

# SOVEREIGNTY (OR LEADERSHIP) as UNDERSTOOD BY CHANAKYA AND TIRUVALLUVAR

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**One can see talent/skill everywhere today but harnessing the talent/skill for the good of the individual and also the society is lacking.** The management sector today is attempting to seal this vacuum by their understanding of who a leader is and how he can help in harnessing the talent/skill. Although the prerequisites of a leader has been discussed in a wide variety of forums, yet some questions remain unanswered. This paper attempts to highlight those questions and seeks the wisdom of an ancient Tamil poet, Tiruvalluvar, to answer them. **The paper does not intend to make a one-to-one comparison of this poet with that of Chanakya, but, would surely present the views of this poet to the world as complementary to that of Kautilya, coming from another part of India and belonging to another century.** The highlight of this attempt is to show how two thinkers have identified and given solutions independently even though one may be tempted to make a comparison.

What are the characteristics of a leader? The characteristic of a leader is governed by his own interest that has to go in tandem with the expectation of his role (be it as a King, according to Tiruvalluvar and Kautilya, or a manager/leader in management parlance) and that of his subordinates (be it the people or his team member). Management studies expects the leader to bridge the gulf between his team and the management while the King has to take care of good governance and man-management. Kautilya, according to Radhakrishna Pillai, outlines 'man power' as one of the factors that lead to true power in a leader. He continues:

There are two kinds of manpower – internal and external. Internal manpower comprises employees of the organisation, the board of directors and the shareholders. External manpower includes the customers and suppliers<sup>1</sup>.

What type of leaders satisfy this need? What are the characteristics of such leaders? It is in this context that the paper attempts to bring to light the contribution of Tiruvalluvar here.

Tiruvalluvar, a celebrated Tamil poet, wrote the Tirukkural that is predominantly ethical in character. It is a collection of wise sayings brought out in pithy statements that run to just two lines each (called a couplet). The topics that he has touched in this work range from that of a King to the ordinary man and their duties and responsibilities. The significance of this work is (i) its universality (hence called *ulaga pothu marai - world's common scripture*) (ii) applicability and reinterpretation of its ideals for the present, be it for the management sector or in the political arena (iii) touches every aspect of human life (iv) secular nature of this work even though it belonged to a time when India was witnessing the impact of either Hinduism or Jainism or Buddhism. This work comprises of 1330 couplets. They have been grouped under 3 sections, namely the section on wealth/politics (*Porutpāl*), the section on desire/love (*kāmatthupāl*) and the section on law/virtue (*aratthupāl*). There are 133 chapters (under these 3 sections). Each chapter consists of 10 couplets and has a specific subject-matter ranging from 'ploughing a piece of land' to 'ruling a country' or happiness/love and also the significance of *aRam* or virtue. The first section deals with right manner of conducting the worldly affair and good governance; the second section deals with love and the attendant likes and satisfaction of needs of a person; lastly, there is the section that deals with virtue, viz., good ethical behaviour and with conscience and honour.

**The paper begins with an understanding of the role of a leader in today's management sector and the expectations that go with it and, in turn, tries to reveal the role of a King as envisaged by Tiruvalluvar, which can be applied back to the present needs. A manager, today, has to be good at balancing act, especially the need to work**

<sup>1</sup> Corporate Chanakya: on Leadership, p. 4

upwards, downwards and sideways, if one understands Peter Drucker<sup>2</sup> correctly. In other words, the manager has to work with the people who report to him, and also to work with people in other areas along with working upwards (to his boss, or the management). Be it in any manner that he works, the manager has to take responsibility to the contribution (of his team) and the result. Therefore, a manager has to set his objective, classify the work and then motivate through regular communication and, more importantly, through his decisions on pay, placement and promotion. He also needs to establish a management structure or team (as was done and proved beneficial to General Motors by its then President, Alfred Sloan Jr in 1920 and later to Ford by Henry Ford Jr). **The recipe, therefore, is good governance, proper delegation and effective working. Kautilya's<sup>3</sup> suggestion on 'sovereignty' is worth considering here.** He says that "sovereignty is possible only with assistance. A single wheel can never move. Hence the King shall employ ministers and hear their opinion". **To him, the King, the minister, the country, the fort, the treasury, the army are the elements of sovereignty.** Being possessed of valour, consulting the elders, the virtuous, being truthful etc are some of the traits required of a King, according to him. Notwithstanding these, he also adds that the King should have large aims, and should be highly enthusiastic; not addicted to procrastination, a sharp intellect and a taste for discipline are some of the other prerequisites. The king should also be ready to award punishments or reward whenever necessary and discerning enough to identify his enemy's weak points (of competitors in his area of business). Moreover, he should be free from passion, anger, greed, obstinacy, fickleness, haste and back-biting; he should talk to others with a smiling face and observe customs that go with his role. Kautilya adds that a wise king can make even the poor and miserable elements of his sovereignty happy and prosperous; but a wicked king will surely destroy the most prosperous and loyal elements of his kingdom. Look at the following couplets of the Tirukkural (in 2<sup>nd</sup> Part, viz., 'Poruṭṭāḷ' dealing with wealth – **5 couplets taken from the Section titled 'Royalty' or** □□□□□□□□ **or greatness of a King and the last one, namely 542 taken from the section on 'Just Government' or செங்கோன்மை**<sup>4</sup>:

