Chapter II

Introducing the Primary Sources

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Introducing the Primary Sources

This Chapter has three sections introducing the Primary Sources as pedagogic tools teaching the nuances of leadership.

The first introduces the normative, secular and didactic Tamil text *Tirukkural* and the second *The Mahabharata* in Sanskrit, one of the two Indian epics - the other being *Ramayana*. The third points out the common ethical edifice of the two works.

Written by Tiruvalluvar about 2100 years old *Tirukkural* comprises three books, Virtue, Wealth and Pleasure (Love Life). The 1330 couplets are set in 133 chapters, ten couplets each.

*The Mahabharata* predates *Tirukkural* by several centuries. With about 200,000 lines in 18 Cantos this epic illustrates, as flashback, the intrigues between the warring first cousins over governance of the country.

Though scholars debate over the date of composition, the works are assignable undoubtedly to the BC millennia. One of the common factors is their concern for leadership, specifically the man in the leader as the *sine qua non*.

The works prompt men to take an inward journey to plan their growth. All good things, which go into the making of an individual, start from the family, they assert.

Analysing the components in no unmistaken terms the works hold that man is the measure, to lead and to be led. They prescribe norms for ideal manhood and ideal leadership, one leading on to the other for universal good. They insist that wealth should be gained only by the righteous means.

This Chapter also presents comments of scholars, Indian and overseas, who edited the works besides the views of some of the delegates who presented papers on *The Mahabharata* at Sahitya Akademi’s international seminar in New Delhi in April 2004.

With 20 quotes from each text the third section reflects the shared ethical edifice.
Chapter II

Section 1: Introduction to Tirukkural

Tirukkural, a secular work in Tamil language is 21 centuries old. While the epic The Mahabharata is prefixed with the definite article 'the', Tirukkural is mentioned just as such, because Tiru is an honorific in Tamil that goes with great persons, great places and great works Viz. Tiru-moolar Tiru-Valluvar (names of poets) Tiru-nelveli. Tiru-vaarur (names of places) Tiru-Arutpa, Tiru-Vachakam and Tiru-kural (works).

Kural is a two-line metrical verse in Tamil, like the English couplet. Going by the Indian school of philosophy Tirukkural deals with values of life in its three books Aram, Porul and Inbam, (Dharma, Artha and Kama in Sanskrit) Virtue, Wealth and Love, respectively. The three books of Tirukkural, with 1330 couplets, set in 133 chapters, prescribes norms for a good man, a good minister and a good king in its 1080 couplets of the first two books - Aram and Porul – Virtue and Wealth. The couplets define the nature and functions of men, kings, ministers, subtleties of diplomacy, mind-reading, judgment, public presentations and a lot more. They also list the cultivable qualities for kings and leaders. The leaders are obliged to look inward; yet the external factors that guide them have also been dealt with.

There is no demarcation as to where the internal quotients stop and where the external ones start. Valluvar is a poet of synthesis, not of dissection, implying that internal unction renders external excellence possible. However, the impact of the man in a leader is crucial. The fall of the man in a leader is the fall in his leadership. Hence what happens to the leader, as an individual matters. In tune thereof, the focus of this thesis is: – Set the man right, the world will be all right.

Alagappa Rammohan, publisher of an international edition of Tirukkural, gives a recent count of translations of Tirukkural thus¹: English 36, (starting from Kindersley in 1784 to Sivaya Subramuniaswamy in 1999) Malayalam 8, Telugu 8, French 7, Hindi 4, German 3, Sanskrit 3, Latin 2, Kannada 2, and one each in Sinhalese, Russian, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Malay, Burmese, Fiji, Chinese, Dutch, Spanish and Swedish.¹
Professors of History N. Subrahmanian and R. Rajalakshmi prepared a useful concordance for *Tirukkural*, long before computers entered the academia. In their erudite introduction to that researchers’ ready reckoner, *Concordance of Tirukkural*, they state,

