Chapter VIII

Future Leadership, Literature and the Academia

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Future Leadership, Literature and the Academia

This Chapter substantiates in two sections that literature is a potent pedagogic source to learn more on Leadership, to face the challenges of future.

The first section seeks to identify what is perceived to be the lacking input in management education in the U.S. where it was started and where it flourishes.

It also states how scholars establish that works like Shakespeare’s plays have a lot to tell on leadership, a key management obligation.

The Buddhist literature and the Bible are commended among the works that inspire leadership. They are approached from management perspectives nowadays.

The second section points out how legends and epics, once the sources of inspiration for youngsters have ceased to form part of the lore of bedtime stories for kids.

The hurly burly of modern life leaves little time or interest for the parents to relate bedtime stories, whatever be the source.

Inside or off the classrooms, the teachers are obliged to compensate what the parents fail to do; that enjoins more responsibility on the academia.

This section refers to emerging challenges to leadership in the third millennium and places man at the epicentre, in line with most ancient books of wisdom.

Profiles of ideal leaders, as constructed by Valluvar and Vyasa, authors of the primary sources - Tirukkural and The Mahabharata - are presented here for guidelines.
Chapter VIII

Section 1: Future Leadership, Literature and the Academia

If the mid-19th century gave rise to industrialisation, the early 20th century caused the emergence of a handful of management schools in the U.S. Admittedly the U.S. still retains its status as the much sought after destination for management education. Business education’s origin could be traced to the University of Pennsylvania’s bachelor’s programme in 1881, thanks to efforts of businessman Joseph Wharton. A distant pioneer to this was ‘the Prussian school of bureaucratic statecraft, which developed an agenda very much like those of today’s business schools.’

Dartmouth College in the U.S. was the first school to offer a master’s degree in business in 1900 allowing a few undergraduates to extend their course by an year. Still neither Harvard nor Stanford had an easy time in those years.

To use the words of Canadian management expert and author of interesting books Henry Mintzberg the sponsors from the business community were unenthusiastic, students were boisterous and sceptical, university colleagues and trustees remained jealous and cynical. While thirty-three students enrolled in the Harvard MBA in 1908, only eight of them returned for the second year. Today flaunting a Harvard, Stanford or Wharton MBA is fashionable, prestigious and remunerative.

However, not long ago none other than Professor of management studies in the U.S. was alarmingly frank on the hollowness of MBA programmes there. Mintzberg candidly discloses such an academic bankruptcy in his Preface to his book of 2004 Managers Not MBAs:

“Some years ago the dean of a prominent business school (Richard West of New York University) claimed, “If I was not dean of this school, I would be writing a book on the bankruptcy of American management education.”

This startling statement calls for a stocktaking of management education in U.S. and elsewhere. Thereby the missing curricular quotient could be identified, sourced and supplied to equip general as well as management education to meet future
challenges. Hollowness or shallowness is not peculiar to the branch of management studies; other disciplines also lack value inputs in the curriculum. As managing institutions is not confined to MBAs alone, value inculcation in other branches is also keenly felt. Of the post 2000 AD plight of management Henry Mintzberg points out,

“A survey before the collapse of Enron and other corporations reported that only 47 percent of the employees of American companies saw their leaders as people of high personal integrity. (The Gazette, October 2000) A more recent study by Rutgers University of Connecticut found that “58 percent of workers think that most top executives are only looking out for themselves, even if it harms the company, while 33 percent of think that top executives are interested in doing a good job for their company (in Greenhouse 2002). Can we really continue to tolerate this situation?” 3

This moot question raises on its trail a few more questions: Were not institutions get managed fairly well before the MBA boom? Are all the managers MBAs? Do the non-MBA managers lag behind in managing or leading? What sort of formal education did go into the making of the manager before the B schools were born?

Based on the Indian experience it could be said that general education in the past contained man-making quotients; those made men function as good managers. Schools then offered ‘Moral Instruction’ as part of the curriculum for all students. Language teaching was done with the help of extracts from the best works of literature that went into the textbooks. They espoused values. Language study was, in fact, a literary study and literature inculcated values. That language could be taught scientifically is a lingual possibility. But the method is bereft of life.

