



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LITERATURE AND LEADERSHIP: A STUDY IN LEADING TAKING SHAKESPEARE'S *JULIUS CAESAR* AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims at presenting how works of serious writers can serve as case studies teaching students leadership and managerial skills. In this paper I will be presenting Shakespeare's Julius Caesar as an excellent case study which can teach more about leadership in an entertaining way. I have analysed the character of Julius Caesar portrayed by Shakespeare and in doing so I have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of a leader and how great leaders also fail if they succumb to the temptation of narcissistic tendencies

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*Most men and women go through their lives
using no more than a fraction ...
of the potentialities within them.
the reservoir of unused human talent and energy
is vast,
and learning to tap that reservoir more effectively
is one of the exciting tasks ahead for humankind...
among the untapped capabilities are leadership gifts .¹*

(Developing Creative Leadership. Parker and Begnaud, 2004. p.1)

Aristotle is said to have believed that from the hour of their birth some are marked out for subjugation and others for command. In today's pluralistic society, which acknowledges the many types of ability possessed by human beings – the belief that leaders are born (the leadership trait theory assumes that leaders are born with certain character traits) and not made is regarded as a fallacy. The term leadership has been defined in many ways. According to Howard Gardner (1995) President Harry Truman saw a leader as a person "who could get

other people to do what they don't want to do and like it. Leadership guru Warren Bennis sees leadership as "the energetic process of getting other people fully and willingly committed to a course of action, to meet commonly agreed objectives." He further states that leadership is about "understanding people" and connecting with the potential followers, as well as "having a unique vision, making strategic choices, and designing and enabling an organization to get the job done." (Parker and Begnaud, 2004;1)

In the present situation the belief is that leaders are made. A person who is not born with the desirable traits of a leader can be groomed to be one. Management Schools and Technical institutes are now emphasizing on teaching leadership skills to the students. Teaching leadership lessons through the works of great and serious writers such as Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, and Jonson etc as case studies is an excellent way of imparting experiential learning. These works which are universally acknowledged as masterpieces offer typical case studies raising questions of morality, ethics and values, human weaknesses and dilemmas which a leader faces in real life. Not only this the great outburst of intellectual activity that stirred all of Europe called Renaissance had its inception in the belief that classical learning and classical literature has a humanizing and civilizing effect on man.

Shakespearean tragedies present before us a range of heroic leaders filled with energy, passion, vigor and vitality but they suffer from frailties of character which Aristotle termed *hamartia* that leads to their downfall. Each tragic hero is portrayed as a leader with high calibre and immense potential yet they suffer from some human weakness which leads to the ultimate catastrophe. They are shown fighting and resolving inner conflicts or some dilemma which leaders face in real life as well. These tragedies present series of tragic consequences but at the same time they also give moral directions to avoid such consequences.

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is a play about a political killing. It is a tragedy of an assassin who is too honourable to succeed and could not resist the hazards of success. It is a story of seduction and a course in public speaking, about revenge and forgiveness and a dramatic poem about regretted decisions.

Julius Caesar is one historical figure - a military genius and charismatic leader who leaves us in awe. His personal assets--a keen wit, powerful intellect, decisiveness, and an athletic physique hardened by years of discipline--won him instant allegiance among the men he commanded and allowed him to ingratiate him with the masses. Shakespeare has portrayed Caesar as a man who surpassed all the luminaries of his age and even Cassius who was jealous of his aura and majesty, approves of his grand stature in the following words:

*Like a Colossus, and we petty men,
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves. (1.2.137-39)*

Even Brutus could not resist praising Caesar when he tries to justify himself and the other conspirators of the brutal killing of Caesar as a step taken to save Roman Republic:

*Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more,
Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that
Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I
weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it: as he was valiant,
I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. (3.2. 45-50)*

Shakespeare presents Caesar's real greatness and nobility only after his death through Antony's funeral speech. Antony in his funeral speech skillfully maneuvers public opinion in Caesar's favour reminding them of his favours bestowed on them:

*I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
the evil that men do lives after them;
the good is interred with their bones:
So let it be with Caesar. (3.2.82-85)*

A leader has to be foresighted and intelligent and Caesar was the man with great insight and in-depth understanding of human nature. He could very well understand Cassius's nature and was not at all ignorant of his abilities and therefore advised Antony to be alert against such men as they can prove to be very dangerous:

*So soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much:
He is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men: he loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony: he hears no music:
Seldom he smiles, and smiles in such a sort
As if he mock'd himself...
Such men as he be never at heart's ease...
And therefore are they very dangerous. (1.2. 203-10)*