“The *Kural* is a very important Tamil text dealing with moral philosophy as applied to ideal situations. It is very important, not only because of its textual excellence and its unique place in Tamil literature, but also because of its immense impact it has had on later Tamil literature and the socially consequent hindsights it has given to influential dabblers in Tamil sociology in recent times...Valluvar omits religion from his purview; gives secondary consideration to the state and the government; but primarily deals with man in his personal and social relations in *Arattuppal*, (The first book Virtue) and with a special aspect of such personal morals in *Kamattuppal* (The third book - Love) ...The *Kural* is a string of dos and don’ts, good advice (mixed with persuasion and occasional admonition) and bland statements of proverbial wisdom. All these look like a list of injunctions, duties to be performed. There is no mention of rights...”

The American Hindu monk Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who commissioned a lucid translation of *Tirukkural* in American English, spelt *Tirukural*, has observed,

“The chapter structure and the sequence are well thought out. Tiruvalluvar chose a topic and gave us ten different couplets on one subject. To properly understand this perspective, all the ten couplets must be read, for, they are like facets of a gem, each reflecting the light of his understanding, slightly differently and the richness of his comprehensions. In the opening few verses he tends to focus on the subject at hand, while moving in the latter verses into more specific matters.”

All couplets assay what is ideal manhood in edict-like brevity. A man true to himself shall be true to others; that is *Tirukkural*’s key message. Scholars across the world have underscored this.
Who did Tiruvalluvar, the author of Tirukural; have in mind when he wrote the Kural? The king? The minister? The citizen? The lad? The lass? The wife? The husband? The mother? The father? The son? The teacher? The pupil? The thief? The spy? The addict? The gambler? The saint? He keeps in mind almost all those who form the society. As Prof. K. Kunjunni Raja observes,

"The emphasis is on the individual rather than on society."  

Sivaya Subramuniyaswami further asserts,

“I found it (Kural) one of the most important scriptures in all of Asia, so enchanting and so very practical. It contains wondrously no-nonsense insights on life, teaching us how to deal with the various feelings and circumstances that we encounter in our internal life and our interactions with others…. Tirukural is the most accessible and relevant sacred text I know, applying to every day matters and common concerns. Like the Buddha and Bhagavad Gita, the Kural desires inner freedom from the world and a mind free from hatred. You find the quintessence of the best gems of thought in Kural, a living ethic of love and liberation. Indeed, many claim that Tirukural is man’s earliest statement of the ostensibly contemporary ecumenical tenants, for, it is free of dogmatic bias that commonly attends religious scriptures.”

Adds the monk,

“The father of modern India, Mahatma Gandhi took to these verses in his own spiritual life, telling his pupil, ‘only a few of us know the name Tiruvalluvar. The north Indians do not know the name of the great saint, there is none who has given such a treasure of wisdom like him.’

Rev. Xavier Thani Nayagam of Sri Lanka has said,

“The ancient literature in Tamil provides useful data for an inquiry into the origins and sociological development of education within a culture complex. It is a very valuable corpus for the study of ancient India, because Tamil literature is predominantly secular.”
Western humanist Albert Schweitzer says,

"With sure strokes, the Kural draws the ideal of simple ethical humanity. On the most varied questions concerning the conduct of man to himself and to the world … there hardly exists a collection of maxims in which we find such lofty wisdom." 8

K. M. Munshi states in his Foreword to Rajaji’s translation of Tirukkural,

"In its essence Tirukkural is a treatise par excellence on the art of living. Tiruvalluvar diagnoses the intricacies of human nature with such penetrating insights, perfect mastery and consummate skill absorbing the most subtle (sic) concepts of modern psychology that one is left wondering at his sweep and depth. His prescriptions, leavened by godliness, ethics, morality and humaneness are sagacious and practical to the core. They cut across castes, creeds, climes and ages and have a freshness, which makes one feel as if they are meant for the present times. No wonder that the Kural has continued to attract the best minds down the ages. Gandhiji is known to have delved deep into its wisdom. Vinobaji is an acknowledged student of this classic." 9