Once for rural tourists the two spots of attraction in Chennai, then Madras, were ‘settha college’ and ‘usir college, museum and the zoo respectively. The idiom has lost their currency now. But looking back, it presented the vital difference – between life dormant and life vibrant. A museum is a museum, after all. But a zoo is lively, refreshingly pulsating with life. Teaching ornithology with skeletons in the museum is just bone counting. Observing birds in sanctuaries is meeting life in its vivacity.
Grammar teaching through literature and or moral instruction with the help of wisdom books was meeting life in its beauty and truth, the two inextricably together.

**Shakespeare, the management consultant**

Crafting a new curriculum with inputs on values of life warrants more homework for curriculum developers. They might do well to resurrect William Shakespeare in the classrooms. Among the prescribed textbooks of the past were the plays of Shakespeare, which taught language as well as morals.

Even as *moral instruction* departed the academia, a quarter century ago or much earlier, Shakespeare was also bidden adieu, yielding to the wisdom of those who held that language could be taught independent of literature. All undergraduate students in Science and Humanities streams in India had a paper on Shakespeare, with two plays, a comedy and a tragedy; almost all the plays were covered by rotation.

American authors Norman Augustine and Kenneth Adelman say that Shakespeare is taught in more than 90 per cent of American High Schools and in all colleges, with the bard looked at from management perspectives. They say North America alone accounted for 140 Shakespearean summer festivals and theatres and 300 plus movies including five in 1999. That is just literature and entertainment. But Shakespeare has travelled farther from the stage and the academia in U.K. and in the U.S. They add,

"... a growing number of executives find that the time spent with the bard is a sound investment, and unpredictably enjoyable. The Bard boom has hit the boardroom. For business leaders find that Shakespeare’s plays offer deft and gripping explorations of the world of power which remain as relevant today as they were in the sixteenth century. The lessons that they teach are remarkably useful in today’s tough corporate universe."

The authors hold Shakespeare relevant to modern management because,

"... business involves people and people – fundamentally – don’t change. The essence of business is thus remarkably constant... Shakespeare is fascinated by the depths and complications of human relationships: boss to subordinate, colleague to colleague, lawyer to client, customer to salesman, parent to child, and
friend to friend. And he probes the range of human emotions – ambition, hurt, pride, grief and love – as well as the motivation behind our acts, wise or foolish, generous or malicious.”

In their Preface to their book *Shakespeare in Charge* with a long subtitle ‘The Bard’s Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage,’ authors Augustine and Adelman cite William Hazlitt, “To know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespeare,” and Helen Whall, a professor of English, “Shakespeare is the best mind-altering subject I know.”

**Wise men and wisdom books influence**

Shakespeare has presented the world intelligibly and in a time-tested manner too. Approaching the bard from modern management angle is refreshing and laudable. The western mind that understands easily Shakespeare may not get at the whole import of eastern thinkers and writers. Still some scholars make attempts.

Like Shakespeare Indian Prince-turned ascetic, Gautama, the Buddha, has evoked, of late, an interest on leadership in the business circles. Buddha was a psychologist and a teacher; he was not a god. Authors Franz Metcalf and BJ Callagher Hately, in their thought-provoking title, *What Would Buddha Do at Work?* feel that many employees and organisations are yearning today for a leader who is Chief Spiritual Officer, not a Chief Executive Officer.

The authors relate Buddha thought-provokingly to the modern corporate world, which as they and others feel, needs spiritual buoyancy. Franz Metcalf and Callagher Hately recommend *Building a Business the Buddhist Way* by Geri Larkin and a few other works of the Zen variety.

They find something new in the oriental wisdom. Their reading or interpreting the text might be limited, as in the case of Franz Metcalf and BJ Callagher Hately, who with 101 quotes from Buddhist literature, have attempted to inculcate the value quotient in employees. What they tell as the Buddha’s view of charity could have been more pointed and exact if they had been exposed to the lore of Indian literature, especially the primary sources of this research *Tirukkural* and *The Mahabharata.*
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Section 2: Mandate of Primary Sources: Man, the Measure

*Tirukkural* and *The Mahabharata* hold that that the man in the leader matters. They are keen even on the food habits and the love life of leaders. This growth process, due to start from home, obliges the young ones to imbibe values of life in their formative period. Substance apart, *Tirukkural’s* style also suits the exposition methodology of those delivering lectures on management topics, coining catchy one-liners. All couplets of Tirukkural are such relatable and retainable pithy expressions.

