Chapter VII

Native Moorings of Modern Indian Leaders

Introduction

Section 1 Native Moorings of Modern Indian Leaders

Section 2: *Tirukkural’s* Consonance to Modernity

Section 3: *The Mahabharata’s* Empirical Excellence

Summary of Chapter VII

Works Cited
Introduction to Chapter VII

Native Moorings of Modern Indian Leaders

This Chapter on the applied aspects of leadership norms has three sections.

The opening section one explains that Leadership is an inward journey. Gandhi proved that Truth has its Force and that is satyagraha. Rajaji proved that an ideal leader does not consider leadership a title or a role, big or small but responsibility that is important. Mao Tse-tung, Nelson Mandela and others illustrated indefatigability.

Contemporary Indian business leaders, like Azim Premji or Narayana Murthy do not hold corporate captaincy to wiled power or to heap wealth. They are introduced here as social entrepreneurs.

The second section analyses under several heads, normally chosen by modern corporate writers, the message of Tirukkural, one of the primary sources. They are: Home and family life, Vegetarian food, Learning, Truth, Communicating, Attitude, Enthusiasm, Pure Mind, Mentoring, Delegation and allied aspects.

The third section which follows the format of the earlier one covers the lessons of leadership, as could be gleaned from The Mahabharata presents two Indian corporate leaders who lived by the values espoused in the epic, selflessness, mentoring and commitment without a desire for personal gains.
Section 1: Native Moorings of Modern Indian Leaders

While lessons on leadership could be learnt from conceptual, observational and empirical sources, literary works present numerous types of characters worthy of emulation. Of all ancient works, the *Mahabharata* presents every type of conceivable character. Although modern leaders cannot be compared to epic heroes, as the parameters do not agree because of the supernatural elements in the epics, there is still much in characterization and the good could always be imbibed, provided leaders and leader aspirants realize that life is a process of evolution, from being to becoming, an inward journey.

Both the primary texts insist on one becoming a good man, to grow into a good leader and a good leader’s nursery is his family. The individual, the texts say in unanimity, shall start learning from the family background such things as good food habits, pure mind and a good character. He must grow within before he turns out to be of any use to those around. The family matters in the evolution of man, providing the atmosphere to develop a pure mind. If a mind is trained well during the formative period, it stays so all through. Failure in the man in a leader would cause breakdown in his leadership too.

Some modern corporate writers also feel that one should make an inward journey to develop his leadership assets. This is what Indian mystics have said centuries ago. To say this is not to fall into any reverse snobbery rut, but to impress upon the need to reinterpret passages in some ancient works which critics and literary historians have pigeonholed into devotional hymns, mystical literature and the like, while the authors and poets had no such compartmentalisation in mind when they wrote them. All that they had in mind was man, God and the world.

Modern management writers recommend a search within oneself to become a good leader. Here is a story cited by Robin Sharma that points out pithily and poignantly the need for an inward journey:
"According to Indian mythology, all people on earth were once gods. However, they began to abuse their power so the supreme God Brahma decided he would take this gift away from them and hide godhead in a place where they would never find it. One adviser suggested it be buried deep within the ground, but Brahma did not like the idea. ‘Mankind will one day dig deep enough to find it,’ he said. Another adviser suggested that that it be hidden in the deepest of the ocean. ‘No’, said Brahma, ‘One day mankind will dive deep enough to discover it.’ Yet another advisor suggested that godhead be placed on the highest peak of the highest mountain, but Brahma replied, ‘No, mankind will eventually find a way to climb to the top and take it. After silently thinking about it, the supreme God finally found the ideal resting place for the greatest of all gifts. Here is the answer. ‘Let us hide it within man himself. He will never think to look there.’ 1

Looked at from this angle, all the old-world virtues are found to be relevant and rewarding. Analysing the qualities of soul-searching leaders, author Gene N. Landrum remarks,

"Great leaders with noble goals - those with ethical agendas - are capable of changing the world for the better. They become transformational leaders in dynamic societies and these leaders are very important." 2

Mahatma Gandhi is a transformational leader who compels comparison with Bhishma in his steadfastness, commitment to truth, service, sacrifice and wielding influence without holding authority. As noted in the introduction, Pitirim A Sorokin who had a concern for leadership dedicated his book Reconstruction of Humanity to ‘the deathless Mohandas K. Gandhi.’ Sam Pitroda and others have also taken him as an ideal leader.

James MacGregor Burns in his book Leaders Who Changed the World has written at length on Mahatma Gandhi. He notes,

"Gandhi’s invention of the concept of the satyagraha was the distinctive act of his creative leadership, and it was to be the distinctive weapon of his protest leadership." 3

“In the history of public leadership, there has never been an individual as committed to a single standard of conduct in private and public life as Gandhi... he rejected compartmentalisation... Gandhiji formulated two absolute values: truth and non-violence. They were linked together, both in ends in themselves and means to an end.”

An advice on leadership to kings in Indian texts of statecraft is his judiciousness in choosing ministers, as discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. In modern India, there was a crucial situation when the enslaved India went to polls in 1937. Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, (Rajaji) lawyer and freedom fighter, won the Madras Presidency’s legislative assembly elections. He was a scholar and a no-nonsense man. Choosing his ministers was an arduous task. He was obliged to satisfy his party’s interests to take various sections of the society along with him. Of that citing historian A.R. Copley his biographer R.K. Murthi calls it,

“... a masterly compromise between the necessary claims of communal interests and dictates of his professional and moral competence.”

