

INDIAN BUSINESS CORPORATIONS AND THE QUEST FOR THE SERVANT CEO

Sahayaraj Stanley, SJ♦
Arulkadal, Chennai

Abstract

This write-up begins with a small portrayal of Indian business leaders. To illustrate the point, the examples of two unethical business chiefs are given. The essay further analyses the difference between a country and a company and explains how some families would like to run the country as they run their family business. Servant leadership is shown to be the best alternative and antidote to the evils of unethical corporate culture. Some salient qualities of servant leadership are presented, and the need for it is exemplified. The write-up further elaborates on the need to form leaders in this new mould of leadership. The author concludes by pointing out that future corporate leaders need to be servants as well as mystics, engaged in the marketplace.

Keywords: Business; Dalits; Democracy; Entrepreneurs; Globalization; Leadership; Poverty; Servant Leadership

1. Introduction

What will be India's future? This is a big question for me. Our rivers are drying up. Agriculture is starving. The poor are migrating in enormous numbers to the cities. The cities, unable to cope with this influx, pave way for slums. Where are we heading towards? That is my question. The problems suggest that there is a clear lack of direction from the leaders. Since economic growth became the target in the last few years in India, I spent more time analysing the possible solutions to the economic problems in the corporate channels, by way

♦ **Sahayaraj Stanley, SJ** is a Jesuit, belonging to the Jesuit Madurai Province. He did his licentiate in Alfonsiana, Rome, and completed his doctorate at the Leopold Franz University in Innsbruck, Austria. He is teaching at Arulkadal, the Jesuit Formation Centre for Theology in Chennai. Globalization, leadership studies, and Ignatian spirituality are among his areas of interest. He can be contacted at: sahaysj@gmail.com

of a benevolent servant leadership that would help communities and the country. Perhaps what is needed is a leadership that cares for people and the planet. The culmination of this thinking and reflection makes up the corpus of this paper.

Problems facing India are plenty, but I would like to focus on three of them in a nutshell.

1. **Abysmal Poverty:** Poverty kills. There are many books romanticizing poverty, but very few give an actual account of what poverty does to people. Poverty stifles all forms of growth and halts all the capacities to grow. Poverty combined with the so-called “low caste” states, is a sure social condition for suffering, unless one is gifted and saved. Poverty strikes India in a variety of ways and forms. Redeeming people from poverty needs to be the core criterion for any leadership. In today’s globalized context, poverty can be created or eliminated by business houses. These business houses are not obscure entities, but institutions managed by people with flesh and blood. A business leader has to be convinced of removing poverty.

2. **Irresponsible Business:** India invites investment. Our leaders hop from country to country to sell its wares. Freebies are offered and economic concessions are promised to set up shop in India. In a way, foreigners are invited and encouraged to plunder India. Cheap labour, corrupt administration that is ready to do anything for money, an abundance of resources, all these and other privileges summon foreign and inland investment. Pollution, toxic waste, child labour, unfriendly labour atmosphere, cheap labour, poor medical facilities for labourers, no safety insurance all beckon business to India.

3. **Toxic Corporate Leadership:** Unethical, lethal leadership is perhaps a very special characteristic of India. This is true of political as well as big business leadership. Globalization has opened the gates of the economy since 1990. If the economic ground were even and level, then the play would be smooth and charming. Since the societal ground is uneven with problems like crony capitalism and caste system, the ordinary people get affected. While globalization has helped many of the rich, upper-class and middle-class people, it is the poorest of the poor who bear the brunt of inequality and deprivation.

2. Two Unethical Corporate Personalities

Abysmal poverty, irresponsible business, and toxic corporate leadership make a deadly Molotov cocktail! Today, India witnesses

all these maladies to a great extent. All these lacunae drive home the need for servant leadership. Leaders as servants serve the world and do not exploit it for their own advantage. To drive home my point, I present two corporate CEOs who are famous for their wealth and dishonourable business practices.