*Tirukkural’s Profile of a Leader*

Valluvar expects the leader to be righteous, generous and committed; be he a family head, corporate CEO or a political leader, he should not give up love. He should seek wealth and pleasure by the right means. A leader shall be modest, easily accessible, loving, noble, honourable, courteous and perfect. He shall be hospitable, health conscious with right intake of good and timely food, avoid liquor and meat. He shall be sweet tongued and be aware of the enemies within. He should be free from base desires. He should judge things and persons impartially and have forbearance.

A leader shall always be learning, empathetically listening, truthful, he shall avoid slander, anger and hatred. Pure minded, he shall not envy others or think of coveting what belongs to others, wealth or wife. He does not cause injury, mental or physical, following the virtue of non-violence. He shall be erudite and eloquent, have retentive memory, but not be conceited.

Friendly, he should evaluate friends; he be wary of harmful and unbecoming persons. He shall respect the rule of law and is just; does not take undue liberties with any. He should be charitable even to his enemies. A leader shall be impartial, able and shall not resort to meanness. He shall behave righteously, worthy of emulation. Not ostentatious, he shall be straightforward, remain grateful and make others stay so. He shall educate and train others. He shall not commit frauds. Not dreading the audience, he shall speak purposefully. He shall act with forethought. Let him be resolute; knowing what to do and how to do, realising that the methods are also important.
Realising his own strength, he shall choose the right time and place. While being industrious, he shall not be hasty. He dares destiny with perseverance. He shall test his deputies; trust them; assign work and remain non-interfering, having judged them already. He shall read faces and minds and get at the root of hostility. He shall discriminate between good and bad, avoid base people, keep the right type of ministers for wise counsel. Guided by elders, he shall never offend the great. He has charitable mind and charitable hands, knowing hoarding wealth would not be of any use to the seeker or to those around.

He works for growth and attends to the basic need of man - food. He helps the society grow. He is conscious that the command strength is a matter of pride and that the country is what the ruler makes it. He gathers intelligence through his spies. He gains wealth by the right means. He uses it in right channels. He employs right type of envoys and gains by them. He shall lead an unblemished family life, not having extra-marital affairs. For all his extolling asceticism in some couplets, Valluvar expects man to lead a normal life within the confines of matrimony.

*The Mahabharata’s Profile of a Leader (From Bhishma’s Raja Niti)*

The eight key traits of leadership, according to Bhishma, are: steadiness, cleverness, restraint, intelligence, health, patience, bravery and attention to the mandates of time and place. A leader should be farsighted and exercise his intelligence and decide on his action. He should judiciously create, protect and distribute wealth. He should discriminate righteousness from unrighteousness.

With intelligence, sharpened by a study of scriptures, a leader should decide his course of actions. He should not procrastinate. In treating his personnel, he shall have no malice. Knowing that mildness has force in it, a leader should apply it effectively. He should behave with humility and have a tranquil mind. He should be patient and sweet-tongued. A leader should be pro-active and strive to become great. He should have higher learning, wisdom and courage. He should be cautious enough to avoid damages. He should know how to handle his friends and foes. He should have forethought and presence of mind. Self-controlled, avoiding envy and slander, he should be honest and brave. He should respect elders.
The Mahabharata’s Profile of a Leader (From Vidura Niti)

The leader is intelligent, energetic, strong, alacritous and persevering. He has reverence for others. Content, righteous and taking up praiseworthy acts, he rejects what is blamable. He shares wealth with those that serve him. He chooses learned, kind, clean, incorruptible, able men without pride and without an inclination to procrastinate. Endued with humility, he is never indifferent to the sufferings of others. He is never haughty and does not address harsh words to others. He is known by his deportment, honesty and good conduct. He is tested at seasons of panic.

He stays tranquil. He is free from anger, pride, false modesty, stupefaction and vanity; he has a heart to forgive. With faith in the high ends of life, he has his senses collected. He does not rejoice at honours, nor grieve at slights. He remains cool. He is not a prey to folly, insolence, sins, disloyalty and crookedness. He learns quickly, listens patiently, pursues his object with judgement, not from desire. He strives, having commenced anything, till it is completed.