Another remarkable trait of Rajaji was his equanimity in holding public offices. From his first political office as the Chairman of the Municipality of Salem to that of Governor-General of India, he was the same man. After being Governor-General he accepted chief ministership of the Madras State. To him no position was too small or too big, as he believed servant leadership. Demitting office as Governor of West Bengal, he handed over to the Government presents given to him while in office, saying they belonged to the office he held and not to him as an individual. That was his sense of detachment.

Both Valluvar and Vyasa have extolled in as many words the greatness of compassion and reverence for life. Living in the African forests Albert Schweitzer practiced those virtues. His immortal words, as captured by James Bentley, linger:
"In everything you recognize yourself. The tiny beetle that lies dead in your path – it was a living creature, struggling for existence like yourself. Rejoicing in the sun like you, knowing fear and pain like you. And now it is no more than decaying matter- which is what you will be sooner or later too."  

Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi holds service, sacrifice, desirelessness, compassion and simplicity as cardinal virtues. He has said, as cited by his biographer Gibb Christopher,

“One of the most important things is compassion. You cannot buy it in one of New York’s big shops. You cannot produce it by machine. But by inner development, yes.”  

The traits as an individual gained Nelson Mandela the status of an inter-national leader. His first wife Evelyn has told of him,

“Nelson was a highly organized person and very regular in his habits. He was up the crack of dawn, jogged a few miles, and had a light breakfast and was off for the day,…”  

Strini Moodley, a fellow prisoner has said of Mandela,

“He stood head and shoulders above the others. Everyone looked up to him. When he spoke, we listened. He was patient, tolerant and I never saw him lose his temper.”

The vision-impaired Helen Keller could think by her soul, which was not possible for king Dhritarashtra of The Mahabharata. Biographer Fiona Macdonald quotes her,

“If I write what my soul thinks, then it will be visible, and the words will be its body.”

Many recent leaders have exemplified self-esteem, confidence, drive, vision, tenacity and perseverance, as emphasised by Valluvar and Vyasa. Gene Landrum lists 10 of them as ‘the most influential people who ever lived.’ Mao Tse-tung who moved China to his will fits the bill. Of Mao Landrum says,
"Mao Tse-tung went into the hills of China in 1923, at age thirty and spent the next twenty-two years fighting for survival and assembling the team that would bring Communism into power as the People’s Republic of China in 1949. During this time he led his army on a retreat that became famous as the Long March, which took Mao and the Red Army 6000 miles across the hinterlands of his nation." 11

In the Indian scenario, salutary political and social leaders apart, corporate leaders also call for attention for their exemplary behaviour. Held as the first citizen of Indian corporate den was J. N.Tata. Sampat P. Singh commends him,

"Jamsetji Tata is generally portrayed as a pioneer amongst builders of modern India because of his strong beliefs in nationalism and humanism. What is however more significant is the personality which displayed versatality, perspective, passion and vision....At college he developed the love for reading literature, which was to last him throughout life. He had varied interests including industry and he pursued them with vigour and enthusiasm. He was a great leader.” 12

J. N. Tata succeeded as a leader in that he created leaders behind him and his nephew and successor JRD Tata turned a legend in his lifetime. He pioneered Indian aviation and many new industrial enterprises. His guiding principles in his own words:

“Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without deep thought and hard work. One must forever strive for excellence, or even perfection, in any task, however small and never be satisfied with the second best. Good human relations are essential to the success of any enterprise.” 13

Indian industrial protocol places the Birlas next to the Tatas. Of the leadership of G.D. Birla, the founder of many units, biographer Medha M. Kudaisya, observes,

“Birla’s... great success was his grooming of the next generation for his family business. Not only were his sons and nephews inducted and groomed to head companies that made up the large empire but even the next generations of grandsons and grandnephews were trained during his lifetime...” 14
The Tata-Birla legacy of leadership, social concern, austerity, hard work and generosity has become the general ethos of Indian industry, with others also imbibing them. Disarmingly simple is Azim Premji of Wipro who asserts that business houses could also function beyond the lure of bottom line. Receiving the Tata Corporate Award for Leadership, Azim Premji spelt out his leadership concept, revolving round six quotients: Vision, Values, Energy, Confidence, Innovation and Team-building. 

**Vision:** Vision is like a lighthouse, showing the way and pointing out hazards.

It must be slightly beyond reach but must not be an impossible dream.

**Values:** If vision gives direction, values set boundaries. Values need leaders to be absolutely transparent in whatever they do.

**Energy:** The leader must work both hard and smart, long and intensely. It is the only way to keep on top of the demands.

**Confidence:** Self-confident leaders assume responsibility for their mistakes and share credit with their team members.

**Innovation:** Ideas have limited shelf-life. The leader must create a culture of continuous innovation.

**Team Building:** The leader must attract the best minds and create a sense of ownership in them.... through emotional engagement.”

Industrialist N.R. Narayana Murthy, promoter and Founder of an Indian IT titan, Infosys, who has designated himself just ‘Chief Mentor’ in the corporate world of high-sounding titles, says,

“Premji is very focused and for ever willing to learn from others.”

Narayana Murthy, who commends Premji, is also a great leader. He has exemplified what Premji calls ‘transparency.’ Of the transparency of Narayana Murthy, chronicler Devangshu Datta says,

“Infosys declares results according to eight different accounting standards, ensuring that customers, partners, and investors everywhere know exactly what is going on in the business.”
Consultant Srinivas Pandit provides the points of strength in the leadership of 22 corporate chiefs in their own words. Ten of them are quoted here:

1. Humayun Dhanrajgir (formerly of Kodak India Ltd & Glaxo):
   “You have to pulsate enthusiasm in the team to get results.”