Case 1: Mukesh Ambani

Mukesh Ambani is another enigmatic business magnet. Forbs comments that during the Covid-19 lockdown, Ambani raised more than \$20 billion by selling a third of Jio to a string of investors, such as Facebook and Google and the founder and Chairman of Reliance Industry's net worth as of February 2022 was 92.4 billion US dollars.¹ If we look a little back in history, before the liberalization era, Dhirubhai Ambani, the father of Mukesh Ambani, was a force to reckon with in the Indian corporate scenario, and governments were accused of moulding and drafting laws to suit the needs of Reliance.²

Is Reliance an ethical company? One can only be sceptical. The best example would be the way natural gas explorations and exploitations were done in the Krishna-Godavari riverbed.³ The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) of the Government of India entered into a contract, with Reliance for oil and gas exploration in 1999. This contract took place before the Reliance group was split into two by the two sons.⁴

Anil Ambani's RNRL (Reliance Natural Resources Ltd) claimed that this company had rights to extract gas from the Reliance KG basin for 17 years at \$2.34 per MMBtu (million British thermal units), which was disputed by Mukesh Ambani. The Supreme Court finally settled the matter by saying that 'the government owns the gas till it reaches its ultimate consumer and parties must restrict their negotiation within the conditions of the government policy.'⁵

¹Profile, #1 Mukesh Ambani, in Forbes. See: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/mukesh-ambani/?sh=dd3d4ad214c1>. Accessed on 20th February 2022.

²Hamish McDonald, *The Polyester Prince: The Rise of Dhirubhai Ambani*, Australia: Allen & Unwin Limited, 1999.

³Paranjy Guha Thakurta, *Gas Wars: Crony Capitalism and the Ambanis*, Paranjy Guha Thakurta, 2014.

⁴In June 2005, the Reliance empire was divided between the two sons. The elder son Mukesh Ambani was given the flagship company Reliance Industries Limited and IPCL (Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Limited) a dominant polymers producer and the younger son was given Reliance Energy (which was later renamed as Reliance Infra, Reliance Infocomm and Reliance Capital).

⁵Shishir Asthana, "10 things you should know about the Reliance KG-D6 gas deal - Ready reckoner on the KG D6 gas basin controversy," *Business Standard*, 12th February 2014. Online in: <http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/>

Business Standard points out that government did not make it very clear that, in the first place, oil and natural gas are the property of the nation and not the property of any single individual.⁶ The fact was that governments and ministers were acting in the interests of corporate houses. Mukesh Ambani is still the undisputed boss of Reliance and is calling the shots in the Indian corporate as well as political fields.

Case 2: Vijay Mallya

The following is a short sketch of Vijay Mallya. After his college studies, his father sent him to the US to work with the pharmaceutical giant Hoechst. It was here that Vijay Mallya learnt the tricks of international trade and gained experience in global innovations. When he took over, United Breweries had a total revenue of about Rupees 40 crore from the sale of about 3.8 million cases of beer and other alcohol, and each case contained nine 750 ml bottles. Soon, Vijay Mallya established himself as the liquor baron of Bangalore.

Vijay Mallya revived the brand of Kingfisher beer. Vijay Mallya also bought companies like Mangalore chemicals and fertilizers, Best Crompton Engineering and food processing and beverages like Kisan. In addition, Mallya similarly bought Berger Paints and experimented with soft drinks like *Rush*, *Thrill* and *Sprint*. Not all of these brands brought profit. Repeatedly, it was the alcohol business that gave profit.⁷ Mallya singlehandedly promoted the idea of liquor consumption. He used many popular film stars, important and famous people as brand ambassadors and used many business techniques and publicity stunts to promote his business.

Vijay Mallya called himself the “king of good times” but unfortunately he faced very bad times. Many Indian banks

10-things-you-should-know-about-the-reliance-kg-d6-gas-deal-114021200357_1.html. Accessed on 6th October 2021.

⁶Asthana, “10 things you should know...”