Discreet, he does not divulge the counsels. Before venturing he considers the competence of the agent, nature of the act and its purpose. He does not waste time. He does not desire hostilities and he does not disregard even a weak foe. He proceeds with intelligence gathered on his foes. He waits for the right opportunity to strike. He realises the importance of time, place and means. He knows scriptures. He is straightforward. He understands that perseverance is the root of prosperity and of gain. Though learned, wise and virtuous, he asks the advice of elders who do not mislead. He knows the science of argumentation, possesses genius and can interpret the meaning of scriptures. He speaks boldly, can converse on various subjects.

He does not return the slander or reproaches of others. He does not humiliate and insult others; does not quarrel with friends. He abstains from companionship with those that are vile and low. He trusts only those to be trusted. He avoids sleep, drowsiness, fear, anger, indolence, procrastination, crimes, theft and outrage on the wives of others. He is diet conscious. He eats sparingly for his health, long life and ease: his progeny also becomes healthy thereby. He is content with the name he wins and the umbrella that is held over his head.
**The Mahabharata’s Profile of a Leader (Lord Krishna’s Gita)**

The leader should be steady-minded, the same in pain and pleasure, victory and defeat. He should discharge dispassionately his duties, without seeking any personal reward. He should know food habits influence his mind. A man is what he eats; therefore a leader should be choosy in his food habits. He should work hard, for work’s sake and with full control of his mind and senses.

A leader should realise that desire and anger are counterparts; he should respond accordingly. Greed is but grotesque desire. If a leader casts off his desires, he will not turn greedy. A leader should adopt the four ways to control the mind. They are regular practice, relentless enquiry, non-attachment and firm faith. He should have a charitable mind, should have compassion. Gentle, modest and not fickle-minded, he should not covet. A leader should avoid pride, ostentation, hypocrisy, pompousness, arrogance, vanity, anger and harshness.

**The inculcating responsibility**

Expectedly, to ensure an orderly, well-led world, the aforesaid quotients should get into the psyche of those who hold positions of authority. An early imbibing of them would help them and the society. If they were to learn and practice what is expected of them after assuming leadership/managerial roles, the gestation period could be excruciating for them and the society. This, the, enjoins on the family and the academia the inalienable responsibility to inculcate values of man-making at the very early stage in the life of everyone, as people are going to lead/manage their own affairs and those of others, whatever be their position or level of operation.

Time was when elders in joint families in India had occasions to relate bedtime stories to kids from epics and legends. The modern lifestyle, the growing urbanisation, with both parents in employment, the grandparents not living with grandchildren, kids do not hear bedtime stories anymore, except in some families.

The change had taken place even around the middle of the 20th century. But the fast changing social milieu grants no time or occasion to parents or grandparents to teach the wards values espoused in works like *Tirukkural* or *The Mahabharata*. 
Of this social change scholar Krishna Chaitanya notes with much regret:

"I first learned the story of the epic from my grandmother; then read many abridged versions as a boy; later read the complete work, and several times over, making fresh discoveries every time. The social, economic and cultural transition of the last few decades has denied similar opportunities for familiarisation to the younger generation. The children of the nucleate family see their grandmother only during annual holidays, which allow brief sojourns to the home provinces from distant work places. The parents, if they knew the epic, have very little time to narrate it to their children ... The task (with elders) is twofold: to induce the younger generation to benefit from their great legacy; to indicate the ideal manner in which the legacy can be assimilated by the younger generation." 8

If elder members of the family find not time to inculcate values in the young minds, the academia that finds time, value-inculcation does not have dedicated slot in the curriculum, though the knowledge-pack to be worth for application in life should cater to both external than internal dimensions of personality development.

General educational institutions apart, even reputed management schools do not appear to revise the course content to foster leadership. Regrets Henry Mintzberg:

"Business schools pride themselves in teaching about new product development and strategy change; yet their flagship, the MBA is a 1908 degree with a 1950s strategy."

Five decades have passed since management curriculum was substantially revised according to Mintzberg. If clues are to be taken by the current thinking of writers of books on Management and Leadership, both management education and general education should foster both tradition and modernity with a liberal addition of native legacy and cross-cultural exposure of leadership.