2. Bhavarlal Jain, Jain Group:
   “Leave this world better than you found it.”

3. Deepak Kanegoankar, DK Group
   “I am an indefatigable optimist, difficult to demoralise.”

4. Bhausaheb Kelkar, S.H. Kelkar & Co
   “We have to create the best and reach them in record time.”

5. Ravi Khanna, Control Group
   “Lack of resources make you resourceful.”

6. Raghunath Mashelkar, CSIR
   “Only usable knowledge will create wealth.”

7. Kiran Mazumdar, Bicon Group
   “I sold my colleagues the vision of Bicon and my own personality.”

8. Prakash Ratnaparkhi, Electronica Group
   “I believe help rushes in where strong desire exists.”

9. Ronnie Screwvala, Unilazer Media group
   “You must love what you are doing.”

10. Sartaj Singh, FMC
    “The more I network, the more I learn.”

Corporate writer Raghu Palat has interviewed seven contemporary Indian business leaders on leadership. Deepak Parekh of HDFC who also figures in the book cited earlier, calls for Integrity, Transparency, and Accessibillity.
Damodaran, Chairman, UTI, acknowledges, “I got my values from my parents.” 20
“So long as you are sincere, so long as you have a sense of ethics, whatever you do will be successful and right,” 21 says Naushad Padamsee, Chairman of Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development. Udayan Kotak, Managing Director of Kotak Mahindra Bank happily admits, “I do not need to de-stress. In enjoy my work so much that it is not stress.” 22 Kiran Mazumdar Shaw of Bicon of Bangalore, as says her father was her role model because of his unconventionality. “Mr. Vagul of ICICI is another of my role models. He is an unconventional person,” says she striking at another leadership component- the unconventional that makes one tread new paths and innovate - in the words of corporate chronicler S. N. Chary.23

These obligations-conscious CEOs, catering to customers and thereby the society, have expressed what they work for. They relate themselves to the following 20 leadership quotients. They could be called quotients drawn from the empirical source. They are: Alacrity, Application, Braving challenges, Common good, Enjoying work, Enthusiasm, Exertion, Improvement, Innovation, Knowledge, More output, Motivation, Networking, Optimism, Profit, Strong desires, Team spirit, Togetherness, Vision, and Working. They are in agreement with those in the primary sources.

The above Indian CEOs apart, there are 50 U.S. based CEOs listed in the appendix. They also share the above 20 leadership components. They have been subjects of interesting articles, monographs, biographies and part of business history.

Yet hundreds of them, those succeeded fully and partially, failed slightly or miserably, remain undocumented. If in-depth and unbiased study of leaders were done, evaluating them against the norms drawn from ancient works, it would be a helpful blend of literature and corporate history.

But that is a big if, because all documents relating to them are not likely to be made available. Managements providing vetted documents may not help researchers in this direction. If people follow the virtues ordained, there will be no need for vetting, as transparency would be ensured. That is holding up the mirror of the hoary past to the present to ensure a virtuous posterity.
Chapter VII

Section 2: *Tirukkural’s* Consonance to Modernity

What has family life to do with the man who is a leader? Cold logic may place the family far from the functional realm of a leader, not real life situations. There could be a rare Rudolf Guiliani saying,

“I have not included details from my personal life in this book. (Leadership) The dissolution of my marriage, for example, had nothing to do with my public performance and never affected it in any way.”

**Home and family life**

Abraham Zalesnik says, “Every person’s development begins with family.” Maintaining that marriage provides a settled life and a peaceful mind, R. S. Garg, a retiree of Indian Foreign Service, says in his book on the *Gita* for executives:

“Following a value-based life is profitable and beneficial even in the material terms. Indians are now preferred...by big corporations in U.S.A. The reason discovered was that Indians’ contribution was more, as their minds were free from suspicions and tensions because of mutual trust between husband and wife. The message is loud and clear: honesty and integrity in married life as in other aspects of life are of paramount importance. Pictures of elders, family and dear ones serve to deepen one’s vision and help discover a wider purpose in life.”

Writing on animator Walt Disney’s formative years, J. Barnes avers,

“A strict, hard-working father and a fun-loving mother gave Disney the early traits he needed.”

Asked about ‘influences that shaped her’ Anu Aga, CEO of *Thermax*, said,

“I picked up the love of reading from my father. He encouraged me to be independent. I got my sense of humour from my mother. I learned from her to be natural and unpretentious. Without the love and encouragement of my husband
and children I would not have had energy and strength to venture out. My son’s honest feedback and critique ...brought me in touch with reality and truth." 28

What matters is not simply growing within family imbibing values, but facilitating the growth of the wards. Lee Iacocca, commended as a successful leader in the automobile industry who turned out to be an engaging author later, says,

"Throughout my life, the bottom line I have worried about most was that my kids turn out all right. The only rock that stays steady, the only institution I know that works is the family. I was brought up to believe in it — and I do. Because I think a civilised world can’t remain civilised for long, if its foundation is built on anything but family. A city, a state or a country can’t be any more than the sum of its vital parts — millions of family units. You can’t have a country or a city or a state that is worth a damn, unless you govern within yourself in your day-to-day life. It all starts at home." 29