⁷Mahesh Gavaskar reports how the Karnataka politics was engaged by the business lobby, influenced by business people like Vijay Mallya and another businessperson called Vijay Sankeshwar. Gavaskar comments, that during the license-permit raj, wealth creation was stigmatized in the public eye. So, the politician-businessman nexus operated behind the scenes. Successful businesspersons owning huge enterprises, like Vijay Mallya and Vijay Sankeshwar, made inroads into politics and even floated new political arrangements and parties. See: Mahesh Gavaskar, “Karnataka - Businessmen as Party Leaders,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16th August 2003. Before his fugitive state, Vijay Mallya was a two-time Rajya Sabha member.

announced that Vijay Mallya was a wilful defaulter.⁸ *Times of India* reports that so far, Mallya has got the Calcutta high court and Kerala high courts to issue a stay order on the wilful defaulter tag given by the United Bank of India and Federal Bank respectively. They are just two banks out of a 17-bank consortium to which Kingfisher Airlines owes in excess of Rupees 8,000 crore.⁹ Mallya was severely criticized for not paying salaries for his employees for months together. Many of the former pilots and other staff are seeking legal compensation now. Mallya has fled the country and is in the United Kingdom now.

The above mentioned are two of the well known corporate chiefs of the Indian corporate edifice. They are the quintessential antithesis of servant leadership. These men at the helm of corporate affairs decide the destiny of thousands of workers. Their corporate decisions affect millions of ordinary people and create political and social repercussions. If these corporate heavyweights while thinking about maximising profits, also think about the problems of the country, there will be many wonderful societal changes.

3. The Corporate Leadership – Conflicting Interests of Company and Country

James Macgregor Burns in his classic work on leadership points out that there is a hunger and a compelling necessity for leaders.¹⁰ Since most of the people who live in this generation do not live under war or acute famine but under relatively well-defined societal structures, many times people take many things for granted. One such thing is leadership – the lack of it and the abysmal dearth of knowledge about it. This is true for political as well as corporate leadership.

In November 1987, *Time* magazine asked in a cover story, “*Who’s in Charge?*” and answered its own question, saying, “The nation calls for leadership, and there is no one home.”¹¹ This is how Warren Bennis begins his famous book, “*On Becoming a Leader.*” This might be a

⁸See: “Now, UCO Bank wields willful default stick on Vijay Mallya’s Kingfisher Airlines,” *The Indian Express*, 20th September 2014. Online in: <http://indianexpress.com/article/business/banking-and-finance/now-uco-bank-wields-wilful-default-stick-on-vijay-mallyas-kingfisher-airlines/>. Accessed on 2nd February 2021.

⁹Anshul Dhamija, “Mallya’s chairmanship of USL subject to caveats, says Diageo” *Times of India*. Oct 2, 2014. Online in: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Mallyas-chairmanship-of-USL-subject-to-caveats-says-Diageo/articleshow/44044046.cms>. Accessed on 5th April 2021.

¹⁰James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, London: Harper perennial, 2010.

¹¹Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (Revised Edition), New York: Basic Books, 2003.

perennial question that calls for a good answer in every context. The country as a whole, as well as organizations and institutions, all look and hunt for leaders. The ever-increasing saga of corruption that comes in ever-new forms, with its all-pervasive octopus tentacles gnawing in all the spheres of society is another area that cries for good leadership to prevent and check corruption.

Leadership is a complicated issue. In the last thirty years there have been many theories offered and many new areas explored. Some theories and some individual books have become best sellers while hundreds have simply disappeared into oblivion. Globalization presents corporate leaders who manage trans-national mega companies. Some of these corporations' annual budgets exceed those of national budgets. It is pointed out that these formidable companies push around their host governments to the advantage of their shareholders and the disadvantage of the citizens of the country of operation. They blunt local economic policies, destabilize the exchange rates, defy foreign policy objectives, create and exploit monopoly power, among other antics.¹²

A political leader has power and influence only in her/his country, while a corporate leader has power across borders. This is a danger and a challenge to democracy. There are also some major contradictions that affect democracy. In a democratic set-up, the political leader is elected by the people for a stipulated term. When there is no opposition sabotaging, the leader is normally expected to finish the stipulated term in office. So, without a popular mandate from the people, she/he cannot remain in office. On the other hand, the corporate leader neither has a mandate from the people nor has he a stipulated term of office. She/he can be hired or fired at the pleasure of the company board or by the shareholders assembly according to the company's rulebooks.

