

The Joy of Leadership

Mudrarakshas

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Friends, the country's in real trouble. Avadh Narayan Mudgal has become a leader. There was a time when Bharatendu was very upset with the sorry state of India. I'm a lot more upset than he ever was. What's been happening to the people, after all? You never know when some fine gentleman will arise in our midst and, with a somewhat pleased, yet heavy, gait, go sit in the chair of leadership.

Having taken his seat, the very first thing the new leader will say is that he is not worthy of the honour; nevertheless, instead of allowing someone else to reevaluate his decision, he'll sink into that chair as if he had never sat anywhere else.

I think that in this field of leadership some research needs to be done. Instead of dissertations on female emotions in the poetry of Pant and descriptions of the life and work of Premchand, universities should now investigate topics such as "Ideas on Leadership in Indian Politics", "The Canon of Leaders in Hindi Literature", and "Leadership: a Psychological Study", etc.

I've seen some of those unfortunates afflicted with leadership. Their condition is very poor indeed. The state of drug addicts and alcoholics, in fact, is no worse. If they go for a number of days without being able to lead, they start looking pale, dried up and hopeless. In such a state, even heading up a neighbourhood satsang brings a little colour back into their faces, and they are often delighted to be in charge of the Neighbourhood Improvement Committee. The joy of being in charge is so divine that people don't even hesitate to spend millions for it. Sometimes they'll even generously foot the entire campaign bill merely with the hope of

becoming a leader. Unscrupulous people are often on the lookout for just such people and will appoint them to various leadership positions merely for their own financial advantage.

Since there's been an increase in literary output and a revolution in literary composition, I've felt quite a dearth of publishers worthy of the name. To save one's invaluable work from being devoured by Time, one has to go to hell and back. In such a situation it's the Editor Saheb who turns out to be the true saviour. After making him a leader, the publication of *The Diary of Mathuradas* went ahead a little more easily. I even know an editor who is publishing the complete works of some authors simply because they are the main organizers of literary seminars and conferences. Therefore, sooner or later the occasion will arise when the Minister or Department Head won't show up to lead the event and the Editor will be summoned. Nevertheless, even in those circumstances his position isn't very secure. Up until now only Kanhanyal Nandan was the leader of journalists, but now Avadh Narayan Mudgal has also entered the scene, so Nandan's position isn't as good any more.

Editors have now begun to monopolize this area even illegitimately. It always used to be the sole preserve of the senior citizens of the literary world. After attaining the fullness of his years a writer often starts spouting all sorts of nonsense and becomes an object of censure in the world of writers. The place that provides the best protection from that is the leader's chair. You'll notice that two old writers never go together to the same gathering. Why? Because there can only be one leader. After a writer reaches a certain age, even without being invited to the conference, his legs start heading on their own for that chair in the middle of the stage. When he sees the garland at the side of the stage, he imagines how fine he'll look wearing it. When the garland has been placed around his neck, he'll keep on wearing it until a picture's been taken, despite efforts to the contrary. After the picture's been taken, he'll take off the garland and leave it on the table in front of him so that those arriving late will be able to realize who the leader is. Without a garland the joy of being a leader is cut in half.

Once one becomes a leader it's very easy to give speeches. At a conference of house painters once, the Master Saheb of Ceremonies gave a speech on the necessity of children's literature. He still got a round of applause. Another saheb, presiding over a Romanian cultural program, gave a speech in praise of Rome's Julius Ceasar. He, too, got a round of

applause. Another saheb, though, outdid them all. Placed in charge of a funeral service, he said, “It is a matter of pleasure and pride that you have given me the honour of inviting me to this auspicious occasion.” And then he recited some of his recent poems.

You can get all kinds of degrees and respectable employment situations, but if you never get to be in charge, it all seems dry and worthless. That’s why it says in the Shastras that next to the joy of being a brahman comes the joy of being a leader. Just as it is not necessary for a man to sit in a temple in order to experience the joy of being a brahman, so a chair isn’t necessary for one to experience the joys of leadership. Just look at Pandit Shri Narayan Chaturvedi. No matter what he sits down to do, the bliss of being in charge exudes from his demeanor.

This joy of leadership only he can understand who has become a leader and vowed never to give up his position. You can drag Chandra Shekhar four thousand kilometers, and although his feet will be scraped and bloody, he still won’t give up his infatuation with leadership. Charan Singh, on the other hand, has no infatuation at all for leadership; he’s always ready to give up that position. It’s the chair that won’t let him go. In this struggle everything gets confused. He’s ready to join any party, but his chair has to come with him. Without his chair his entire personality gets befuddled. Jagjivan Babu’s situation is totally different. He can’t sit without a chair, but every chair he sits in breaks beneath him. In the midst of all this, Raj Narayan is a welcome mischief-maker. He himself never sits in the chair, but he doesn’t let anyone else sit in it either.

In this business Kamalapati Tripathi is very big-hearted. Just attach the word “Leader” to any other word, and he’s at your service. You won’t even have to organize a conference or a conference organizing committee. He doesn’t at all believe in being flashy like Hemavatinandan Bahuguna. Bahuguna, whose name means “one who has many virtues”, indeed does have many virtues. He can perform the office of leader even while standing. And if that’s not possible, he’ll even do it while walking.

The most dangerous leader of all, however, is Atul Bihari Vajpayee. No matter who the leader is, he’s the one who’ll give the speech. No matter who’s sitting in the leader’s chair, he has the right to the garland. The garland, however, should be an ordinary one. And then there’s Sharad Pavar, who can get along with just the thread of the garland.

There are specialized kinds of leaders, too. The welcoming leader, for instance. He is, indeed, a leader, but he never leads. Often not everyone

even knows anything about him or even that he's present. His presence is known either by the editor of *Smarika* or by the treasurer of the institute sponsoring the conference. This type of leadership is purchased by a certain level of donation, and once purchased, it's immediately given. I know a professional welcoming leader who was once made a real leader. So he gave a welcoming speech even to himself.

So brothers and sisters, I'm very worried that a country like ours, in which the art of leadership has been so finely developed, has demeaned itself to the point of making Avadh Narayan Mudgal leader!