloyalty towards the king, crookedness of behaviour is the foremost of the species. P. 65

4. **Examine carefully**

They that are quarrelsome, covetous, shameless, deceitful are known unrighteous and their companionship should always be avoided. He that is learned, examining everything carefully and reflecting well should, from a distance, avoid the friendship of the vile and wicked persons such as these. P. 84

5. **Shun the six faults**

The six faults to be avoided by a person who wishes to attain prosperity: sleep, drowsiness, fear, anger, indolence and procrastination. P. 63

6. **Keep away from the wile and the low**

Abstain from companionship with those that are vile and low. P. 72

7. **Don’t insult**

Do not humiliate and insult others. P. 72

8. **Don’t quarrel**

Quarrel not with friends. P. 72

---

**Vidura: Leadership - Transparent functions**

1. **Realise the importance of time and place**

Effort after securing what is good, the properties of time, place and means, acquaintance with scriptures, activity straightforwardness and frequent meetings with those that are good these bring about prosperity. P. 89

2. **Share and flourish**

He should divide his wealth of the kingdom among those that serve him. Alone he should not appropriate everything. P. 83
3. **Gain by wise counsel**

Friends that are eminent in wisdom, virtue, learning and years, he that asks their advice about what he should do and should not do is never misled. P. 90

4. **Work your way to wealth**

He that is without deceitfulness, he that is active, grateful, intelligent and guileless, even if his treasury be empty, obtains friends, counsellors and servants. P. 83

5. **Recruit talents discerningly**

Men of learning say that a servant be endued with eight qualities, viz., absence of pride, ability, absence of procrastination, kindness, cleanliness and incorruptibility, birth in a family free from taint and weightiness of speech. P. 78

**Vidura: Leadership - Discreet Functions**

The following are discreet functions of a ruler/CEO/leader, by Vidura’s norms:

1. **Be indiscernible**

He whose intended acts and proposed counsels remain concealed from foes, and whose acts become known only after they have been done, is considered wise. P. 59

2. **Mind the foes**

He is a wise person who does not disregard even a weak foe; who proceeds with intelligence in respect of a foe, anxiously watching for an opportunity; who does not desire hostilities with persons stronger than himself and who displays his prowess in season. P. 64

3. **Beware of inherent foes**

He that desires success and a long dynasty should ever guard himself from the six. They are intoxication; sleep, inattention to spies, set over by another, one’s own demeanour as dependent on the working of one’s own heart, confidence reposed on a wicked counsellor and unskilled envoys. P. 86

Having wronged an intelligent person, one should never gather assurance from the fact that one lives at a distance. P. 79

A foe that deserves death and brought under subjection should never be set free. P. 83
4. **Evaluate the demands and the competence**

Before one engages in an act, one should consider competence of the agent, the nature of the act itself and its purpose, for all acts are dependent on these. P. 66

5. **Espy the spies**

That king whose counsels cannot be known by either outsiders but who knows the counsels of others through his spies enjoys prosperity for long. P. 82

6. **May not your tongue reveal the heart**

Never tell one, “I do not believe thee;” but assigning some reason send him away on a pretext. P. 79

7. **Be cautious in trusting**

One should never put trust on him who should not be trusted, not put too much trust on him who should be trusted. P. 81-82

8. **Weigh external counsel**

Never set thyself against the decision which a person has arrived, who keeps low company and who is in the habit of consulting all he meets. P. 79

One should never speak of what one intends to do. Let anything you do in respect of virtue, profit and desire be not known till it is done. Let counsels be not divulged. P. 82

* By speaking words out of season even Vrihaspathi himself incurs reproach and the charge of ignorance. P. 84
Chapter IV

Section 6: Leadership as Propounded in Bhagavad Gita

Of nearly a lakh of stanzas of The Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita takes just 700 plus. Yet, there are more books on the Gita, than on the other sections of the epic. The Gita had walked out of its ecclesiastical confines and entered the social realm with books by erudite leaders like Gandhiji, Vinoba Bhave, Bala Gangadara Tilak, Shri Aurobindo, Rajaji, Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Chitbhavananda and others.

Jack Hawley, an American translator and commentator of the Gita, states:

“When Mahatma Gandhi died - the ‘great-souled one’ the leader of India who non-violently freed his country from British rule – a now-famous photograph was taken of all his possessions: his simple white cotton piece of clothing, his glasses, his sandals, and his well-worn copy of the Bhagavad Gita. It was the book he read daily, as a source of endless inspiration to him.”

Taking the Gita as an integral part of The Mahabharata and not an alienable text, Shri Aurobindo adds,

“It does not stand apart as a work by itself but is given as an episode in an epic history of nations and their wars and arises out of a critical moment in the soul. The teaching of the Gita must therefore be regarded as (having) a bearing upon a practical crisis in the application of ethics and spirituality to human life.”

The Gita has travelled from religion to ethics, to philosophy, to meta-physics, to spiritualism and to management. The credit of ushering in the Gita to the corporate domain, to attune the executives to the lessons of Lord Krishna, goes mainly to

(i) Jack Hawley, The Bhagavad Gita, A Walkthrough for Westerners
(ii) Ajanta Chakravarty, The Geeta and the Art of Successful Management
(iii) R.S. Garg, Gita for Success in Modern Life
(iv) V. Ramanathan, Bhagavad Gita for Executives.
"The battle of The Mahabharata was fought probably in the 10th century BC. On the hot dusty plains of Kurukshetra stood the warring clans of Kauravas and Pandavas, first cousins by birth and feuding warriors by circumstances." 11 says Ajanta Chakravarty.