Another fact is that in India, big, influential families manage many of the companies. Therefore, strictly speaking, it is a family business.¹³ *The Economist* points out that far from declining, family firms will remain an important feature of global capitalism for the foreseeable future and comments that families have always been at

¹²For a detailed reading, See: Maurice D. Levi, *International Finance* (London: Routledge, 2009), 452-472. He analyses in chapter 20 the influence of multinational corporations.

¹³India is well known for family enterprises! For more information, one can read: "Family Business," Editorial, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27th November 2004. For example, the business rivalries between the Ambani brothers are very famous and how their mother acted as a mediator.

the heart of business.¹⁴ One can see throughout the world the influence of families in business.

A healthy democracy is ruled by law, and business is held accountable by the law enforcing agencies together with a free media. Family business, because of its connections in places tends to by-pass the law and create a system favourable to it. *The Economist* points out that family power needs watching over, and if it cannot be contested, it should not be welcome.¹⁵

A political leader, in a democratic setup, needs to follow the pushes and pulls of the democratic machinery. She/he is answerable to Parliament, to the Court of law and ultimately to the people. When some wrongdoing is proved, the political leader has to go to prison. On the other hand, business leaders are not democratic.¹⁶ They are uncrowned kings/queens in their domain and many times can have the last word in all business matters. The point here is that business leadership is different from political leadership.

A new twist in leadership studies is seeing the leader as a servant. This perspective gives a spiritual touch to leadership studies and propels people to serve humanity as apostles and ambassadors of God!

4. The Leader as a Servant

“Pittukku Man Sumantha Peruman” (The God who carried mud for the sake of Pittu) is an interesting myth of the 6th century Tamilnadu. Written by one Paranjothi Munivar, this myth is part of 64 plays that Lord Shiva performed in the work called “Thiruvilayadal Puranam.”¹⁷ According to the legend, there was an old woman living on the banks of river Vaigai in Madurai. Due to floods, the King wanted to strengthen the banks of the river and so, he ordered that each household send a person to work. This old woman was alone and had no one to send. She appeals to God and God comes in the form of a worker and goes to work. God made a deal with the old woman. He would go and work, provided the old

¹⁴“Dynasties & A Special Report on Family Companies,” *The Economist*, April 18th-24th, 2015.

¹⁵“Dynasties & A Special Report on Family Companies.”

¹⁶Joanne B. Ciulla, “What We Learned along the Way: A Commentary,” *The Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals & Georgia L.J. Sorenson, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2006, 223.

¹⁷Shiva is not a native Tamil god. Murugan is the original Tamil God who is associated with shepherds. The name “Murugan” means beauty. In the later Hindu traditions, Murugan was depicted as one of the sons of Shiva. This theory is disputable.

woman gave him pittu. Pittu is a sweet delicacy in Tamilnadu that is prepared from rice. The old woman agrees. Therefore, God worked for the old lady in the form of a servant and saved her.

In the Hindu myth, God comes only in the guise of a worker to help the old lady and in return for his work, he gets pittu! On the other hand, in the Gospel, we read that God himself serves. In John's gospel chapter 13 we read the beautiful passage, where Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. This is a great and at the same time simple act of grace, faith, companionship and radical camaraderie. Jesus uses a very common element of water to purify his disciples, his friends' feet. The recipient is passive, he receives the service but he is invited to actively repeat the action. This is a radical and creative action that is supposed to have a butterfly effect.