Rajaji in his Preface adds,

"Tiruvalluvar was one of those rare and great men whose catholic spirit rose above all denominations and whose vision was not clouded by dogma or prejudice of any kind. Tiruvalluvar’s approach to moral doctrine is marked by a very thorough knowledge of human psychology. Throughout we can see how the poet brings everything down to the level of practicality without losing hold of the ideal. The second book of Kural has 70 chapters on purity in worldly affairs including statecraft, full of interest for the scholar and the historian. The chapters are not addressed only to princes and those around them. They contain principles of conduct that should guide all…." 10

Educationist V.C. Kulandaiswamy observes,

"Valluvar lived and wrote in the age of the bullock cart: He lived at a time when monarchy was the only form of civilized government…Can a book written at a time when education was meant only for a few, when kings enjoyed unlimited"
powers, have any relevance in an age when man-made satellites are in the orbit?"\textsuperscript{11}

From Mu. Varadarajan to V. Sp. Manickam and Sp. Annamalai, eminent Tamil Professors, have come out with their ethical and literary studies. These annotated editions of \textit{Tirukkural} facilitate easy understanding. They have their own merits.

Although scholars have occasionally held \textit{Tirukkural} as a management manual, they were pleased with just citing a few couplets in their articles or random orations. Of the very few books linking \textit{Tirukkural} with management, three deserve mention:

(i) \textit{Management Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar in Public Administration} by Agamudai Nambi\textsuperscript{12}

(ii) \textit{Management Mantras from Tirukkural} by S.M. Veerappan and T. Srinivasan.\textsuperscript{13} and

(iii) \textit{Tirukkural and Modern Management} by Sundara Srinivasan\textsuperscript{14}

The first is different from normal literary criticism; the second opens with communication nuances wherein are discussed Time Management, managing the boss, moulding of an executive, planning, developing core competence, trusting and entrusting.

The authors of the second book, an illustrated one, employ modern managerial idiom. The third is a bilingual work offering some interesting insights.

When \textit{Kural} moves over thus from the den of literary criticism, pure and simple, to the applied aspects, especially in the realm of management, more works of in-depth analysis would come up. That in turn, depends on

(i) proliferation of literary scholars cum professional managers, and

(ii) efforts to take literary works to the schools of management.

This thesis is an attempt in this direction, with specific reference to leadership quotients in \textit{Tirukkural}. 


Chapter II

Section 2: Introduction to the *The Mahabharata*

The date of *Tirukkural*, as consensus with Tamil scholars, is 100 BC. Experts differ on the date of *The Mahabharata*. Anita Chakravarty, writing on the *Gita*, fixes the date of the Kurukshetra war, the epic’s climax, to 1000 BC. Krishna Chaitanya, a literary critic familiar with Western and Indian literary texts, subscribes to Robert Minor’s date of the *Bhagavad Gita* circa 150 BC, though he dismisses the latter’s contention that the *Gita* was a later addition to the epic. Krishna Chaitanya holds the *Gita* an integral part of the epic. Whatever be the dates, it is certain that these texts were written when monarchy was the form of government. When no explicit democracy was in vogue, authors Tiruvalluvar and Vyasa breathed the spirit of democracy with the conviction that man is the measure to lead and to be led. They laid an ethical edifice, holding the individual at the nucleus of the society. That is their undisputed major premise in explicating leadership quotients.

Woven around numerous intriguing, interlinked episodes, portraying the characters in conflict, war-centric Indian epic, *The Mahabharata* in Sanskrit, prescribes the ethical pursuit of Wealth and Pleasure. With 96,635 stanzas under 2382 chapters in 18 books, it is known to be the world’s oldest literary work in the narrative format, with the largest cast of characters.

"With its 18 Parvas, 1200 chapters, and 200,000 lines of verse, *The Mahabharata* is eight times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together, longer than the united extent of all the epic poems in European languages and three and a half times the Bible,"15

notes Krishna Chaitanya who has dedicated his book on *The Mahabharata* to the European scholar Philip Glass.