படைகுடி கூழ் அமைச்சு நட்பு அரண் அறும் உடையான் அரசருள் ஏறு	Paṭaikūṭi kūzh amaicchu natpuraṇ aruṁ Uṭaiyān arasarul ēru
<i>He who possesses these six things, an army, a people, wealth, ministers, friends and a fortress, is a lion among kings.</i> - 381	
அஞ்சாமை ஈகை அறிவுக்கம் இந்நான்கும் ஏஞ்சாமை வேந்தர் கியல்பு	Anjāmai aṟivūkkam innānkum Ēnjāmai vēntark kiyalpu
<i>Never to fail in these four things, fearlessness, liberality, wisdom, and energy, is the kingly character</i> - 382	
தூங்காமை கல்வி துணிவுடைமை இம்மூன்றும் நீங்கா நிழலாள் பவர்க்கு	Thūngāmai kalvi thuṇivuṭ immūṇṟum Nīnga nilanāḷ pavarkku
<i>These three things, viz., vigilance, learning and bravery should never be wanting in the ruler of a country</i> - 383	
அறனிழுக்கா தல்லவை நீக்கி மறனிழுக்கா மானம் உடைய தரசு	aṟanizhukkā thallavai nīkki maranizhukkā mānam uṭaiya tharasu
<i>He is a king who, with manly modesty, swerves not from virtue, and refrains from vice</i> - 384	
காட்சி கெளரியன் கடுஞ்சொல்லன் அல்லனேல் மீக்கூறும் மன்னன் நிலம்	Kāṭchi keḷiyān kaṭuṅṅosollan allanēl mīkkūṟum mannan nilam
<i>The whole world will exalt the country of the king who is easy of access, and who is free from harsh language</i> - 386	
முறைசெய்து காப்பாற்றும் மன்னவன்	muṟai seytu kāppāṟṟum mannan makkatku

<sup>2</sup> Management: Task, Responsibilities, Practices,, p.393-4

<sup>3</sup> R Shamasastri, Kautilya's Arthasastra, p, 518

<sup>4</sup> G U Pope's translation of the Tirukkural is followed along with that of Kaviyogi Maharishi Shuddhananda Bharati's

மக்கட்கு இறையென்று வைக்கப் படும்	iraiyenru vaikkap paṭum
<i>That king, will be esteemed a God among men, who performs his own duties, and protects (his subjects).</i> - 388	
வானோக்கி வழும உலகெல்லாம் மன்னவன் கோல் நோக்கி வாழுங் குடி	Vānōkki vāzhum ulakellām mannavan Kōl nōkki vāzhum kuṭi
<i>The earth looks up to sky and thrives (while) mankind to king's rod of justice</i> - 542	

One can thus see how Tiruvalluvar enlists the characteristics of a King (which include those that he should possess and those that he should shy away from). Among these couplets, the first one is necessary for any King while couplet 382, 383, and 384 deal with those that helps one to differentiate the good King from the ordinary or even bad King. Now, what are the characteristics of a good King? A good King should be virtuous, fearless, vigilant, be liberal and wise; he should be full of energy, be brave, and yet, modest. He should have an army, wealth, ministers, a fortress and be a lion among Kings, be liberal, vigilant, wise, brave, refrain from vice, soft spoken and accessible.