The crucial background of the calamitous Kurukshetra war and the exact juncture of the utterance of the Bhagavad Gita are captured by Jack Hawley in his engagingly precise expressions:

"His unseeing eyes blinked several times as he spoke to his minister Sanjaya. The blind old king, Dhritarashtra, fidgeted and cleared his throat. "Tell me, Sanjaya, what is happening on the holy plain where the mighty armies of my son Duryodhana and his cousin Arjuna are gathered to fight?" 12

Of Sanjaya, bidden by Dhritarashtra to relate to him as to what was happening in the battlefield Krishna Chaitanya says,

"Vyasa, (as an august character in the poem) gives magical powers to Sanjaya that makes him the perfect war correspondent who can roam all over the field without danger... Sanjaya gives a visually vivid narration to the blind king, implacably driving home the basic responsibility of the monarch every time Kaurava fortunes suffer a serious blow... And as the narration ends, the magical power that is enabled it is exhausted....The old man knew that his son Duryodhana’s decision to go to war was wrong. He knew that the young king’s judgement was clouded over by his jealous hate for his cousin. The old man had felt pangs of conscience but had said nothing when his son had cheated Arjuna’s family out of their rightful kingdom and then denied their request even for a trifling parcel of land that was rightfully theirs. The old man had maintained his curious silence when his son mortified Arjuna’s wife and the whole family in public by having a henchman attempt to strip her of her clothes. He didn’t condemn his son’s heinous attempt to assassinate Arjuna’s entire family. Nor did the old man try to change his son’s mind when the young king sneered at all the recent peace overtures from Arjuna’s family....Indeed, the old man was so caught
up in his mindless support of his son that neither ethical nor spiritual feelings could find their way into his heart. All good judgement had been lost. An unfair and ill-conceived war was about to erupt, although he was the only person who could at this point avert the disastrous slaughter, he had no mind to do so.”

Sanjaya tells Dhritarashtra of Duryodhana’s nervousness. In Hawley’s words,

“Perhaps his confidence wanes or his conscience bothers him.” The old king didn’t immediately react to this, as the old man’s spirits were as sinister as his son’s. Instead of boldly facing the enemy, Duryodhana faulted the teacher for having tutored Arjuna in archery. Sanjaya tells Dhritarashtra, “No one should ever speak to his teacher in this way; it reveals your son’s nervousness.”

Arjuna also loses his resolve, for altogether different reasons. For a moment he thinks, was he there to kill his kith and kin. Says Arjuna,

“I know they are overcome with greed. And I know they are blind to the evil of all their treachery. But does that justify my being blind too? If those same relations attack me and kill me, unresisting and unarmed on this battlefield, so be it. Death would be better for me.”

Lord Krishna emboldens the hesitant Arjuna to fight and win the war; that is the Bhagavad Gita. Another reference on the Gita’s greatness’ bears relevance.

“Gandhi identifies Krishna with the righteousness of the end and Arjuna with the purity of the means and says that where the means are clean, God is undoubtedly present with His blessings and where the two are combined their defeat is an impossibility,” says V. Ramanathan, translator and commentator.

Yet another eloquent testimony is Jack Hawley’s admission as a non-Indian corporate consultant, trainer and writer, working to instill new energy, heart and spirit into large organisations. Says he,

“Over the years, I had already developed a relationship with the Gita. Although my cultural background (a practical organisation consultant from
California) is far distant from India, for me, the Gita’s teachings were tangible and immediate. For twelve years my wife Louise and I had lived about six months each year in a spiritual community in rural India where the culture of the Gita is still a strong part of daily life. I was therefore able to test these teachings on the touchstone of life’s trials as I lived them. 17

This part of the thesis which attempts to derive lessons on leadership has faith in the words of Hawley who says,

“To read the Bhagavad Gita is to swing back and forth smoothly between the head and the heart, between the worldly and spiritual, arching between gaining knowledge and applying it in today’s real world. In this swing from humanness to godliness lies the Gita’s secret penetrating power, its ability to lift and move.” 18

If that be so, what are the lessons for leadership from the Gita?

When the protégé’s confidence sinks, Krishna, the mentor, lifts him up, praising him as a cultured person and an evolved soul against the normal human response of a frustrated mentor over an ubiquitous protégé – “Do you dither? Had I known it, I wouldn’t have driven you here. GTH – (Go to hell).”

Krishna arouses Arjuna’s sagging energy and eggs him on to strive for success. That is where divinity scores over humanity. May this approach inspire modern leaders in the way they handle their deputies. Let them follow this to guide their staff, boosting up their energy. Let the Gita talk to the modern Arjunas, hesitant leaders, in the battlefield of life, Kurukshetra.

The need for this enthusing mentor-protégé approach is advocated by diplomat and author R.S. Garg

“...the implications of certain parts of the Bhagavad Gita insofar as they affect the daily life of a reasonably well-placed person. He or she is educated and may even be in the decision making position as an executive in a government department or a corporate division or he may be a professional committed to implementation of certain policies for the country or the society.” 19
Correlating the *Gita* to the corporate realm Ajanta Chakravarty says,

"Management deals with people. Everyone is not brave, valiant, clever and sensitive. An individual may display varying characteristics of courage and cowardice, tolerance and intolerance, friendliness and enmity under different circumstances. However, no matter what the circumstance, the individual prowess of man enables him to justify and rationalise his actions by constructing substantive arguments in their favour. This is what Arjuna does. It is a classic example of mental bankruptcy to be seen in management through the ages, when managers, instead of leading, spend their valuable intellectual resources in constructing excuses for not doing so. This is the situation in so many business organisations though today when massive changes are unfolding, it is more necessary than ever before that management should have lightning reflexes, canny foresight and a determination of tempered steel. Where managers are busy creating smoke-screens of excuses for indecisiveness, how can an organisation achieve its objectives?" 20

Ajanta Chakravarty adds,

"The manager is a *sarati*, the chariot driver. He does not bear weapons or fight but a great proportion of the warrior’s success depends on the vision, skill and ability of the *sarati* to manoeuvre him through the battlefield and take the best advantage of various opportunities. The warrior is the executive, the *sarati* the manager. It is the manager who plans, guides, directs and takes a holistic view of the arena to decide where his executives may operate and how." 21

Ajanta Chakravarty, writing in 1995, used the terms manager and leader when they were actually interchangeable. Now that leadership is considered separately, her terms manager and executive shall mean leader and manager.

The *Gita*’s leadership lessons are approached under three divisions - Qualities, Attitudes and Modes of functioning. Like *Tirukkural*, *Vidura Niti* and Bhishma’s *Raja Niti*, the *Gita* also calls for the qualities of heart and the head, but searches beyond them; it expects the leader to be soulfully wholesome.
"The senses are subtler than the body; the mind is subtler than the senses; the intellect is subtler than the mind. Far above all is soul, the subtest of all, which is beyond any and all desire." Gita III- 42

Gita’s Leadership: the transformation within

Leadership lessons of the Gita are approached here from the above perspective, accommodating the roles of heart, head and soul, under the divisions – Qualities and Functions.