What seems to be greatest mistake of Caesar was his inability to resist the temptations of his overwhelming success. Caesar was at the pinnacle of success in the opening scene of the play. According to Robin Sharma "Nothing fails like success." Very true, this is because a person is most vulnerable when he reaches at the zenith of success and a single mistake can lead to grave consequences. It is believed that success usually breeds complacency and worst of all arrogance. Not only this, it also develops the greed of more and more achievements and finally the person loses himself in this mesh without even realizing it. Another noteworthy aspect of being successful is that when people get really successful, they fall in love with themselves. This narcissism was Caesar's gravest mistake of loving himself too much which extended into arrogance and self conceit:

*I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
Than what I fear: for always I am Caesar. (1.2.213-14)*

When Calpurnia tries to stop Caesar to go to the senate on account of her dream .He first rejects saying:

*Caesar should be a beast without a heart,
If he should stay at home to-day for fear.
No, Caesar shall not. (2.2. 13-15)*

But soon Calpurnia manages to convince him to not to go to the senate saying :

Alas, my lord.

Your wisdom is consum'd in confidence.

Do no go forth to-day: call it my fear (2.2. 48-50)

Caesar was so over confident of himself and his achievements that he failed to visualize the true intentions of Decius Brutus who was send by the conspirators to bring Caesar to the Capitol. Here again we can say another drawback of being successful is that it becomes difficult for a person to exactly decipher when he is being genuinely praised and when it is mere flattery. Decius Brutus realized that Caesar could be easily flattered and he used this weakness against him:

*I can o'ersway him; for he loves to hear
that unicorns may be betray'd with trees '
And bears with glasses...
lions with toil and men with flatterers.
but when I tell him he hates flatterers ,
He says he does – being most flattered. (2.1.195-105)*

Decius Brutus re-interprets Calpurnia's dream in a way to please Caesar and persuades him to move to Capitol for the days proceedings where he was brutally killed:

*Your Statue spouting blood in many pipes,
In which so many smiling Romans bath'd,
Signifies that from you great Roman shall suck
Reviving blood; (2.2. 198-201)*

In spite of the fore warnings given by the soothsayer, "*Beware the ides of March*" (3.1.112) Caesar goes to the Capitol. Not only this, Calpurnia's dream and other signs of ill – omen could not prevent him to overcome the temptation of being crowned as the ruler of Rome:

*To give this day, a crown to mighty Caesar.
If you shall send them word you will not come,
Their minds may change. (2.2. 245-47)*

The greatest lesson that Caesar's life offer for the future leaders is how to cope up with the pressures and effects of success .It also makes us reflect upon the hazards of success and how difficult it is to resist the flow of success. It is seen professionals who are at the height of success cannot resist the temptation of more and more achievements losing on their personal and social lives. The flow of success – the very taste of being a success story makes people get out of bed and work hard even on those mornings when they just want to enjoy the beautiful sunrise or stay in their bed a little longer .It is not the case that working hard and these sacrifices made for better life is incorrect but what is worthy of consideration is what is the limit? How much or how far can we go on to keep on sacrificing these trivial pleasures of life. These small pleasures of life are actually our source of energy, that charge us for further events in life.

Another thing is success is like a vicious cycle when one is caught in it there is no way out or like a dangerous current that overwhelms them but with the chances of being drowned. Thus, Caesar's story presents before us a question to reflect and ponder upon. How can business professionals maintain poise and balance between personal demands and professional life when one is powerfully drawn towards the rewards of being successful? On one hand when success is rewarding in many ways like money ,power, status , respect and many times addictive , on the other hand it leads to emotional dissatisfaction , crime, depression ,suicide etc . Joseph Heller, the author of *Catch -22*, describes this beautifully as ,”success and failure are both difficult to endure . Along with success come drugs, divorce, fornication, bullying, travel, meditation, medication, depression, neurosis and suicide. With failure comes failure.”

Caesar paid the price of being successful with his life. He was at height of success, reached that height after tremendous effort and sacrifices. But he could not resist the temptation of ruling Rome and be a monarch. Being ambitious is not bad but at what cost? That is the question to think upon. Brutus justifies his act of killing Caesar as:

*As Caesar loved me, I
weep for him ;as he was fortunate ,I rejoice at it ; as he was valiant,
I honour him; but,as he was ambitious, I slew him. (3.2. 40-42)*

Caesar was ambitious no doubt but this ambition soon developed into a passion and even madness and his ambition or hunger for power led to his doom. Some historians regarded him as an unscrupulous tyrant, with an insatiable lust for power, and blame him for the demise of the Roman republican. Others, admitting that he could be ruthless, insist that the republic had already been destroyed and it was Caesar's reforms that stabilized the Mediterranean world. In spite of all this Caesar is regarded as one the greatest military leader who laid the foundation of the great Roman Empire.

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