"It is the mightiest single endeavour of literary creation of any culture in human history, *The Mahabharata* is unique in many respects. As an epic, it is the greatest and the grandest, animating the heart of India and destined to lead humanity for
thousands of years in future,” 16 say the publishers of Kisari Mohan Ganguli’s 12-volume English translation of The Mahabharata.

As of most other epics, The Mahabharata is not a single hero-centric epic. It reflects the mind of a nation. Kodandaramayya cites Shri Aurobindo,

“...The whole poem has been built like a vast national temple un-rolling slowly its immense and complex idea from chamber to chamber crowded with significant groups and sculptures and inscriptions.”17

Annie Besant notes,

“It teaches everybody. It teaches children, boys and girls, men and women, and it teaches them what to do at each part of life....The Mahabharata lays great stress on this relation between conduct and position.”18

The Mahabharata is

‘Sastra (scripture) and a Kavya (epic)’ notes scholar S. Ram Mohan. 19

‘To view it as a work of political structuring aimed at bringing about socio-political order and administering propriety is the most profitable reading,’ says Prafulla Kumar Mohanty. 20

K. M. Munshi who launched Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan’s publications, with The Mahabharata of Rajaji, former Governor General of India, says,

“The Mahabharata is not a mere epic. It is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women; some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life; a philosophy of social and ethical relations and speculative thought on human problems.” 21

Says Rajaji,

“Its gospel of dharma, which like a golden thread runs through all the complex movements, that hatred breeds hatred, that covetousness and violence
lead inevitably to ruin, that the only real conquest is the battle against one’s own lower nature.” 22

Subash Mazumdar, an epic enthusiast, who has served the United Nations in many parts of the world, says,

“I believe it (The Mahabharata) is essentially factual...not just a story or a mythology but a social history of our ancestors... It portrays succinctly the moral and ethical values of people who lived at that time. It described clearly how people behaved under stress – some righteously and valiantly; some ignominiously and in a dastardly manner; while some being unable to take a decision merely abstained from action.” 23

In his forthcoming book, The Mahabharata - An Inquiry in the Human Condition, Chaturvedi Badrinath 24 lists 18 traits that mark the epic both normative and illustrative. They are:

“Self-understanding in concrete situations, consonance between particular and universal, attributes of a happy person as definitions, concepts shown as relational, inter-personal relationships, neither neglect or idolatry of any human attribute, the universality of virtues, ethical cannon in all judgments, paradoxical situations, emancipation, moksha, as rising above, time-specific contrary desires, conflict between right and wrong and also between right and right, philosophical debates start from personal angle and proceed to universal, the debating methodology of interaction, the importance to time and place for historicity, speech being central in all discussions, the intellectual and spiritual role of women as teachers.”

The epic has meaningfully enchanted a number of scholars abroad.

Author MacDonald lauds it ‘an encyclopaedia of moral teaching.’ 25

To Winter Nitz it is not an epic or a poem, but ‘rather a whole literature.’ 26

Hermann Oldenberge could sense, “In The Mahabharata breathe the united soul of India and the individual soul of her people.” 27
"If I were to confine for life to a single book, I would certainly choose The Mahabharata," Arthur William Ryder has said. 28

Peter Hill who took the epic as mankind under the clutches of Fate says,

"The Mahabharata was not a purely religious work, nor an epic in the Homeric sense, nor a romance, nor a philosophical treatise, although it did contain all these forms and much more." 29

What Hill calls 'more' is approached here from the management angle through a study of leadership lessons contained therein.