“Even the great sages were perplexed as to what is action and what is inaction. I will tell you which actions you should perform and which ones to avoid.” - Lord Krishna, The Gita, Chapter IV

In the above words the protagonist has said the essence of the Gita more succinctly than any of the translators or commentators. Here are extracts from the Gita from that perspective of what to do and what not to do, as applicable to a leader’s duties. They are transformational traits and the transformation has to take place in one’s inner recesses that is deeper than the heart and the head, which is otherwise termed the soul.

If the Bhagavad Gita’s import is to be presented in a pithy paragraph, it could run like this:

To know what to do and what not to do, man should undergo a subtle transformation within; he should control his wayward senses from the cravings unworthy of himself, direct his mind and intellect toward true knowledge, take up selfless actions, give up the fruits thereof and pursue the path of refined altruism.

How to go about? Lord Krishna guides and that is the Bhagavad Gita.

The Bhagavad Gita presents a master and his disciple locked up in a discussion on the nature and functioning of man’s senses, mind, heart and soul. The disciple is caught in a critical bind and wonders whether to strike at all, knowing full well that he was on the battlefield only to fight. The dithering was due to the fact that he was pitted against his cousins, other relatives, his teachers and his own grandfather. Lord
Krishna enthuses him to be pro-active. Action alone does not count. The type and the attitude of the person who acts count as much as the action.

Taken in the corporate perspective the extracts refer to leadership traits that count. The Gita’s sermon is a leader’s emboldening, enlightening address to his dilemmatic, dithering manager as to what to do in the battlefield of life and pursuits. Krishna is the leader and Arjuna is manager.

The Gita’s Leadership: Heart, Mind And Intellect

(Roman numerals refer to Gita’s Chapters; Arabic ones the serial number of the verse.)

One’s behaviour is rooted in the thoughts and the tendencies that predominate in them. This is the meaning of one’s nature. - III - 33

The man is the leader, nothing more, nothing less. If the man is set right, the leader in him will also have been set right. And, what makes man a man, and the man a leader, and for that matter, a good leader? Bhagavad Gita answers these questions in accordance with Indian philosophical tenets that a man is bound by the combination of three gunas - characteristics, sattva, rajas, and tamas. These three words could be rendered into English as (i) being wise and sober (ii) Being valiant and steadfast (iii) being idle and indifferent, connoting to the brainy, brawny and the lazy.

Sattva signifies calmness, wisdom and the associated sobriety. Rajas prompts one to be brave and assume warrior-like qualities. Tamas is inertia, lethargy, marking inward darkness. However, people cannot be pigeonholed in the three categories. No one is born with a particular guna or lives all through with it. The three, in different proportions, mould one. The proportion varies from person to person. A person is what his dominant guna is. That guna decides his personality.

All advisors, counsellors and their ilk under the category of intellectuals are people with sattvic qualities – they use their brains most. Soldiers and others who eke out their living by their physical strain and bravery are of rajasic type – they use their brawn. Persons who are neither sattvic nor rajasic are tamsic; they are influenced by tamas, inertia coupled with ignorance.
What makes a man good or bad, vibrant or lazy depends on the proportion of the above. Over the years one can change the ratio by volition. One can grow from one stage to another, but there are riders. A sattvic can turn a rajasic or a rajasic could become a sattvic. One can have the characteristics of both and could use one or the other as the occasion demands. This interchange is possible only within the first two categories. The third never grow out of their stupor or stupidity. The tamasic have neither inclination nor the capacity to change. And, they wouldn’t regret their lot!

A sattvic person could become valourous; a rajasic one could take to scriptures. He takes up arms too. Bhishma, the grandsire of The Mahabharata, a kshatria, was rajasic and sattvic. Dronacharya was a Brahmin; but a sattvic turned a rajasic. He was the second in command in the Kurukshetra war. Parashurama, a sattvic Brahmin, was also rajasic, an adept in weaponry. Yudhishtra, a kshahatria, is rajasic and sattvic, being knowledgeable in scriptures and an able warrior too.

What do the slokas on gunas in the Gita tell on leadership in the modern context? The sattvic and the rajasic alone could be leaders, not the tamasic. Still taking cues from the Gita those of the first two can attempt a changeover, if needed, or they could also note whether the tamasic are corrigeble or incorrigible, so that they can take up or give up any bid to improve them. The tamasic character is King Dhritarashtra. He could not become rajasic because he was visually challenged; but he could have become sattvic. Had he been so, the Gita would have been born in the battlefield! He did not take any step toward evolution of his personality. Born blind, he lived blind.

1. Grow from Being To Becoming

Arjuna, known for his valour, which was the pride of his brothers and envy of his cousins, was seen dithering in the battlefield and Krishna energised him to be both rajasic and sattvic. Krishna says the growth of a man should be from ‘being’ to ‘becoming,’ from just an ordinary human being to one divinely endowed. That is the essence of – Jnana Vijnana Yoga (Chapter VII)

One learns knowledge through his senses and mind, that is through sight and thinking; one gains wisdom through direct grasp, through insight and intuition. Knowledge ‘knows’ at an intellectual level; wisdom realises it fully and is able to
apply it in daily living. Once you combine both of these, there is nothing more you need to know in this world. (VII-2)

2. **Take the food that nourishes**

You are what you eat, and, you eat, based on what you are. XVII–8

Apart from his genes food habits also mould man's character. What is sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander. The menu for inmates of monasteries is different from the staff there. Normally food preferences reflect one's nature, but one is also at liberty to choose the food that nourishes him, of *sattvic* or *rajasic* components, per his state and need. Change in food habits causes a change in personality traits. Says *Gita*:

Regarding dietary practices, know that there are subtle elements in food that significantly influence the mind, and therefore shape mental attitudes. This creates a cycle similar to the situation with one's faith: You are what you eat and you eat based on what you are. (XVII - 8)

Food is a vital factor influencing character and behaviour. Still it is not everything. One should change himself through his firm will; he should also have the firm resolve, not to slip off from his status and stature. The type of food one takes shapes his will power too. Normally what type of food the *sattvic, rajasic* and *tamasic* people take, or what sorts of food come under the above three categories? *Gita* has answers:

*Sattvic* people consume pure, mild, nourishing food that strengthens them physically and brings pure thoughts and mental cheerfulness. Their foods are fresh, juicy, soothing and agreeable to the body's digestive system. Breakfast is light; the daytime meal is as required, but not more; supper is as light as possible so bodily organs can rest through the night. (XVII –8)

*Rajasic* people are drawn to spicy, hot, bitter, salty, acidic and burning food. Like the people who eat it, this food produces pain, grief and disease, and hinders spiritual attainment. (XVII -9)

*Tamasic* people eat old, overcooked, stale, tasteless, impure, empty and dead food with no nutritional value. This food returns the qualities in kind to the eater. (XVI I–10)
People who eat too much or too little or who sleep too much or too little will not succeed in mediation. Eat only food that does not heat up the body or excite the mind. When you balance and regulate your habits of eating, sleeping, working and playing, then meditation dissolves sorrow and destroys mental pain. (VI-16, 17)

The proportion of the gunas could be changed by food habits. One’s constant efforts toward personality improvement through dietary control will yield the results desired, says the Gita; the cannons of modern health science uphold this to the letter.

3. Be self-controlled

Controlling the senses is an important factor, says Lord Krishna. As the pursuit of senses prompt and foster desires, they should be controlled.

Senses derive their power from the many likes and dislikes imprinted in the mind by family, by culture, and by one’s actions in this and previous lives. (III-34)

Much of one’s spiritual discipline must therefore focus on taming wayward senses and being ever vigilant against the treacherousness of the senses. The refinement of an individual or a society is measured by the yardstick of how well greed and desires are controlled. (II. 60)

The wise recognize the transient nature of worldly gratification and thus do not look for happiness in the realm of senses. Sensual delights are the wombs of misery. Earthly pleasures, though they seem enjoyable, are fleeting and ultimately painful. Wise ones know that misery, inevitably, without fail, marches in lockstep with worldly pleasure. (V-22)

Mind controls desires in two ways: (i) not to entertain the ruining desires; (ii) to restrain them as they crop up. A leader should subdue his mind through regular practice, relentless inquiry, non-attachment and firm faith, advises Lord Krishna.

Some advanced aspirants actually learn to suspend the physical senses of hearing, sight, taste, touch and smell - offering them into the fire of sense restraint. In this way they control the stimuli at the gate before these enter their perception. Others do the opposite – not retraining the senses before they enter, but controlling the influence of
them on the mind itself. Both approaches produce the same result: purification of mind, which is absolutely necessary for Self-knowledge. (IV-26)

The mind is restless and hard to subdue, but it can be done. There are four main ways to do it: through regular practice, relentless inquiry, non-attachment and firm faith. (VI-35)

Renounce all selfish desires, which are but products of the ego. Use your mind to curb all your senses. Rein in your restlessness and fidgety mind from wandering outside to seek stimulation and satisfaction. (VI-24)

The mind should be a rudder to the ship of senses says the Gita. A leader shall score over others by keeping his senses under control – Gita tells thus:

The roving mind that that attaches to the objects of the senses loses its discrimination is adrift, a ship without a rudder. Even a small wind blows it off its safe-charted course. Those who use all their powers to restrain their senses, steady the mind, free them-selves from both attachment and aversion – they are the people of true wisdom, Illumined Ones. (II—67,68)

Once you gain your spiritual wisdom, you will never again be deluded or confused. (IV-35)

4. Cultivate the faculty of discrimination

The successful man knows what is truth and what is non-truth. He differentiates the real from the unreal. This sense of discrimination is a laudable leadership quality.

The sattvic intellect discriminates between Truth and non-Truth, real and not-Real. It knows the difference between action and inaction. It differentiates between fear and fearlessness. (XVIII—30)

The one who uses his discrimination power knowingly for wrong ends, swerves from virtue and there is no use in his being endowed with that trait. He is not a leader.

The rajasic intellect also discriminates, but wrongly. It has a distorted understanding of right and wrong deeds, rationalising that the means justify the ends no matter how selfish or hurtful. This type of buddhi (intellect) is capable of conver-
ting truth into falsehood and vice versa. Greed, passion, anger and fear cloud its vision. It stays mired in base worldly life instead of guiding one upward. (XVIII –31)

The *tamasic* people can never be leaders, as they cannot discriminate between good and bad. But they could be converted to the *rajasic* stage, if they show initiative. Indefatigable leaders with conviction can mend them to be of some use.

The *tamasic* intellect, wrapped in ignorance and enveloped in darkness, simply cannot discriminate. Good-ness appears bad to this intellect while evil seems good. It understands life in a perverted way. The *tamas*-dominated intellect drags one ever downward. (XVIII –32)

5. **Be free from likes and dislikes**

A leader should be free from his likes and dislikes. He should endeavour to cast away prejudices. The noteworthy expression is ‘Desires never say Enough.’ Leaders who want to be effective and eminent should note the other points too, that, anger is linked to desires and the two are the conspiring enemies.

That awful force is desire. Desire is the force that drags you – selfish desire, which rises from your action-oriented nature. Selfish desires are insatiable, the more you feed them, the more you crave. .Desires never say ‘Enough.’ And anger is always linked with desires, and anger corrupts everything. The desire - anger duo is your direst, most formidable enemy, here on earth. (III-37)

6. **Know the disasters of desires**

To be part of the world and discharging duties without attachment is a rare leadership quality. It may not be possible for all men. But leaders who cultivate it gain much thereby. To harbour desires and to be directed by them is getting ensnared. A leader cannot afford to be a desire-free mendicant monk. He should understand the nature and course of desires and direct them to his betterment and that of others.

The central points of issue, Arjuna, are desire and lack of inner peace. Desire for the fruits of one’s actions brings worry about possible failure - the quivering mind I mentioned. When you are preoccupied with end-results you pull yourself from the
present into an imagined, usually fearful future. Then your anxiety robs your energy and, making matters worse, you lapse into inaction and laziness. (II—47)

7. Eschew desire and anger

Ideal leadership is discharging duties without room for desires or attachment. Desires prompt one to develop attachment and a sense of attachment makes one swerve from the right path. If a leader analyses the causes of his anger, he can sense the truth behind the statement – anger is the expression of a mind frustrated by unfulfilled desires.