That is possible if the academia grooms students as practitioners of values within its precincts. Treated as casual travellers to roadside inns they cannot grow as leaders. As parents seem to be losing their hold on their wards teachers should be falconers, with a firm hold on their falcons, directing their flight.
‘The falcon cannot hear the falconer’

But far from native moorings, the wards are as distant from their teachers as they are from their parents. They lack value-orientation. As W.B. Yeats has allegorised in ‘The Second Coming’:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.”

Parents and teachers should be falconers. Academic apathy, as of the filial one, could unmoor students as well as teachers because today’s students are tomorrow’s teachers. The standard of teachers leaves much to be desired. Here is an ensemble:

On the eve of the Independence Day of 2004, a teacher who faced questions in a national network’s regional telecast,

“What is Gandhiji’s first name? What is the title of his autobiography?
answered in exasperation, as reported by the Tamil monthly Manjarí.

“I don’t know; I needn’t, I am a mathematics teacher.”

A lady, fresh into employment, who could not answer the same questions said that she was a commerce postgraduate and Gandhiji was not part of her syllabus.  

Sad that Gandhi, hailed by the West as an ideal leader, who died just less than 50 years ago, has limited introduction with a section of modern students, teachers and others in his home country.

As of now, the Indian educational institutions that churn out skilled employees and professionals including lawyers, doctors and managers, puts bones in the system, not the life-cells, which is a must for any branch of study, even commerce. Value inculcation is breathing life into academic pursuits, science or humanities, as the beneficiaries will have to assume responsibilities for social changes and they should be duly equipped for the task.

Many colleges and Universities in the United Kingdom offer a degree course that is called PPE – Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Studying the Primary Sources of this thesis Tirukkural and The Mahabharata is another PPE course with a difference.
For Business, Study Philosophy

Any day the role of Literature and Philosophy in the academia cannot be sidelined. That is why Thomas Hurka, a Canadian Professor of Philosophy has noted thus in his impressive newspaper article, “Interested in Business? Study Philosophy:

“How should Canada educate students to compete successfully in the business world? Some provincial governments think it is by teaching them business. Recent evidence suggests that this approach is mistaken. We will produce better managers if we educate them first in traditional subjects in the arts and sciences. We may do best of all if we educate them in Philosophy. Consider the GMAT. Undergraduate business students, whom you think would be especially well prepared for this test, do badly on it, scoring below average for all test takers. The best results are by math students, followed by philosophy students and engineers. According to a book by Michael Useem (1989), [arts and science students] have more difficulty in finding beginning managerial jobs than those with business or professional degrees because they lack specific skills in finance or engineering. When they are hired, it is usually lower in the company hierarchy. Once hired, however, they advance more rapidly than their colleagues.

“An AT&T study showed that, after 20 years with the company, 43 percent of liberal arts graduates had reached upper-middle management, compared with 32 percent of engineers. The Chase Manhattan Bank found that 60 percent of its worst managers had MBAs while 60 percent of its best managers had BAs. At IBM nine of the company’s top 13 executives had liberal arts degrees.

“What explains the success of arts and science graduates?

“The study of admission tests found that students do best “who major in a field characterized by formal thought, structural relationships, abstract models, symbolic languages and deductive reasoning.” The more abstract a subject, the more it develops pure reasoning skills; the stronger the person’s reasoning skills, the better he or she will do in any applied job. This fits the data from business. Corporations report that, though technical skills are most important in low-level managerial jobs, they become less so in middle and top jobs, where the key traits include communication skills, the ability to formulate problems and reasoning.”
Social Entrepreneurs

Calling those who effect social changes as ‘social entrepreneurs’ U.S., journalist David Bornstein suggests imparting lessons on leadership to all students. He notes:

“Funders seeking to promote the social entrepreneurship option could establish links with high schools, colleges, grassroots groups and journalists to develop ‘scouting’ systems to identify and nurture potential social entrepreneurs just as society nurtures promising athletes and musicians...Similarly by incorporating examples of social entrepreneurs in school lessons and readings, students could be taught to think about how change occurs and why new ideas encounter political and cultural resistance. Students who have the inclination could be encouraged to start organisations to improve their schools or neighbourhoods or to do internships with community based groups, perhaps, for class credit... At the college and university levels, there are limitless possibilities for incorporating examples or case studies of social entrepreneurs in course work. Beyond focusing on non-profit management techniques the case studies could be useful for under-graduate or graduate courses in medicine, law, engineering, psychology, agriculture, social work, history, political science, economics and so forth. Doctors and nurses could learn about people like Vera Cordeiro, James Grant, and Veronica Khosa who have addressed health problems in creative ways; engineers or agronomists could learn from the experiences of entrepreneurs like Fabio Rosa; psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers could study the work of innovators ...There are enough practical solutions that haven’t been documented to keep curriculum developers busy for years.”