To Juan Miguel de Mora of Mexico The Mahabharata is,

"The Mahabharata is a gigantic torrent of life and thought, of action and meditation, of images and examples, and, of principles. The Mahabharata transcends, in every aspect, the frontiers of India, (with its) delicate ambivalence, true to reality, in presenting all aspects, the nuances and forms of human life. It deals with good and evil, but a profound character analysis…it is not a question of placing the bad on one side and the good on the other. The ‘good’ are not so good and they are far from perfect. And the bad are not absolutely bad." 30

In her book of leadership-based quotes from the epic, bereft of contextual references, Meera Uberoi, says,

"Sun Tzu wrote his classic about two thousand years ago, Machiavilli in the 15th century and Mushashi in the 17th century. The Mahabharata predates them. It is pragmatic, clear-sighted philosophy crosses barriers of epoch and culture." 31

The epic's large canvas, numerous personae in conflicting circumstances, pointed and illuminating debates and sermons have elicited this spectrum of laudatory opinion from domestic and foreign scholars. Each is right in his/her observation. But there is something more than all that has been said as above. The Mahabharata is, in deed, a study of leadership from its failure to success, failure in personality traits causing a chain of failures in public affairs, and success through catharsis, atonement and forbearance, as is to be discussed in the subsequent chapters.
Chapter II

Section 3: Common concerns of the Primary Sources

One familiar with Tirukkural, as he goes through Vidura Niti, Bhishma's Raja Niti and Bhagavad Gita will be surprised to find striking similarities in views and metaphors regarding statements on life and ethical ways. As this research is only on leadership in both the works, no attempt is made here for a literary study comparative philosophy. Anyone who takes up a close scrutiny will have a rewarding experience.

The Mahabharata is several centuries older; it was part of India's oral traditions presumably long before Tirukkural was written. Given the plausible theory that some ancient Tamil veterans were well-versed in Sanskrit too because of the cultural cohesion of those days, there is every reason to believe that Tiruvalluvar, author of Tirukkural, was quite familiar with the epic as a literary and philosophical work. The epic did provide him inspiration. The theory that Tiruvalluvar might have influenced by views and metaphors of Vyasa on life and concepts of man, might not be palatable to the post-Independent politically influenced, emotionally surcharged, indoctrinated lingual chauvinists. Still it is worthwhile to look at the striking similarities.

A sample list of 20 quotes from The Mahabharata as in Janaki Abhisheki’s book Tales and Teachings from The Mahabharat (1998) and comparative Kural couplets presents the common ethical edifice of the two authors. The Mahabharata is quoted first. Numerals within brackets for the quotes from it refer to the Parva number, the surga number and the verse number in that order given by Janaki Abhisheki. Kural couplets, with their numbers, are italicized and right aligned to mark the difference,

1. Ahimsa (non-violence) and truthful speech are the dharma that do (sic) good to the world. Ahimsa is the highest dharma, and it resides in truth. (3.198.69)

   Truthfulness is avoiding harmful words.” (291)

2. All asramas survive on the householder just as all survive on the mother. (12.261.6)

   A householder shall support those of the other three orders – bachelors, quasi-ascetics and ascetics. (41)
3. Only that which is done according to dharma can bring happiness. Wealth is superficial. (12.283.55)

"Happiness is what comes through virtue; the rest are aside; they lack glory." (41)

4. He who drinks real amrit (the elixir of immortality) is the one who eats only after the family, servants and guests have eaten. (12.214. 10,11,12,13)

"Don't take even the life-giving elixir, keeping aside the guests." (82)

5. Knowledge (Jnana) helps to discriminate between good and bad and adopt the right course. (12.194.13)

"Wisdom will harness the mind, diverting one from the wrong path and directing him toward the right." (422)

6. Look favourably on a guest, see to his needs, speak sweetly truthfully and sincerely when he departs go with his a little way and pay attention to him. (13. 7.12)

"The one who sees off departing guests awaits arriving ones is heaven's guest." (86)

7. Wealth obtained by fair means gives much better fruits than giving daan for food or performances of many yagnas. (14.93.76)

"Wealth with the right persons is a fruit-bearing tree of common reach" (216)

8. Just as a well is hidden by grass so the immoral take their guise of dharma and break the limits of decent behaviour. (13.147.11)

"The wicked look like good people; the like of which we have not seen." (1071)