Desires cloud your spiritual light and bury your power of discrimination. As a flame is covered by smoke, and a mirror is covered with dust, and embryo hidden in the womb, true knowledge is concealed by desire. For spiritually advanced people, desire is like smoke and is easily blown away to reveal the light of knowledge. For worldly-caught people desire is more like a dust that requires vigorous wiping so that light can shine. For really dull persons desire so enfolds them that they are like embryo buried in darkness. (III-38)

Desire and anger are counterparts. Anger is your response to the frustrations of unfilled desires. When you can control and transcend desire and anger you will have found true, lasting happiness. (V-23)

Desireful action is the very nature of rajas. Desire goads one into action and creates a sense of doership in the mind. (XIV - 7)

Any pleasure, even good pleasure, creates attachment and subsequent desire.

(XIV – 6)

8. Don’t be greedy

Partially satiated desires longs for more and provoke Greed. To avoid desire is to dispense with greed that ruins. Ultimately greedy leaders lose more than they gain.

Greed is but desire swollen to grotesque size. The wise one knows that desire is the eternal, insatiable archenemy, and tries to steer clear of it. But despite one’s best efforts, desire still puts on many disguises and sneaks furtively into the heart and mind. (III-39)
The three main causes of this depravity are the so-called three gates to hell: desire, greed and anger. Any one of them is enough to bind you to this darkness, so abandon all three. (XVI –21)

9. Note, purity of thought is important

The war of Kurukshetra was born in Duryodhana’s mind long before it was declared. Thought provokes words, actions and reactions. From street brawls to world wars, thought is an igniting agent. It would do well for the leaders to introspect catastrophes and calamities of human origin and fix the thought-agent. The author of the Gita prompts this, because an impure mind ruins himself and the society.

Purification of thought is more important than the other two refinements, words and deeds, because good words and deeds are spontaneous in the mind that is saturated with good thoughts. Maintain a calm and gentle state of mind and you will not be speaking wayward words or doing unwanted deeds. To develop equanimity of mind, allow only good thoughts and noble sentiments to arise in you. This may sound impossible to most people, but as we know now, one can indeed, cleanse the mind through constant, intense, direct practice. (XVII –16)

10. Clear the mind of impurities

Those of impure mind cannot give up their ego. The pure attract pure; the impure attract impure; those of anger and greed attract only their ilk. Their senses prompt them to be avaricious and money-minded. Such traits do not go with leadership.

They (those of impure mind) are bound on all sides by scheming, greed and anger because being hurtful themselves, they attract hurtful people. They amass and hoard wealth for the sole purpose of indulging in senses and the whims. Grabbing for riches governs their every thought and move. (XVI –12)

They (those of impure mind) arrogantly proclaim, ‘I wanted this or that and I got it. Tomorrow, I will get more. These riches are mine, and I will spend my life, making more. I have destroyed this and that enemy, and I will get rid of the rest of them. I am, in deed, mighty. I am the ruler of my domain. I love having things of the world. I am successful, powerful, and rich. Who can compare to me? I will buy my
way, making lavish contributions to the poor and the weak and revel in my own good-ness. That is how far blindness and ignorance have eaten into their soul.

(XVI –13, 14,15)

These degenerates, bewildered, trapped in their addiction to sense gratification, are stuck in the spider-web of delusion. They spiral downward into the filthy, painful hell of their own minds. (XVI –16)

Purity of action and heart is absolutely essential for further spiritual growth.

11. Cast away the ego

The Gita delves deep into human psyche. A subdued mind is pure. It gives no room for ego; a lower mind lets the ego grow. History is replete with instances that mighty leaders had fallen more by their ego than through snares of external enmity.

From the ego principle is produced the lower mind. Its job is to receive through the senses and process the messages received from the field and carry them to the intellect. Included here are some modifications of the mind; desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, the experience of one's physical body, intelligence (the power to interpret) and the mental experience of the physical stamina. (VIII-5, 6)

The ignorant one, mistakenly identifying with the body, erroneously thinks, 'I am the doer.' This is the mark of egoism. In truth, Arjuna, all actions are really performed by worldly nature, not by Atma. The Self (Atma), remember, is beyond all action, all karma. (III –27)

12. Cultivate equanimity

In this world of fissiparous tendencies, it is very difficult to remain unalloyed by joys and sorrows, likes and dislikes. Still one should endeavour to cultivate qualities of purity, sans ego.

The cessation of your present pain and sorrow will depend on how well you will overcome your ignorance of your ‘True Self’ that still lives within you. (II -24)

And heed this important point about life in general: the way to win this great war is to react alike to both pain and pleasure, profit and loss, victory and defeat. (II-38)
When one’s actions are not based on desire for personal reward, one can more easily study the mind and direct it towards the atma the True Self Within. (II-41)

This is the man or the woman whose mind is unperturbed by sorrow and adversity, who doesn’t thirst for pleasures, and is free of the three traits that most tarnish the mind, namely, attachment, fear and anger. Such a one is an Illumined One, a stitapragna. (II-56)

13. Be of firm resolve; that is fait accompli

The mind matters in man’s ventures and leadership evolution. A firm mind achieves its aims. The phrases of the Gita – fixity of purpose, inner discipline and meditation are to be taken note of.

The gunas account for the degrees of firmness of mind. Sattvic firmness is an absolutely unwavering devotion to the Divine. You carefully cultivate this fixity of purpose through inner discipline and meditation. You turn all life energy and all functions of the mind (feelings, thoughts and senses) Godward, and then firmly fasten them. Like the compass needle that points north regardless of the direction of travel, this focus on the Divine never veers from the ultimate goal of merging in That. (XVIII –33)

Rajasic firmness of mind is similarly resolute but holds fast to the desires for pomp, power, prosperity and prestige or even to the attachment to virtuous. If turned Godward, this resolve could lift you toward the Supreme, but directed toward worldly enjoyment it condemns you repeated lifetimes of turmoil and pain. (XVIII –34)

The firmness of sattvic persons helps the world progress; the firmness with rajasic people helps themselves at least, though for a short term. But the firmness of the mind of the tamasic, born of ignorance, lack of purpose and lack of fortitude, helps none, not even themselves. Tamasic firmness of mind is born of ignorance, lack of purpose, and lack of fortitude, which results in a deadening inertia. In the absence of discrimination or understanding, the only resolve in tamas is to eat, drink and sleep. The tamasic person ignores the rest of life as it were a dream. (XVIII –35)
Influence of the genes on one’s personality has its limits. Beyond the formative period, progress depends on one’s right resolves. The sattvic always make the right resolves and stand by them. Right or wrong, the rajasic also stand by their resolves, but it is not always that they take the right resolves. Still status and stature growth from rajasic to sattvic is a distinct possibility. Growth from tamasic to rajasic is almost impossible. If the tamasic food is given up and the indolent habits are changed, a path for a change could open up for the tamasic. But it is very difficult to energise them.

