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BOOK REVIEW

“Leading: Lessons from Leadership”

Sampat P. Singh. New Delhi: Response Books, 2003.

212 pages. ISBN 0-7619-9753-9. Rs. 300 (paperback).

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Sampat P. Singh provides a detailed explanation of what constitutes leader and leadership. He makes a digression from the normal ways of studying leadership by analyzing the phenomenon through examples from diverse disciplines like management science, literature, philosophy, drama, mythology, and experiential knowledge from key business leaders, etc. The book focuses mainly on his conceptual understanding of the relevance and significance of leadership, as displayed by characters from literature.

The book is interspersed with examples and anecdotes from the lives of characters discussed from humanistic literature. Through this book, the author has attempted to answer some of the persistent questions that thinkers and theorists have tried to answer since the beginning of organized human society. What is leadership? Who is a true leader? Are leaders born or made? What are the qualities that make one human being lead others? These questions have been addressed from a fresh perspective. In presenting his unique approach, Sampat P. Singh addresses some key issues including:

- A differentiation between a leader and a manager;
- Developing young leadership mindset by changing their perspective;
- Understanding leadership from a complete perspective;
- Deprogramming pre-programmed mindsets for development.

According to the author, the aim of the book is to develop an understanding of the leader as shown in literature. The author has tried to search thoroughly and select from a wide range of appropriate masterpieces from world literature. These literary pieces offer a wide range of characters, situations, events and ideas, which could be used as inputs for developing leadership mindset. The book covers well-known religious, fictional, and real-life characters, such as Rama, Buddha, Don Quixote, Gandhi, Vivekanand, Mulk Raj Anand, and Amrita Sher-Gil, etc.

The book is divided into five sections containing 16 chapters, and each section emphasizes a different theme related to leadership. The first section (“Looking at Leadership”) has two chapters. In Chapter 1 (“Leaders and Leadership”), the leader has been presented as a hero, as a catalyst, as a visionary, as a fulfiller of dreams, as an adventurer, and as an individual whose self is balanced with objective and subjective reality. Chapter 2 (“Leaders and Managers”) takes examples from literature to show the difference between the two roles. The difference lies in their psychological orientation, in their role definition, and in their outlook towards fellow humans. An alternative approach for bridging the gap between the two has been suggested.

The second section is on how management education can be molded and adapted for developing leadership mindsets. The author suggests that management education should not be focused on simply giving knowledge and skill-based courses, which develop only the transactional aspect in the individual. In Chapter 3, the author shows how science has limited scope for developing the complete individual and is incapable of explaining the complete picture. Chapter 4 gives an overview of three modules of management education that will make it holistic in approach. The three modules are (a) practitioner's module, (b) professional's module, (c) and the humanistic module. Chapter 5 has some examples of themes in literature. Anecdotes from *Tughlaq*, *Panchatantra*, *Mudrarakshasa*, *Don Juan*, *Don Quixote*, etc., have been used to show how a leader should be.

The third section is on orienting the mindsets of to-be-leaders. The author suggests that if leaders wish to influence followers' way of thinking, they must first bring changes in their own thinking. In Chapter 6, he notes that observing a child who looks at life with a fresh perspective can give many insights into how to de-program and re-program a pre-programmed mindset. Meditation is another route through which this can be done. Suggestions on how to synergize reason and emotion have been given in Chapter 7. The main emphasis is on why logic and reason alone are not sufficient for motivation. Charisma and emotion are essential to motivate and sustain followers to move towards a goal. Chapter 8 ("Enlightened Leadership") discusses key modern writers like *Goethe* and *Maslow*. Chapter 9 shows that knowledge without insight is not a sufficient criterion. With the help of insight, an individual can develop the faculty to resolve contradictions.

The fourth section is on leader's falsity, authenticity, and trust. One point that comes out emphatically is the statement that there are no clear-cut answers or norms for deciding between right or wrong, falsity or truth, good or bad. The author clearly shows that conflicts demand situational judgments, based on compromises, and checks and balances to control the misuse of freedom and power. He suggests transparency and accountability as means for getting good results.

The fifth and last section is on the leadership role. The demands and norms of a leader's role are discussed and case studies have been used to show the application. *Mulk Raj Anand*, *Amrita Shergil*, *Don Quixote*, *Krishna*, *Ashoka*, *Gandhi*, and *Vivekanand* are discussed in this section.

In conclusion, the book is an assimilation of enough material to help the reader understand that there is no significant conflict between traditional and modern views on leadership and that a synthesis of the two traditions is possible. Leadership has been looked at from all the three perspectives: as a personality, as a role, and as a process. The book draws examples from fictitious and living characters to show how each can be developed. However, the reader might feel that the flow of the material is not smooth. The author seems to be moving in and out of concepts and theories, without dwelling fully upon any point. However, considering the sheer enormity of the texts from which the book uses examples to illustrate its point, this might be a small sacrifice to make.

The unique contribution of the book lies in the fact that it is a storehouse of relevant and diverse material because it draws from ancient, new, eastern, and western texts. The book is of relevance not just to management students and professionals, but to all others also who are interested in understanding leadership in organizations.