Of his father and founder of IBM, Thomas Watson Jr. has this to say:

"My father was the son of an upstate New York farmer. He grew up in an ordinary but happy home where the means and ...the wants, were modest and the moral environment strict. The important values, as learned them, were to do every job well, to treat all people with dignity and respect, to appear neatly dressed, to be clean and forthright, to be eternally optimistic and above all loyal." 30

Even as the wards, parents are also expected to be rather demanding. This is a social obligation according to Valluvar. Kural couplet says,

"Pleasant it is to people across the world that parents groom their wards more intelligent than they are." (Kural 68)

How the accomplished parents of J.M. Keynes brought up their son as a renowned economist is history. Sylvia Tiersten writes on Carly Fiorina of Hewlett Packard:

"...Fiorina grew up without limitations. Despite her sex she could be or do anything she wanted....her parents had exceedingly high expectations for their daughter, so she didn’t want to disappoint them." 31
Two couplets of *Tirukkural* in the same chapter on ‘The Wards’ point out the duty of the parents and that of the wards:

‘The father’s duty is to project his son as *prima donna* in assemblies.’ (67)

‘So shall the ward be that people exclaim: how blessed the father!’ (70)

Only such parental responsibility and wards’ response will take the society forward on its march for progress through generations.

**The call for vegetarian food**

Even as Vyasa, Valluvar has spoken of the impact of food on man and his attitude to food in 20 couplets. The relevant chapters are 26 and 95, Avoiding Meat and Medicine. In these days of dinner politics or business dinners, political or corporate dining tables do not confine themselves to vegetarian dishes. What does the eating habit of one matter? A littérateur and judicial luminary, S. Maharajan, presents the overseas response to these questions pertinently in his monograph on Tiruvalluvar:

“The World Vegetarian Congress, having its headquarters in Holland, sent in 1961 a goodwill mission to India....After visiting several places in India, they came to Coimbatore and convened a public meeting. The author of this monograph who happened to preside over the meeting quoted a Kural. At the end of the meeting the European savants rushed to the platform and shouted, “...the Kural you have quoted throws a new light on vegetarianism and inspires us to stick to it.” The Kural that captivated the European mind was the one on non-killing. Usually the merits and demerits of vegetarianism are canvassed from the economic, hygienic, medical and cultural points of view. Valluvar went to the bottom of the question and said, ‘Unless we eschew violence, from our minds and hearts, we cannot show compassion to our fellow-creatures.’ Violence is disruptive of the unity of life, and subversive of the reverence for life, without which (reverence for life) there could be no peace on earth. ...If a man practices non-killing, not mechanically, but out of a genuine respect for all life, he practices a supreme virtue, but if a man resorts to killing, whether the victim of killing is a man, bird or beast, he shows irreverence for life which would form the basis of all
Vices such as decoity, rape or murder. Valluvar has most pithily put this idea in *Kural* No: 321, which can be translated as follows: ‘What is virtue except non-killing? For killing brings in its train all the other vices.’ Representatives of the World vegetarian Congress left Coimbatore saying that their Indian visit had been worthwhile, because they had heard the voice of Valluvar lending a new dimension to vegetarianism.” 32

English literary critic A.C. Ward writes thus on Bernard Shaw abstaining from eating because of his reverence for life:

“He became a vegetarian when he was twenty-five. His reading of the works of the English poet Shelley had some influence in leading him to refrain from eating meat, but the stronger motive was his deep feeling that ‘animals are our fellow creatures’, not to be slain for human food.” 33

Modern writer on management and leadership Robin Sharma advises,

“You must eat to win. When you care your body, you care for your mind.” 34

Learning

*Tirukkural* insists that one learn what all he/she should, learn perfectly what is to be learnt, and stand by the learned quotients. Sam Walton who ushered in a revolution in retailing with his network of numerous Wal-Mart stores across the U.S. was an avid learner all through. He had his notepad handy wherever he went, especially in the retail outlets of others. He has gone on record saying,

“We are really not concerned with what (competitors) are doing wrong. We are concerned with what they are doing right.... Although you should learn from competitors, don’t follow them blindly.” 35

What to learn is important because one should gain by learning; he should gain all through his life he should continue to learn. Retailer Sam Walton was a life-long learner, going by *Tirukkural*:

‘Any place is his; any country is his – to the one who keeps learning. Why doesn’t one learn till he dies?’ (397)
Stressing on the need for continuous learning, especially for leaders, Jay A. Conger, Professor of Organisational Behaviour at London School of Business says in his Foreword to Leaders Talk Leadership by Ashby Meredith and Stephen Miles:

“One of the hallmarks of effective leadership in this century will be the capacity to learn and adapt quickly. Years of experience will no longer be enough - and, in some cases, may prove a hindrance. The shelf life of knowledge today is simply too short. Instead, a winning characteristic of the new generation of leaders will be its commitment to personal learning and the ability to generate a “buzz” about learning thought their organisations.”

Listening

Valluvar calls listening a wealth because it brings in information. In the chapters on Listening, Eloquence and Taking Cues he expresses the nuances of non-verbal communication. What matters is not simply the ability to communicate without words, but to understand what is so communicated. That is possible by discerning and immense capacity to listen to. Of the contemporary relevance of communication, one of the best-selling writers on Management is Mark H. McCormack who has written on Selling, Communicating, Negotiating and other aspects of management. He states,

“I am a true traditionalist, it is the area of communicating; the goals remain the same: to introduce, instruct, persuade or assert authority. From yesterday’s handwritten notes to today’s e-mail the architecture of effective communication remains the same. Know your subject, know your audience, know your medium; given the choice, be brief rather than wordy. Keep in mind the difference between a forceful and belligerent tone. Trust the power of a carefully chosen word. Never forget how you would like people to communicate with you.”