Tamasic, literally darkness, is saturated with ignorance and instills nothing but indolence and stupor. This guna bewilders people, stealing their capacity for work (their rajasic energy) as well as their composure (their sattvic calmness.) (XIV – 8)

14. Be steady-minded

Decision-making is an important duty of a leader. Wavering, indecision, unmindfully yielding to pressures and pulls spoil the leader and his ventures. The leader should be steady-minded, noting the difference between firmness and hard-headedness.

For the person of steady mind, there is always just one decision, but for the quivering mind pulled in a thousand directions, the decisions that plague it are endless, and they exhaust one’s mental strength. People with an unsteady mind inevitably end up failing; those with an unwavering mind achieve great success. (II-47)

One does not accomplish great ends in some by and by future, O, Warrior. Only in the present can you hammer out real achievement. The worried mind tends to veer from the only real goal – realising the atma, uniting with Divinity, the True Self Within. (II –47)

Through long concentration of one’s mind ceases its wandering. After some time one develops what is in essence a new sensory faculty known as medhanadi, an intuitive penetrating skill that makes knotty issues of life no longer problems. (VI-15)
15. Realise the intellect is not everything

Intellect has its rewards. Still even a sharp intellect is no substitute to a pure mind, or a generous heart. Intellect void of a pure mind is no leadership.

From the perspectives of the gunas are formed two additional qualities: Intellect and firmness of mind. Intellect refers to the faculty of discrimination and firmness of mind refers to the strength of convictions, resolve, fortitude and courage on the spiritual path. (XVIII –29)

16. Avoid degenerating qualities

Although much is said on destiny, thinkers have been telling from time immemorial that man is responsible for what happens to him. Good and bad are not caused externally, even so, anguish and appeasement. This is expressed in the oft-quoted adage – It is mind that makes hell a heaven and heaven a hell. To have a heaven, the mind should be pure. An impure mind is hell in itself.

But those who carp about these teachings and do not practice them are deluded without spiritual discrimination. They are the cause of their sorrow and ruin. (III –32)

God is neither responsible for nor takes note of any-one’s bad or even good deeds. Both bad and good deeds are the results of action performed by people. (V-15)

From the ego principle is produced the lower mind. Its job is to receive through the senses and process the messages received from the field and carry them to the intellect. Included here are some modifications of the mind; desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, the experience of one’s physical body, intelligence (the power to interpret) and the mental experience of the physical stamina. (VIII-5, 6)

On the other hand are the degenerate qualities, behaviours and moods that render a person less than human: “Pride, (ostentation, hypocrisy, pompousness (arrogance) vanity (self-conceit) anger, harshness (coarseness, sternly judging) and absence of discrimination between right and wrong, Truth and non-Truth, real and not-Real) (XVI –4)
Look more closely at degenerate behaviour – not to dwell on negatives, but to guard against them. (XVI –6)

Degenerate beings, because they have no sense of truth or right conduct, (dharma) do not know what they should or should not do. There is no purity in them. (XVI –7)

17. Cultivate positive qualities
Among many leadership traits the power of positive thinking has been advocated by the Gita, in the following sloka:

Fearlessness, purity of heart and emotions, steadfastness, charity and control of senses are the divine traits. (XVI –2)

The list of god-like traits are: Truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation (away from worldly attachments) equanimity and not slandering. Compassion, not coveting (no desire) gentleness, modesty, not being fickle, (no fluctuations of mind) and vigour. Forgiveness, fortitude, courage, endurance, ‘putting up with’ cleanliness (clean mind and body) no hatred and no pride. All these are cardinal virtues and tendencies that reveal the real nature of human beings: their Divinity. (XVI –3)

18. Have empathy for all
A leader of sober traits is not egoistic; hence he has empathy for others. Perceiving everyone equal to him, he develops the right perspective in life and career. Timeserving leaders do not transcend their mundane clutches. To them power and pelf, whatever way they come, matters most. The Gita says:

The person of satvic knowledge knows the Divinity of the Self, sees Divinity in all beings, knows the oneness of all creatures in the universe, and sees none of the separateness of others. (XVIII –20)

The man of ego sees him on a high pedestal; hence he has no empathy for others; thereby he lacks the requisite leadership trait. Such a person is always up in arms, taking others not as kindred souls, but as hostile ones, pitted against him.
The person of *rajasic* knowledge perceives separateness every-where and sees each individual as distinct from all others. He or she believes there are as many separate souls as there are bodies. (XVIII –21)

The person of *tamasic* knowledge has, in reality, no knowledge at all, only ignorance. This deluded one clings to the belief that an individual is only a body. To him or to her the loss of the body means the loss of everything. There is no subtlety of reason in this. (XVIII –22)

**Beyond Heart And Head - The Soul**

Heart, head and intellect contribute to leadership. The *Gita* accords the soul the status of a guide. It accommodates the best of the heart, the head and the intellect. The soul’s role is to identify humanity with Divinity; even in an agnostic context this connotes refined altruistic hedonism, ie., taking into consideration the larger interests of the humanity, void of any personal stakes. The *Gita* addresses Arjuna, so much so, everyone on this.

Addressing the hesitant but valiant Arjuna on the battlefield, just when the war had been declared, Lord Krishna told him of the ordained functions of individuals and how well could they be performed. As things get done in accordance with the character of the doer, Krishna sermonised on the *qualities* and *duties* of a leader. They were discussed in the foregone section. Here are the *Gita*’s directives to the functioning leader.