Servant leadership is a concept as old as the Bible, but this particular version of servant leadership was popularized in the leadership circles by Robert Greenleaf who wrote a small essay in 1970 focusing on this central point of the leader as a servant. Greenleaf got his inspiration from Hermann Hesse's work *Journey to the East*. This is a small novel, first published in German in 1932 as *Die Morgenlandfahrt*.

This work by Hesse revolves around a servant boy Leo, who in fact is a leader. While describing his servant leader, Robert Greenleaf writes,

The servant-leader is servant first - as Leo was portrayed. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. As such, it will be a later choice to serve after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.¹⁸

As Greenleaf rightly points out, leader first and servant first are two extremes and the modern CEO has to decide as to which she/he would happily identify with. For Leo, the hero of Hesse, perhaps the remodelling was easy, but not for the modern CEO.

Quoting Spears, Peter Northouse points out ten qualities of a servant leader. They are:

¹⁸Robert K. Greenleaf, "Servant Leadership," *The Leader's Companion-Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*, ed. Thomas Wren, New York: The Free Press, 1995, 18-23.

1. Listening: Communication between leaders and followers is an interactive process. Servant leaders communicate by listening first.

2. Empathy: Empathy is “standing in the shoes” of another person and attempting to see the world from that person’s point of view.

3. Healing: To heal means to make whole. Servant leaders care about the personal well-being of their followers. Greenleaf argues that the process of healing is a two-way street—in helping followers become whole, servant leaders themselves are healed.

4. Awareness: For Greenleaf, awareness is a quality within servant leaders that makes them acutely attuned and receptive to their physical, social, and political environments.

5. Persuasion: Persuasion is clear and persistent communication that convinces others to change.

6. Conceptualization: Conceptualization refers to an individual’s ability to be a visionary for an organization, providing a clear sense of its goals and direction.

7. Foresight: Foresight encompasses a servant leader’s ability to know the future.

8. Stewardship: Stewardship is about taking responsibility for the leadership role entrusted to the leader.

9. Commitment: Commitment to the growth of people.

10. Building Community: Servant leadership fosters the development of community.¹⁹

These are the ten salient features of servant leadership. Servant leadership as it is presented here, has many advantages and plus points. Northouse correctly points out that it is the only leadership approach that frames the leadership process around the principle of caring for others.²⁰ Properly applied, the servant leader would be the good Samaritan of broken modern humanity.

Robert Greenleaf writes that today the world is bothered more about governing, managing, administering and even manipulating.²¹ On the other hand, true leadership is wholly a voluntary response of going ahead and showing the way, specially when the way is rugged and filled with risks and hard responsibilities. These risks call for the

¹⁹Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership – Theory and practice*, 6th ed., California: Sage Publication, 2013, 221 -222.

²⁰Northouse, *Leadership*, 234.

²¹Robert K. Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, ed. Anne T. Fraker and Larry C. Spears, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996, 39-40.

imagination and foresight of the leader, which are supposed to be his resources. Greenleaf points out the effect of the leader on her/his followers. According to him, those being served, grow as persons, while being served, they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous and more likely to become servants themselves.²²

A servant leader is supposed to sacrifice her/his life for the benefit of others, like the suffering servant of Isaiah. At the same time, servant leadership is focused on industry and organizational outcome. Northouse writes that the potential outcomes of servant leadership are follower performance and growth, organizational performance, and societal impact.²³

Northouse quotes Greenleaf who says, in his original work that came in 1970, the central goal of servant leadership is to create healthy organizations that nurture individual growth, strengthen organizational performance, and, in the end, produce a positive impact on the society.²⁴ Consequently, the servant leadership has two focus: the ethical enhancement of the individual leader, and the betterment of society.

Robert Greenleaf always used the term “goal” to describe the concept of servant leadership and by ‘goal’ he meant, a common purpose, the big dream and the visionary concept that is always out of reach but something to strive for, and to move towards.²⁵ According to Greenleaf, both the individual and institutions can act as leaders to serve one another to build a good society. In our spiritual understanding, we can strive to be servant leaders and the end effect could very well be the coming of the Kingdom of God!