The psychological impact of the patient listener on the complainant/hearer is imemerasuraale. Listening as response to communication deserves a separate research. Nandita Chaudari of New Delhi has just come out with her book Listening to Culture - Constructing Reality from Everyday Talk. Therein she suggests that listening should be cultivated from very young age and parents and grandparents could help much.
Subtleties of listening are scientifically interpreted by Robin Sharma,

"When you constantly keep the lines of communication open, your employees will begin to value you as a leader, ...they will not want to let you down." 39

Of the capacity to listen, Sharma adds,

"Visionary leaders capture the hearts of their people by deeply listening to them.... Most leaders believe that to lead effectively they need to do most of the talking. They have been brainwashed to believing that leaders speak and followers listen. Visionary leaders know that another of human hunger is the hunger to feel understood. Visionary leaders become excellent listeners...they become known as super communicators... And the person who feels understood is the person who listens when it is your turn to speak... one of the greatest gifts you can ever give anyone is giving them 100 per cent of your attention – listening truly is the highest compliment. Don’t interrupt; don’t complete the sentence the other has begun. Effective listening is an important leadership discipline. 40

Valluvar suggests employing personnel who could be mind readers through face-reading. Much the same is what Robin Sharma, a modern leadership specialist, says,

"In my years of business I have discovered that a person’s eyes can reveal the truth. They can disclose warmth, insecurity, insincerity or integrity if one takes the time to study them." 41

Sharma says why and how looking into the eyes is important:

"Human beings are visual creatures. Eighty-three percent of our sensory input comes through our eyes so that often we neglect much of what we hear... More than 90 percent of business people forget the name of the person they have heard it. The reason is that as soon as we meet someone new, our brains start processing all the visual and tactile information such as height, weight, gender, strength of handshake and facial expression. In process the name escapes our attention...The second reason most leaders are not excellent listeners is that human beings process the ability to listen at the rate of about 500 words per minute, yet we
speak at much slower rate of 100 to 125 words per minute. With all that space left to fill, our minds tend to wander.” 42

Enthusiasm

‘One with undaunted will is on the trail of wealth.’ (594)

asserts Valluvar, which has a distant empirical echo in a different locale. It is William Wrigley Jr. a chewing gum manufacturer of Chicago, who has on his desk this saying:

‘Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.’ 43

Attitude

Ray Kroc, the legend of a leader with McDonald, has averred:

“I believe that if you think small, you will stay small.” 44

Valluvar has said,

“ Minds rise just as high as lotus to the surface of the water.” (Kural - 595)

Much the same is the opinion of Thomas Golisano of Paychex. He is categorical, “You can teach ability – You cannot teach attitude.” 45

Pure mind

Valluvar accords prime importance to mind. A pure mind is a paramount leadership trait. If purity must be cultivated, all other good things will follow.

Much the same is the stand of modern thinkers and acclaimed leaders. Robin S. Sharma, a writer on Leadership with some best sellers to his credit, points out,

“Most leaders believe that effectiveness and excellence come from external factors like an efficient workforce or application of the latest technology. The truth of the matter as visionary leaders have known over centuries is that success is an inside job. Excellence begins within. Leadership in world begins with leadership in your life.” 46
What Lord Krishna calls a quiet and unruffled mind in the *Gita* is extolled by the modern writer Robin Sharma thus,

“All humanity’s great advances, whether technological or artistic came not from frenzied activity but from the deep reflection and interrogation that quiet time brings.” 47

Again Sharma quotes no less a person than Sir Edmund Hillary who scaled the Everest, the peak of the Himalayas,

“It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.” 48

Noteworthy that Valluvar also uses the image of mountain when he speaks of controlling one’s mind.

“Loftier than a mountain is the greatness of the self-controlled.” (Kural 124)

**The truth, the whole truth**

A leader receives a lot of information in his normal routine. He has to sift untruth from truth. The truth matters, not the sources. One should not be misguided by the status of the sources. Of this aspect of leadership, Aviation pioneer William Boeing has had the following saying on a plaque at the entrance of his chamber:

‘There is no authority except facts. Facts are obtained by accurate observation. Deductions are to be made only from facts.” 49

To those like William Boeing these *Kural* couplets could be commended:

‘Go into grains of truth, whatever be the source.’ (355)

‘Sources apart, the wise discern the meaning of what is heard.’ (423)

**Casting away ego**

‘The one free from ego shall gain everything here and in heaven.’ (346)

AmeriCredit’s Michael Barrington, told his people ego’s ravages, much like Valluvar, that egos spoil individuals and institutions:

‘Leave egos at the door. They have no place here. We champion team work.’ 50
Modern leadership’s main concern is casting away ego and encouraging others to do so. That alone can facilitate teamwork, which the ego and clash of egos mar.

‘True leadership is very different from management. Leadership is about others and not about self,’ so specific is James Despain in advising leaders to cast away any trace of ego.

**Communicating**

Valluvar has covered in no unmistaken terms the purpose and modes of communication. One’s knowledge must be revealed in his expressions without any trace of conceit and the speech should gain the intended results.