1. **Know it before you do it**

A leader, before he acts, should have thought of the modes, intents and consequences of his action; he should have a thorough knowledge of his foray. When he starts doing it, he must give up the feeling that he is the doer; he should do it in all modesty, as arrogance would spoil the results. Krishna says a leader is a servant. Modern western thinking is also in conformity with ancient wisdom. Recently author Robert Greenleaf has come out with a book titled *Servant Leadership*.

The function of the scriptures is to guide people toward living a perfected life on earth and repeatedly remind them of the goal, which should be nothing short of
achieving Divinity Itself. But those who spurn the teachings and guidance of scriptures and act only on the impulses of their desires will not achieve perfection and divinity, only misery. (XVI –23)

Let the scriptures tell you what you should and what you should not. Know what the right choices are and live up to them. It is simpler than you think. When you, or anyone, is firmly on the road to enlightenment there is no conflict at all between what you do and what the scriptures advice.

(XVI –24)

The ignorant cannot lead the community; the enlightened who are the best servants of the society. So do your worldly work without attachment and for the interests of all. (III-20)

Right knowing leads to right doing. Right doing gives rise to right knowing. Take either path to the very end where they meet. (V -5)

2. Do your assigned duty

One’s personal duty in life (svadharma) should be viewed as one’s duty...for a warrior, war against evil, greed, cruelty, hate and jealousy is the highest duty. (II-31)

One’s duty in life is one’s dharma. This essentially means that you have to live by your inner Truth rather than your selfish desires. One must do one’s duty. (III-35)

3. Do not withdraw from responsibilities

Leadership is no position or status but a role of responsibility. And, what are the factors a leader has to take into account in discharging his duties? The Gita answers:

If you do not do your duty the tale of your dishonour will be repeated endlessly. For a man of honour to go down in history as dishonourable is a fate worse than death. Ordinary human beings naturally strive to preserve their lives, but the warrior has a different way. Warriors must be ever ready not merely to safeguard, but to sacrifice their lives for a cause. Knowingly surrendering your life to an ideal increases your glory. (II - 34)

Your enemies who have harboured a grudging respect for your prowess in battle will slander you and ridicule your bravery. Those who used to shudder at the thought of fighting you will crack innocent jokes about your faint heartedness. Failure
to do your duty will destroy the well-deserved reputation you built over many heroic battles. (II-36)

4. Do your duty for duty’s sake

Extraneous considerations in discharging duties twist the mode of working or affect the results. The ideal is to work for the sake of work, not for other factors. That is what a leader should try to cultivate, to be successful in his endeavours.

Work hard in the world for work’s sake only. You have every right to work but you should not crave the fruits of it. Although no one may deny you the outcomes of your efforts, you can, through determination, refuse to be attached to or affected by the results, whether favourable or unfavourable. (II-47)

5. Never be selfish or have covert intents

Corporate or political leaders with a personal stake in what they do plunge institutions into loss. Instances of leaders working with selfish stakes, being reported by the media, point to this rut. Resignations of the highly placed persons such as the Enron chief in the U.S. and some ministers in India and elsewhere are examples, not to speak of the current affairs.

The ideal is to be intensely active and at the same time have no selfish motives, no thoughts of personal gain or loss. Duty uncontaminated by desire leads to inner peacefulness and increased effectiveness. This is the secret art of living a life of real achievement. (II –47)

Do your work in this world with your heart fixed on the Divine instead of on outcomes. Do not worry about results. Be even-tempered in success or failure. This mental evenness is what is meant by yoga (union with God). (II-48)

Work performed with anxiety about results is far inferior to work done in a state of calmness. Equanimity - a serene mental state free from likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions – is truly the ideal attitude in which to live your life. To be in this state of mind is to be lodged in the Divine. Pitiful are those pulled by the fruits of action. (II-49)
Engage in action, do your work but with full control of your mind and senses. And be aware that the work you do should contribute in some way, directly or indirectly, to the higher good of humanity. (III—7)

6. **Be judicious in charity**

Thinkers have been extolling charity as a virtue, which means the society had been wallowing in economic imbalance for ages. Charity covers patronage, sponsorship, gifts, presents, compliments and give-aways. Terms differ; they are only lexical variations, not the changing factors of life. Hence the import behind the genuine act of charity bears relevance even now. In the corporate sector charity is *quid-pro-quo* transaction. But that is not the ideal way of being charitable. The *Gita* says:

Consider the three types of charity - *dana* - alms giving. It is one’s duty to give. When you offer charity out of a positive sense of duty with no feeling of obligation in it and no expectation of reward, and furnish it at the right time and place to a deserving person who can make no return, that giving is *sattvic*. (XVII -20)

Handing over a gift with strings attached to it makes both the giver and the taker uncomfortable. Charity presented with the hint of desire for receiving a return is *rajasic*. (XVII —21)

Gifts given at the wrong time and place to unworthy persons – people of questionable character who squander their money or do not help others or gifts presented disrespectfully or accompanied by an insult – those charities are *tamasic*. (XVII —22)

7. **Your attitude matters**

In the modern world of one-liners a catchy one is – Your attitude decides your altitude. *Tirukkural* and the *Gita* have said this exactly.

Sacrifice is the noblest form of action. Work performed in the right attitude of mind becomes sacrifice. Service is sacrifice. This level of sacrifice actually has Divinity in it, performing it becomes a subtle but powerful mental force. This makes life itself sacred. Eventually all your actions, mental and physical become an offering (a sacrifice) for the betterment of the Universe. (III- 14)
The objective of life is to reshape one's character upward in pursuit of a higher ideal - changing from indolence or inertia (tamas) into passionate effort (rajas) and then channelling that into calmness (sattva). (XIV – 5)

8. Be devoted to the cause

Lord Krishna emboldens Arjuna to think only of what he had to do in the given context. Hesitation or tarrying is born of one’s ignorance. As the right knowing would lead to right doing, a leader should first get educated on the agenda and go full-stream. What was told for Arjuna holds good for all.