9. He who has realised the Self can never be subdued by anyone. (14.19.23)

Only he is called a man who...is free of ego and pride (13.134.13)

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

10. He who gets an animal for killing, he who kills, who sells, who trades in it, who cooks it and enjoys it are all violent. (13.116.47)

"If none buys, none in the world would sell meet." (266)

11. To be steeped in Vedic knowledge and being fair with all beings are both regarded as equal. Straightforwardness is more important. (13.130.29)

"The wise are the righteous, treating all living beings equally." (30)
12. First the mind must be free of violence and then speech and deed. (13.115.8)

   A pure mind is everything of virtue; all else is nothing. (34)

13. Merely washing the body with water cannot be called a bath. He ... who has kept his sense organs under control... has had a bath. (13.111.9)

   Water cleans body; truth cleans the mind. (298)

14. Do not criticise those defective in body, the fat, the old... (13.107.59)

   Don’t ridicule men by their stature; they are like axle-pin upon which mighty wheels of a chariot spin. (667)

15. A guest should never be insulted and spoken to angrily. (13.62.11,12,13)

   Virtue is receiving pleasantly, looking kindly and speaking pleasantly. (931)

16. Non-violence towards all beings, giving oneself to all, self-control, renunciation, steadfastness and truth are what will bear fruit. (13.59.8)

   Enduring pain, not injuring others are the traits of penance. (261)

17. Just as weeds are bad for crops, so are the wicked among men. (12.174.7)

   The king punishing criminals is like de-weeding the fertile fields. (550)

18. Charity becomes flawed when there is no discrimination between the deserving and the undeserving. (12.20.9)

   The help is rated not in itself but by the worth of the recipient. (105)

19. The best medicine of sorrow is not to dwell on. It only increases sorrow. (11.2.17)

   Least bothersome, least worrisome. (341)

20. The ruler who extracts more taxes than that accepted by the shastras harasses the subjects and invited his own destruction. (12.72.15)

   The tears of the oppressed barrage and sap the king’s treasury. (555)

   A lot more comparative statements could be ferreted from the primary sources. They mainly cover the first two of the three ordained pursuits of humanity - Virtue and Wealth and Pleasure. Leadership is also built on what is said on the first two.
Summary of Chapter II

Introduction to the Primary Sources

The above Chapter has introduced the two ancient Indian texts *Tirukkural* and *The Mahabharata* as expositions of leadership, among the other man-making values.

As acknowledged by scholars, *Tirukkural* is an extraordinary work on the art of living, delving deep into the unshifting foundations of human nature. It provides guidelines, not for the society in general but for individuals – the ascetic, the family member, the father, the son, the monarch, the minister, the ambassador and in general to everyone in society who hold responsibilities unto themselves and to others.

*The Mahabharata*, being an epic is a string of integral stories under a master plot. Though not entirely factual, as contended by some, it is not altogether fictional. Fiction or history, taken of just what is being said, the epic portrays succinctly the moral values of the then society. It describes clearly how people behaved under stress – some righteously and valiantly; some ignominiously and in dastardly manner; some who were unable to take decisions and so merely abstained from action.

Both the texts share the common ethical edifice of the Indian polity that Wealth and Pleasure, the twin ends of life, should be earned only through Virtue. The authors discuss various components of leadership and statecraft upon this major premise that the means matter in realising the ends.

A random selection of twenty quotes present the authors on the same wavelength.
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5. Subramuniyaswami, Sivaya Trans. Tirukural (New Delhi, Abhinav 2000) P. xiv,

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19. Ram Mohan S *Delineation of evil in The Mahabharata and the “Gang of Four”* (Sahitya Akademi Seminar paper on *The Mahabharata*, Delhi, April 2004)


26. Ibid. P. xiii

27. Ibid. P. xiv

28. Ibid. P. xiv

29. Peter Hill *Fate, Predestination and Human Action in the Mahabharata* (New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001,) P xv


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Note: Page numbers are not given for books under entries 12, 13, 14 as no quote is given from any of them. Only the titles get mentioned.