“One who cannot elucidate what he has learnt is like a flower without fragrance.” (650)

Here is an advice from Robin Sharma on communication and human relations:

“If you spend your days communicating your message and building richer relationships rather than micro-managing as most leaders do, there will be fewer misunderstandings and less conflict.”

**Mentoring**

The other factor that can exercise a sober influence on an individual’s growth path in becoming a leader is the guidance by elders, what the modern jargon calls ‘mentoring’. Valluvar devotes a chapter for this and Vyasa also presents numerous instances of the master-disciple interaction.

The *Raja Niti* of Bhishma, the penultimate part of the epic, also insists on a leader being well schooled in scriptures and taking the counsel of elders. What is meant for kings is relevant for the subjects too. The pioneer of self-help books Dale Carnagie looked to those he most admired. Sean Higgins points out,

“His most famous books rely on quotations from and stories about Abe Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin and other wise figures.”
Delegation

Again it is Ray Kroc who says,

"I believe if you hire a man to do a job, you ought to get out of the way and let him do it. If you doubt his ability you shouldn't have hired him...." 54

Valluvar who predates Ray Kroc by 21 centuries has said much the same on selection process, recruitment, training, delegation and non-interference.

Having chosen one for a task, leave it for him to do it. (517)

Selecting one without scrutiny, and suspecting the one chosen after scrutiny will entail in endless troubles. (510)

Being pro-active

All the couplets of Tirukkural in the chapter 68 Being Pro-active, meant for rulers in monarchic regime are relevant to modern leaders as they offer guidelines in carrying out assignments. The corporate connotation of the couplets could be:

* Delay after deliberation is dangerous. Avoid delay.
* Some work can wait; but priority must be heeded to.
* Nothing should be left incomplete; it will boomerang.
* Success should not suffer for lack of speed. Be fast.
* Be forewarned of impediments to tide over them.
* Funds, time, place, means and deed call for attention.
* Consequences of the action should be thought of.
* Be an apprentice to an expert; get trained on the job.
* Take to proper means to accomplish the work.
* Befriend the estranged before making new friends.
* Make peace with bigger players in the industry, to avoid your employees losing jobs.
The above tenets advocated by Tiruvalluvar are practiced in the corporate sector, though *Tirukkural* is yet to find its place in world’s corporate literature.

**Plan, aim and shoot**

Of planning and execution the two American leaders have said thus:

“If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I would spend six hours sharpening my axe,” Abe Lincoln is quoted to have said.

“Many a brilliant idea has been lost because the man who dreamed it lacked the spunk or the spine to it across,” 55

Bank of America’s A.P. Giannini has said.

Both these ideas find expression in *Tirukkural*:

‘Ponder over before you act; hindsight is disgrace.’ (467)

‘The strong mind gets things done, as willed.’ (666)

**Always aim high**

Of aiming things big and high and pursuing them A.P. Giannini has said,

‘It does not matter if you do not always hit the exact bull’s eye. The other rings in the targets score points, too.’ 56

IBM’s Thomas Watson used to tell his people,

‘It is better to aim at perfection and miss than it is to aim at imperfection and have it.’ 57

How happy would Watson have been if he had known that Tiruvalluvar had said exactly that with a metaphor!

“Aim big, even if you lose a little. Better take on an elephant that skips your spear than the rabbit that falls by your arrow.” (772)

Robin S. Sharma, modern leadership specialist is likewise metaphorical,

“Most people are ant-chasers, rather than elephant hunters.” 58
Chapter VII

Section 3: The Mahabharata’s Empirical Excellence

In most languages semantics twisted out of context some well-meant words. The hit-list in English language includes ‘myth.’ One is eager to tag the verb ‘exploding’ seldom emulating. “It is all a myth” is an expression that does not lend a respectable reckoning. On the other hand, the right myths, taken in the right perspective are pedagogues in self-study. The myths in epics like the Mahabharata are such; they cannot be brushed aside as supernatural elements. They teach the characters therein and through them to others vital lessons on life and career. Wherever myths shroud the rulers the context and the outcome should be studied to extract the latent lessons.

For a serious bid in the Western context, to restore the original meaning and intent to myths, credit should be given to Joseph Campbell. Asserts he, rightly so,

“Our archetypes acquired through identity with myths and myths create heroes out of those who heed them.” 59

If at all the Mahabharata has myths, they are plots provoking debates or events portraying one’s personality quotients. They are inspirational, though supernatural. If not anything these myths/legends/supernatural elements, point to the fact that ‘every human being needs to belong, to be part of the whole,’ to use the words of media leader Alyque Padamsee in his book A Double Life, describing his self-development and his life as a leader. 60

Mind and Attitude

Much is being spoken of stress-management these days. That subject finds place in the curriculum of corporate trainers. R.S. Garg who interprets the Gita for contemporary executives as a manual of self-management. says,

“In fact, stress management is nothing, if not self-management. Certainly the modern man does not need a psychiatrist or a psychologist for self-management. He needs himself with the right state of mind and right attitude. The two are not
different. The skills for achieving the goal of HAPPINESS are provided for in PHILOSOPHY, NOT IN ECONOMICS. (Emphasis, the author's) The Gita is a practical example. All of us are contemporary Arjunas. At times we are not clear about our objectives. We are confused whether to do this.”  