5. Forming Leaders with a Difference

The goal of servant leadership is to form leaders with a difference. We need them because today we are at the crossroads of economic globalization. In the name of growth and development, the poor are facing many problems. Many Adivasis and tribals are forced to move away from their traditional habitats. Because of human encroachment and depletion of the green cover, wild animals stray into human settlements. When the poor have no living space in the cities, they are forced to move out to the fringes of the cities thus forming slums.

²²Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 39-40.

²³Northouse, *Leadership*, 230.

²⁴Northouse, *Leadership*, 230.

²⁵ Gill Robinson Hickman, “Building on Existing Theories,” *Encyclopaedia of leadership*, eds. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson and James MacGregor Burns, California: Sage Publications, 2004, 753.

Agriculture, the traditional workplace of Indian villagers, is no longer an attractive destination for labour. Many villagers have moved into cities. Traditional farmers face competition from imported hybrid seeds. Consequently these seeds need more water and manure and it leads the farmers to further problems. In some of the pockets of Maharashtra and Andhra, the suicides of farmers have become a sad saga. Mahatma Gandhi said that the future of India lies in its villages. These villages are slowly dying today because of their heavy dependence on agriculture.

We need a comprehensive education plan with an inbuilt social analysis curriculum. Illiteracy is one of the key factors of poverty. Literacy opens the doors to many opportunities and thus, paves the way for social emancipation. “Educate, Agitate and Organize” – this was the mantra of Ambedkar for the social liberation of the Dalits. In today’s Indian context, imparting a mere text book curriculum might not help the students very much. With the regular syllabus, government needs to impart the much-needed social analysis—at least in the higher education sector. In India, today educational institutions merely ‘produce’ students for the market. A servant leader will listen to the signs of the times and adapt!

We need to initiate eclectic affirmative programmes. That is, one needs to develop indigenous eclectic leadership programmes. For example, GoogleEDU is an unconventional education platform for learners and educators. On the internal side, Google spends millions to teach its own people leadership skills.²⁶ Like Google, many top corporations spend millions on their staff to develop their leadership potential. Certainly, one type will not suit all. Countries and corporations need to access their strengths, weaknesses and needs and formulate their own leadership programmes. It is the need of the hour.

Leadership studies normally do not touch on the topic of Dalits, for the simple reason that Dalits do not have wealth and they do not form an influential slice of society. The poor as we know are made victims of the neoliberal agenda. The focus on the poor, needs to include women, children and Tribals in the Indian context.

In India, most of the leadership programmes are devised to produce students who are very much market-oriented. Though the media houses now and then produce some ‘feel good’ programmes

²⁶Joseph Walker, “School's in Session at Google,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 5th July 2012. Online in: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303410404577466852658514144>. Accessed on 5th November 2021.

where some philanthropic action would be praised and some anonymous awards would be presented to a famous person, concrete actions or better said, a sustained effort with co-ordinated actions are still very much lacking. In short, the students are not given the much needed social awareness and critical education that would enable them to question the authorities and the unjust structures. We need servant leaders who are champions of pro-poor model of education and who would devise a curriculum that is ethically oriented.

There is also duplicity and deception in the way entrepreneurs are seen by society. The very word ‘business’ brings with it a bad taste and connotation. Many people fail to see wealth as a blessing from God and as a precious gift that comes from the Almighty. While ‘business’ is seen as bad, there is a great demand in India for business studies, for the simple reason that it brings home good money! As the Vatican document shows, business needs to be seen as a blessing and the entrepreneur as someone who works with God and through her/his creativity contributes something good to the community.²⁷ A servant leader can blend entrepreneurship with human enhancement, as Robert Greenleaf dreamed.