**Like Kautilya, Tiruvalluvar also advocates that the King should lend his ears to good counsel.** He should, simultaneously, avoid the vices. The last three couplets, cited here, deals with the image of the King among his subjects. A King, according to these couplets, should be easily accessible, speak softly, perform his duties which includes protecting the subjects. In fact, couplet 388 suggests that a King, who performs his duties and protects his subjects, will even be venerated as God. Couplet 542 cites the example of dependence on the sky by earthly beings for sustenance and compares it to mankind's expectation of justice from the King. Good governance is not merely adhering to these. It also involves **weeding out the unwanted**. Hence both these thinkers have no reservation in advocating the need for punishing the wrong. The need for punishing the wrong is brought out by Tiruvalluvar in this section titled செங்கோன்மை (just government or right sceptre). They are:

ஓர்த்துகண் ணோடாது இறைபுரிந்து யார்மாட்டும் தேர்ந்துசெய் வஃதே முறை	Ōrtthukaṇ ṇōṭāthu iraippathu yārmāttum Thérnthusey vahthé murai
<i>To examine into (the crimes which may be committed), to show no favour (to any one), to desire to act with impartiality towards all, and to inflict (such punishments) as may be wisely resolved on, constitute rectitude (uprightness, integrity).</i> - 541	

Both Kautilya and Tiruvalluvar are very clear about this need for punishing the wrong. In fact, couplet no. 549 claims that **the act of punishing the wrong doer does not count as sin. Instead, Tiruvalluvar considers it as the duty of a King.**

குடிபுறங் காத்தோம்பிக் குற்றம் கடிதல் படுவன்று வேந்தன் தொழில்	kuṭipuraṅg kāthhōmpik kuṇṇam kaṭithal paṭuvanru vēnthan tozhil
<i>In guarding his subjects (against injury from others), and in preserving them himself; to punish crime is not a fault in a king, but a duty</i> - 549	

Kautilya's *Arthasastra* also suggests "it is the King in whom the duties of both *Indra* (the rewarder) and *Yama* (the punisher) are blended"<sup>5</sup>. His work treats the law of punishment (*dandanīti*) as the bedrock on which the wellness and progress of the nation depends. Kautilya cautions his readers that absence of punishment will lead to the stronger overpowering the weak (1.4.13-14)<sup>6</sup>. Having said that, Kautilya also reminds the King of how much punishment is to be given or what should be the nature of punishment and what will be the resultant behavior of the one who is punished. He says:

... Whoever imposes severe punishment becomes repulsive to the people; while he who awards mild punishment

<sup>5</sup> R. Shamasastri, *Op.Cit.*, location 704, p., 518

<sup>6</sup> Radhakrishna Pillai, *Op.Cit.*, p. 7

becomes contemptible. But whoever imposes punishment as deserved becomes respectable. For punishment when awarded with due consideration, makes the people devoted to righteousness and to works productive of wealth and enjoyment; while punishment, when ill-awarded under the influence of greed and anger or owing to ignorance, excites fury even among hermits and ascetics dwelling in forests, not to speak of householder<sup>7</sup>.

Two couplets of the Tirukkural can be juxtaposed here:

தக்காங்கு நாடி தலைச்செல்லா வண்ணத்தால் ஒத்தாங்கு ஒறுப்பது வேந்து	Takkāngu nāṭi talaiselvā vaṇṇatthāl Othhāngu oṟuppatu vēnthu
<i>He is a king who having equitably examined (any injustice which has been brought to his notice), suitably punishes it, so that it may not be again committed. - 561</i>	
கடிதோச்சி மெல்ல ஏறிக நெடிதாக்கம் நீங்காமை வேண்டு பவர்	Kaṭithōcchi mella ériga neṭithākkam Nīngmai vēṇṭu pavar
<i>Let the king, who desires that his prosperity may long remain, commence his preliminary enquires with strictness, and then punish with mildness - 562</i>	

It can be seen from these utterances that both thinkers are definitely in favour of the King punishing the wrong-doer but cautions the King to be prudent enough in administering the punishment. **One may point out to the difference in stand point of the two thinkers here – while Kautilya advocates ‘just punishment’, which is neither severe nor mild, Tiruvalluvar aims at strictness coupled with mild-natured punishment. However, couplet 561 has to be re-read before coming to any conclusion in this regard.** It talks of a trace of mildness associated with the aim of deterring this person or any other person from involving in a similar crime. Hence he too seems to be talking of ‘just punishment’ since he advocates ‘suitable punishment’ that is in line with the offence done. Therefore, one need not consider this to be a change in standpoint between the two. It is but a caution given over and above the ‘justness or correctness’ in administering punishment. In fact, Tiruvalluvar has not left any stone unturned when it comes to his suggestions to a King on good governance. One such pronouncement pertains to man-management, especially with respect to faith in his coterie of ministers. Tiruvalluvar has spoken about this aspect too, and his recommendation on this aspect, clearly brings out the cautious approach that a King needs to tread.