The 2005 Scenario

While the classroom is important in its own way, chalk and talk alone would not do for leadership development. Guided social interaction such as a five-day youth leadership programme, got up in Chennai for those from 30 colleges in Tamil Nadu during the last week of January 2005, would help much. Such efforts are laudable. Still caution be exercised in hosting events. Fixing resource persons at random should be avoided; knowledgeable leadership experts should be invited; otherwise the event would be misdirected academic ritual. With the invasion of the electronic media and the internet, interest should be kindled in guided reading habits of students, for, books can never be exactly replaced by other teaching aids even in this click-button age.
Beyond 2005

If *leadership* has become the buzzword in management circles in the wake of the third millennium, a mid-2000 study by *Business Week* predicted thus:

"By 2005, 75 percent of global entrepreneurs will require major overhauls of people management, workplace policies, and workforce planning in response to a shift to knowledge as the centre of wealth production." 13

In his Foreword to a 1989 title *SuperLeadership* by Charles C. Manz and Henry P. Sims, Jr. (who came up in 2002 with a future-oriented *The New SuperLeadership*) corporate chronicler Tom Peters says,

"In *SuperLeadership*, Charles C. Manz and Henry P. Sims…focus on leaders who lead, not for their own edification and glory, not through command and authority, but through a subtle and ill-understood process that leads others to lead themselves to excellence. Indeed, in reading *SuperLeadership*, I recognised many of the characteristics that they articulate in the numerous executives I have encountered in researching my books….The authors do a superb job of articulating specific behaviours and strategies that leaders can use to bring out excellence in others. While philosophy and abstract vision are important executive strengths, the actions that executives take to realise these visions are critical." 14

To meet future challenges corporate writers who conceptualise leadership and exhort managers to realise them in action adjectivate *leadership* as, ‘extra-ordinary *leadership*’ and ‘Super-*Leadership*’. The noun matters, not the adjectives.

When organisations cry out for innovative ways of leading people at work, when duties and responsibilities change, the components leadership remain much the same. The duties and responsibilities might vary in tune with the times, not the intrinsic qualities of a leader. That is where the time-tested ancient books of wisdom count.

Writers accept that ‘true leadership comes mainly from within a person and not from outside.’ 15 It is in this context that the primary sources of this research Tirukkural and *The Mahabharata* deserve consideration.
Summary of Chapter VIII

Future Leadership, Literature and the Academia

This Chapter, in two sections, underscores the importance of teaching Literature and Philosophy to all students, including those in the science and technology stream doing professional courses. There is an avid taking for the course PPE – Politics, Philosophy and Economics in the United Kingdom.

For management students Philosophy it is a must, says a Canadian professor. In some companies non-MBA executive fare better than MBAs, because of their liberal arts education, says another Canadian management consultant.

American Management consultants say that William Shakespeare is being taught in executive refresher courses in the U.S. because of the relevance of his plays to the modern management scenario. His plays are prescribed in almost all high schools and colleges. In India, Shakespeare is taught only for English Literature students.

Krishna Chaitanya, an Indian scholar well-versed in Indian and European literary works, pointed out 20 years ago that he was fortunate as a grandson to learn epics and legends from his grandparents in his formative years, which the modern kids are not fortunate to have, because of the changing social conditions. It is pathetic that some young teachers in India are unable to answer simple questions on Mahatma Gandhi.

Even the incumbent executives, writers assay, stand to gain by studying literature. Those works exiled from the course content of general education must be brought back and such works should be taught to all students, without the apparent divisions of science and humanities.

Students pursuing even medical and engineering courses should be taught didactic portions of literature to mould them to meet the challenges of their career later. In this context the primary sources – *Tirukkural* and *The Mahabharata* – deserve attention.
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