We need to prepare global servant leaders who will have the entire world as their theatre of operation. Today, we face global problems like refugees, migration, depletion of resources, terrorism and poverty—all inter-linked. When the onion price goes up, the Indian government imports onions from the archrival Pakistan! Some of the film awards from South India are now held in the Gulf countries, in cities like Dubai and Sharjah. The German bank KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau) is financing a desalination plant in Chennai.²⁸ Since we live in an interconnected world, we need to prepare servant leaders with the capacity to focus on the global family.

This oneness demands leadership with spirituality. So, servant leadership can also be seen as a good mixture of business approaches with a touch of spirituality, that is non-threatening and world affirming.

²⁷This is not a document as such. Although it is written like an official document, it is titled as “Reflection.” See: “Vocation of the Business Leader—A Reflection,” Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Rome: March 2012.

²⁸K. Lakshmi, “German team to finalize funding for third desalination plant,” *The Hindu*, 19th September 2015. Online in: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/german-team-to-finalise-funding-for-third-desalination-plant/article7667261.ece>. Accessed on 15th October 2021.

6. Conclusion

*“When the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten and the last stream poisoned, you will realize that you cannot eat money.”*²⁹ This Native American saying might become true if humanity does not pay heed to the growing alarming signs of the times and continue its relentless drive of profit maximization. As years roll on and as humanity marches ahead, the need for principled living in accordance with nature is also becoming crystal clear. The much-celebrated theological concept of monotheism has given way to moneytheism and since mammon is catapulted onto the pedestal, one hears hosannas soaked in the blood and sweat of the poor.

The concept of servant leadership is being presented to companies so that the plight of the poor and vulnerable is taken into serious account. The servant leadership is only a small help in enabling the corporate leader, to open her/his eyes, to see the suffering humanity. An old Indian proverb says that you cannot wake someone who is just pretending to be asleep. Many Indian corporates seem to be having more than this mocking sleep, but a real slumber when it comes to righteous leadership, concerning the poor and the vulnerable.

The concept and execution of leadership has seen many changes over the years. Researchers also point out the difficulty in defining leadership for it has more than 200 different definitions.³⁰ In the last hundred years, the world has also seen many great leaders both on the political side as well as on the corporate side. The world has feared some leaders and admired many. Nevertheless, the search or the quest could end with the servant leader.

The servant leader has lots more to learn and to offer to the world. Business is a call. It is a call like any other discipline. Today many religious have taken the serious role of training and educating people, who will have leadership roles in many big companies. Like a

²⁹Native American saying. See: Knut J. Ims and Lars Jacob Tynes Pedersen, *Business and the Greater Good: Rethinking Business Ethics in an Age of Crisis*, London: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2015, 171.

³⁰Quoting Rost, Northouse writes: “While many have a gut-level grasp of what leadership is, putting a definition to the term has proved to be a challenging endeavour for scholars and practitioners alike. More than a century has lapsed since leadership became a topic of academic introspection, and definitions have evolved continuously during that period. These definitions have been influenced by many factors from world affairs and politics to the perspectives of the discipline in which the topic is being studied. In a seminal work, Rost analysed materials written from 1900 to 1990, finding more than 200 different definitions for leadership!” See: Northouse, *Leadership*, 2.

teacher or like a driver, a businessperson is called to execute his/her work for the betterment of humanity. Like in any other discipline, the question of “morality” comes up very strongly and sharply in the realm of business too. The servant CEO can act with a principled bent of mind and enhance the betterment of humanity instead of chasing money to a bitter end, ruining everything.

The God of servant leadership engages the world. The Spirit of God is in constant dialogue with the world, in the sweat and steam of the markets, in collaboration with sinners and saints trying to write straight with crooked lines, always informing and enlightening people in His own mysterious ways, encouraging all with his everlasting hope, accompanying humanity towards the fullness of life.

In short, the servant leader is a mystic in the marketplace. She/he belongs to the marketplace, but still remains a mystic!

I would like to finish with a small poem by the celebrated English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.