The couplet goes like this:

உழைப்பிரிந்து காரணத்தின் வந்தானை வேந்தன் இழைத் திருந்து எண்ணிக் கொளல்	Uzhippirintu kāraṇatthin vantānai vēnthan Izhaith thirunthu eṇṇik koḷal
<i>When one may have left him, and for some cause has returned to him, let the king fulfill the object (for which he has comeback) and thoughtfully receive him again.- 530</i>	

Kautilya<sup>8</sup> also speaks of the dangers that a King may have to face in accepting those that have deserted – “for the king, there is (danger of) revolt in the interior or in the outer regions” (8.2.2). To the business man, internal threat is from employees and shareholders while external threat is from suppliers and customers. **The same amount of caution is expected of a King when dealing with punishment, as the latter should not be used as a means to eliminate one’s subject but to ensure that the crime is not repeated.** It may be worthwhile to showcase that Tiruvalluvar also did not hesitate to advocate death sentence, if necessity demands.

கொலையிற் கொடியாரை	kolaiyiṛ koṭiyārai vēnthoṟutthal painkūzh
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<sup>7</sup> R Shamasastri, Op.Cit., location 234, p. 518

<sup>8</sup> Radhankrishna Pillai, Op.Cit., p.5

வேந்தொறுத்தல் பைங்கூழ் களைகட் டதனாடு நேர்	kaḷaikat tathanótu nér
<i>For a king to punish criminals with death, is like pulling up the weeds in the green corn.</i> - 550	

These pre-requisites for a King goes well with the management requirements of a leader today. Today's management is in need of a leader who is wise, possesses the strength to take up a job and administer it, be soft-spoken and accessible but not given to favouritism, reward the good and punish the wicked as per the act committed etc. Peter Drucker<sup>9</sup> suggests the following requirements of a leader: (i) set objectives (ii) analyse and organise the activities (iii) selects the people for the work (iv) communicates to them of the requirements of the job (v) communicates with his peers (vi) has to be impersonal (vii) coordinate like the conductor of a symphony, having his concentration on the whole music while picking out an instrument for enhancing the music and (viii) does all these through his 'people decision' on pay, placement and promotion. Two statements from Kautilya and Tiruvalluvar respectively will present how much people-friendly a King (or leader) should be.

“in the happiness of the subjects, lies the benefit of the King, and in what is beneficial for the subjects, is his own benefit” (1.19.34)<sup>10</sup>

Couplet 554 of the Tirukkural states:

*The king, who, without reflecting (on its evil consequences), perverts justice, will lose at once both his wealth and his subjects.*

In other words, if the King is not able to keep his people happy, and instead thinks of his own benefit all the time, he will definitely end up being dethroned. Just look at the way the top politicians have had to bow to the popular opinion of the citizens and change their positions. Kautilya's (and Tiruvalluvar's) concept of King suggests the needed answer to the requirements felt in the field of management.

The impact of the discussion on King from two standpoints on leadership can be brought out in a table like the following:

According to Kautilya		According to Tiruvalluvar	Leader in management area
be wise and possess valour,	KING	be liberal, wise & brave	Planning/decision-making based on wisdom and bravery
Be virtuous		Should never swerve from virtue	Shine as an example – lead from the front
Avoid anger, passion, fickleness,		Avoid the vice	
Listens to ministers		Listen to counsel (of his minister)	Participatory management
Soft spoken		Should be accessible	Leads with love rather than power
Reward the good		Reward the good	Project the strength of his team and neutralise the negative in order to get the better out of the individual for the benefit of the company
Administer 'just punishment'		Punishment (duty of the King not a sin) Strictness in enquiry but mild in punishing	

<sup>9</sup> Op.Cit., p. 400-1

<sup>10</sup> Radhankrishna Pillai, Op.Cit., p. 31