Shake off this fever of ignorance that has enveloped you. Break free of your ego. Stop thinking of worldly rewards. And, then with a perfectly clear mind and heart, go forth, fight this battle of life! (III –30)

9. Take the counsel of elders

The sagacious advice given to the rising generation all over the world is this: Listen to elders; seek their counsel; abide by it. Gurukula was the ancient Indian practice. Apprenticeship is the industrial world’s terminology. Mentor-protégé is the modern management jargon. Whatever, the wise counsel by elders has its own weight and value through the ages. This leads to spiritual knowledge, absolutely essential for the functioning of a leader. The Gita puts it in its own way:

Another good attitude that aids the development of spiritual knowledge is to wholeheartedly revere someone who has genuinely achieved it. Sincerely question the teacher. As a burning candle can light many others, an illuminated soul can bring light to many a competent inquirer. (IV-34)

10. Don’t be a theoretician

Armchair farming is done easier than actual ploughing. Even so, leaders addressing from pulpits could impress others; but beyond exhortation, their contribution to the scheme of things might be little. As an anonymous saying goes, “The hands that help are holier than the lips that pray.” Lord Krishna echoes this:
There are marvellous benefits from this selfless way of life, but you cannot acquire them without firm faith. These principles must be lived, not intellectualised. Those who earnestly live them are released from karma, the consequences of their actions. (III - 31)

Stuffed until choking with pride and conceit, drunk with their own wealth, they pay mere lip service to Divinity. They make offerings to the deities only for name and fame, outward show and self-promotion. (XVI –17)

11. Be truthful in words and deeds

Truth matters in every transaction. It cannot be sacrificed for anything, nor bartered. There are instances in the epic where the subject is debated by the characters. What to do if one cannot speak truth under the given circumstances? The Gita answers:

Always tell the truth and present it in as pleasant a way as possible. If you cannot do that, remain silent. If something absolutely needs to be said, you must uphold the truth, but find a way to do it - that is gentle and obliging. (XVII –15)

12. Speak pleasantly

Bare words buy no barley; but pleasant words can. Harsh words hurt, pleasant words should not amount to flattery. Flattery is no less shameful than slandering.

Do not hurt others through harsh words. Words can be more painful than physical violence, and the hurt lasts longer. Words meant to excite negativity are an act of violence; shun such words. Abstinence from harmful words is very important.

(XVII -15)

Scrupulously avoid flattery, even if what you say is pleasant and contains truth. Promoting vanity does not help spiritual growth. (XVII–15)

13. Let your intents be pure

When you relentlessly practice these acts of purification of thought, word and deed, with firm faith and no expectation of reward, your practices are satvic.

(XVII -17)
When you practice these acts of purification to gain admiration or respect, your practices are *rajasic*. Any selfish motive to receive a return, whether in this world or the next, makes the act *rajasic*, and this extinguishes its value for spiritual attainment. (XVII –18)

14. **Have the will to change**

The will has its way. Those who analyse leadership traits choose to elaborate this. The will of a pure mind matters, says the *Gita*. An unholy bartering of soul is insulting the divinity in humanity. A pure mind will never resort to such blasphemies.

There are three methods of purification: the refinement of one’s thoughts, words and deeds – also called the purification, respectively, of one’s instruments of mind, speech and body. When you modify these three you automatically change for the better. (XVII-14)

Purifying one’s words, speech austerities, includes four keys: truth telling; not hurting; not flattering, and devotional chanting. (XVII–15)

15. **Never be deluded by illusions**

Philosophy prompts people to perceive that the world is two-fold – the world of things as it appears, and the world of things as it is in itself. Taking the one for the other is getting delusion. It is illusion, not reality. It hinders one’s spiritual growth.

When your mind crosses the mire of delusion and your intellect clears itself of its confusion about the truth of who you really are -your True Self - then you will become dispassionate about the results, all your actions. (II-52)

16. **Lead by example**

As long as corporate literature confined itself with managers the jargon was MBO – Management By Objectives. When the attention is turned to leader, the jargon got rephrased – MBE - Management By Example. A leader should set an example. This is what Lord Krishna advocates:

Whatever a great man or a woman does, others also do. Eminent people must in the public interest put forth their best virtues. Then ordinary people try to rise to that level. (III-21)
Summary of Chapter IV

Leadership as Propounded in The Mahabharata

The above Chapter covering portions relating to leadership in The Mahabharata analyses the implications of Vidura Niti, Bhishma’s Raja Niti and Bhagavad Gita.

Vidura Niti is plain ethics. It could be taken out the epic’s context and read as an independent text on leadership. Noting the context would do as one starts reading it. Well edited, Vidura Niti could pass for a highly exhilarating self-improvement treatise, useful for any, more so for leader aspirants.

Though perceived as a spiritual or metaphysical text, Bhagavad Gita is analysed here from the leadership point of view. From taking good food to keep the body fit and energetic, to keep the mind above joys and sorrows, to do soul-searching whether the activities are in order by the code of conduct prescribed in the scriptures and whether they are directed to the common good and the larger interests of humanity.

Bhishma’s Raja Niti, statecraft or political leadership is totally principle-centered governance, covering diplomacy and espionage. To be strategic is not to be unethical says General Bhishma who sermonises on the duties and responsibilities of a ruler. The man in the ruler matters, he says, having undergone trials and tribulations.

All the three major portions covered to trace lessons on leadership call for a leader to be human, endowed with an alert mind, flawless learning, wisdom, truth, modesty, non-violence, love, compassion, charity, pleasant speech and forbearance. Wealth should be pursued only by the right means. The forbidden vices include slander, covetousness, causing harm, mental and physical except by way of administering justice, womanizing, forbidden, especially having affairs with another man’s wife. According to Bhishma covetousness alone ensnares one to over 40 allied vices.

In general, the ideal leader is expected to be pure in Thought, Word and Deed, totally selfless and always working for the welfare of others and social upliftment.
Chapter IV Works Cited

1. Chaitanya, Krishna *The Mahabharata, A Literary Study* (New Delhi, Clarion, 1993) P. 47
4. Ibid. P. 156
5. Chaitanya, Krishna *The Mahabharata, A Literary Study* (New Delhi, Clarion, 1993) P.36-37
6. Mani TVS, Seeni Viswanathan (Ed.) *Bharathiar Kavithaigal* (Madras, Vaanavil) P. 421
7. Sridharan, Dr. N. *Vidura Niti* (Chennai, Gangai Puthaga Nilayam 1999) P. 20
14. Ibid. pp. 4-5
15. Ibid. P. 8
18. Ibid. P. xxi
21. Ibid. P. 10