Two most important leadership quotients drawn from the Bhagavad Gita, said to be the essence of the Mahabharata, are: (i) a calm, unruffled mind that does not gloat over success and grieve over failures, (ii) discharging duties without expecting rewards. If a subtle management interpretation is to be given, taking Krishna-Arjuna relationship an allegory, Krishna is the leader and Arjuna the manager. To execute is the manager's duty. The leader directs and takes care of the results. In the modern Kurukshetra of conflicting claims, one is obliged to be the manager and the leader.

**Perception of power**

Mahatma Gandhi who figures in the leadership traits as elucidated in Tirukkural, regarding truth and Non-violence, also finds mention when leadership is discussed by the Gita's dicta.. He felt he had a duty to discharge, that of liberating India from the British bond. He could do it, by adopting the twin virtues – Truth and Non-Violence. After gaining his end, the country’s political freedom, he did not aspire for any position of power. Not only that, he could create a band of leaders too.

This kind of self-awareness is accepted and advocated by some successful modern leaders too. Says Hewlett-Packard’s Carly Fiorina,

“To be successful, you have to love what you do, which means you need to know yourself pretty well.”  

Brownies Wise of Tupperware, without her possible introduction to the Gita, echoes the import of one querying within himself to judge the fitness,

“First, ask yourself if your desire for this thing is great enough that you would work hard enough to get it. Second, will this thing honestly be good for you and the people around you?”
Soul-searching

Apart from quietude, Vyasa advocated, through Lord Krishna, a soul-searching exercise that does not sidestep the intellect and the instincts, but carries them along in the inward journey, so that combination gets manifest in leaders discharging their duties. Such was a woman political leader's feat just a few decades ago. It was Golda Meir, credited to be a unique female leader as Prime Minister of Israel in the bastion of male power, with the force of her soul-stirring commitment to her people.

"If not for her Israel may have perished in its early years when there was never enough people, weapons, money or political support." Biographer Ralph Martin described Golda Meir as possessing 'an instinct and intuition, both logical and intuitive at the same time,' which is a commendable but curious combination. That was to place heart and head at the command of soul. She did it. Others too can, provided they understand what leadership is by ancient Indian standards.

Regardless of rewards

The Gita's oft-quoted message is not to mess up with purpose and reward. "Do your duty, fruit is not thy concern" is repeated in discourses; but understanding of it is difficult, especially if the question - "Why at all do anything without expecting rewards?" is raised. The answer is in the form of a pithy story, easily plausible to youngsters. This too is sourced from Robin Sharma.

"Once a young student travelled many miles to find a famous spiritual master. When he finally met this man, he told him that his main goal in life was to be the wisest man in the land. That is why he needed the best teacher. Seeing the young boy's enthusiasm, the master agreed to share his knowledge with him and took him under his wing. 'How long will it take before I find enlightenment?' the boy asked. 'At least five years,' replied the master. 'That is too long,' said the boy. 'I can't wait for five years! What if I study twice as hard as the rest of your students?' 'Ten years', came the response. 'Ten years, well, then how about with every ounce of my mental concentration? Then how long would it take for me to
become a wise man that I have always dreamed of becoming?' ‘Fifteen years,’ replied the master. ‘How come every time I tell you I work harder to reach my goal, you tell me it will take longer?’ ‘The answer is clear,’ said the teacher, ‘With one eye focused on the reward, there is only one eye to focus on the purpose.’ That one loses hold of the purpose when he focuses on the reward is what the *Gita* says. Yet this story interprets the import better.

‘You are what you eat’

Food is one thing that most writers on leadership have overlooked. Just a few have touched upon that at random workshops. Presentations have slides on stress, hypertension, indigestion and other ills. Even there most of the talk is more on mending other habits than food. But food has its impact on man in more than one way. Health is one thing; but that is not the end.

Bhishma tells Yudhishtra, “Simple food and drink obtained without effort, and luxurious food produced with fear, widely differ from each other.”

Lord Krishna says categorically in the *Gita*,

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

Krishna tells of the impact of food on the character and conduct of a person. Even as the *Gunas*, (strands of nature) *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas* in men, food also has its soft, spicy and slothful types. Sometimes food causes dullness. If one works as much as he takes food, it works out well; not food just for its own sake.

Another relevant piece of advice for leaders is food habits, what they take and what they give others - food that must make one work, not loathe. Men labour a living; work hard, find means for food. So are animals and birds. If it is their nature to go and work hard, the particular being should be allowed to do so; rather encouraged to earn food by hard labour. Anything else is loathsomeness. IBM’s Thomas J. Watson Jr. cites a fable by Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard:

“A man on the coast of Zealand who liked to watch the wild ducks fly south in great flocks each fall. Out of charity, he took to putting feed for them in a nearby pond. After a while some of the ducks no longer bothered to fly south;
they wintered in Denmark on what he fed them. In time they flew less and less. When the wild ducks returned, the others would circle up to greet them, but then, head back to their feeding ground on the pond. After three or four years they grew so lazy and fat that they found difficulty in flying...” 67

Soren Kierkegaard’s message matches with Valluvar’s and Vyasa’s. Says Lord Krishna in the Gita that it is easier to weaken the strong than strengthen the weak. So is it with men and fowls. If a rajasic person (brawny) tries, he can become sattvic (brainy) with conscious efforts on learning and changing the food habits. The tamasic persons like the spot-fed wild ducks, seldom learn anything to grow up, because they take the food that suits them.

The message driven home by Kierkegaard is that – you can make wild ducks tame, but you can never make tame ducks wild again. This piece of wisdom, related in the recent years, brings out pointedly on two counts what Valluvar and Vyasa have said on Charity and Food Habits.

On the part of the duck-feeder it is unmerited charity. If not given food, they would have flown, got the food after physical exertion and remained healthy and active. The kind-hearted person’s misjudged charity made them lazy. That is no charity, by the standards of Valluvar and Vyasa. As the Gita says, food decides one’s personality. Wild ducks that were tamed could not be invigorated again as wild ducks. They lost their nature. The rajasic could be made tamasic and the tamasic shall never turn rajasic, whereas the ideal progress would be to move towards sattvic and stay sattvic, which means controlling or regulating the rajasic quotients.

**Quietude**

Vyasa speaks of meditation through Lord Krishna and again through Bhishma. S.K. Chakraborty, Professor of Management, Calcutta University, with a penchant for native moorings, considers meditation ‘a devoted culture of the sattva and determined control of rajas. It is ‘conscious awareness of the Transcendent while at work.’ He cites K.V.K. Raju of the Nagarjuna group:
"In our business life, we all face an unusual problem; adversaries crop up without our knowing it. Some of them create such obstacles as can destroy our entire business. I have had my share of it and am happy to say... that one can influence the thought process of others by passing on the positive vibrations towards them. This has worked wonders...we never looked upon problems as problems but converted them into God-given new opportunities...The regular practice of meditation and attending daily spiritual classes have benefited me." 68

Another leader inspired by the ideals of the *Mahabharata*, cited by management consultant Sampat P. Singh and academic S. K. Chakraborty in their different books is R. K. Talwar. Singh calls him a leader driven by a mission. Adds K.V.K. Raju,

"I have first-hand knowledge about the deep, inward approach to management adopted by R.K. Talwar, former Chairman of State Bank of India and Industrial Development Bank of India. Whenever faced with an intellectually baffling management problem, he used to retire into a quite (sic) corner within his office-room itself, and by silencing his mind opened to the transcendental intelligence. Even today the reverence for him in SBI is something to realize and feel for oneself. Once retired no more chasing of Committee Chairmanships, Board Memberships and the like..." 69

To be noted in this context is what consultant Sampat P. Singh subtly pointed out:

"There is a vital difference between ‘the personality’ and ‘the self.’ The latter is often called ‘the soul,’ which can be defined in contemporary language as a guiding factor which is different from the conscious personality."

If R.K. Talwar, P.L. Tandon or K.V.K Raju and quite a few of their clan like Azim Premji and N.R. Narayana Murthy are reckoned as business leaders, it is not in the ordinary sense as managers of big corporate houses; but as those who exemplified leadership by managing own their selves.

That, in deed, is one’s evolution of personality from manager to leader or fitment in the much-needed role of manager-cum-leader.
The aforesaid account of business and social leaders apart, conceptual-cum case-study analysis of leadership components would reinforce the relevance of the primary sources. *Tirukkural* and *The Mahabharata* specify that leadership is evolution of the personality within, directing one to righteous action through generosity.

Both the texts call for focus, energy, realising full well the elements of time, place and evaluating own strength and working toward purpose.

Modern management theorists or business leaders do not tell anything more or anything different. There lies the relevance of the primary texts to the modern context. One of the latest titles under corporate literature (2004) is *A Bias for Action* by Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal; its subtitle ‘How Effective Managers Harness Their Willpower, Achieve Results and Stop Wasting Time’ tells everything. 70

The authors classify modern managerial behaviour into four types: The Frenzied, The Procrastinators, The Detached and The Purposeful, by their research, as they say. They add,

“The Frenzied: Forty percent of managers are distracted by the myriad tasks that they juggle each day. They are highly energetic, but very unfocused and appear to others frenzied, desperate, and hasty.

*The Procrastinators:* Thirty percent procrastinate on doing the work that really matters to the organisation because they lack energy and focus. They often feel insecure and fear failure.

*The Detached:* Twenty percent of managers are disengaged or detached from their work altogether. They are focused but lack energy and often seem aloof, tense and apathetic.

*The Purposeful:* Only 10 percent get the job done. They are highly focused and energetic and come across as reflective and calm amid chaos.”

If analysed by *Bhagavad Gita*’s division of the the *Gunas*, innate nature of the individuals, the above categories represent respectively the *Rajasic*, the *Tamasic*, the transitional and the *Sattvic*. Leadership courses shall motivate the first three to rise up to the fourth stage. That is the expected transformation from *Being to Becoming.*
Summary of Chapter VII

Native Moorings of Modern Indian Leaders

This Chapter of the applied aspects of native norms of leadership has three sections explaining citing Indian political leaders Gandhiji and Rajaji, both wielding influence over the society, the former without holding any office of authority and the latter as an ascetic while holding offices from Member of Municipal Council to that of the Governor General of India.

They proved that Attitude and Service matter, not positions of authority.

Corporate leaders, Indian and Western have acknowledged the influence of the members of the family in their life and career. They include Anu Aga of India to Carly Fiorina of Hewlett Packard, U.S. All those cited here have followed one or the other of the norms espoused in the Primary Sources and similar Western texts of wisdom.

Indian corporate captains, steeped in native moorings, albeit higher education abroad commend among other things Vision, Values, Energy, Confidence, Innovation and Team Building as leadership traits.

Leaders cited here illustrate that the man behind the leader is vital in the discharge of the functions of a leader. Evolution of a leader is transformation from what he is to what he ought to be – progression from Being to Becoming through harnessing willpower to achieve results without wasting time.
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