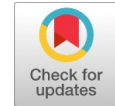# A Vignette of Spiritual Intelligence and Transformational Leadership

Preetha Menon, Anand Sadasivan

Abstract: The United Nations (UN) has identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals aimed to end poverty, hunger and inequality, act on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, and build strong institutions and partnerships. A style of leadership, ingrained in an altruistic and holistic approach that acknowledges the interrelationships of all beings, is a pre-requisite to achieve sustainable development. The projects undertaken by Amrita Institutions, under the guidance and leadership of its founder, Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, are in tandem with the Sustainable Development Goals identified by the UN. Results of a survey conducted to unravel the observable components of Spiritual Intelligence (SI) and Transformational Leadership (TL) of Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, suggest a classic blend of SI and TL. Emulation of the convergence of SI and TL is projected to be an approach for mankind to transcend the differences of race, culture, and ideology, and regard one another as entities of a single all-encompassing consciousness. This prospective is predicted to promote fulfilment, purpose and meaning to life of individuals, communities, nations, and the world at large. The preliminary study illustrating this concept needs to be explored as recommendation for a future research, encompassing qualitative and quantitative analysis, to yield a holistic view of leadership characteristics. Longitudinal studies could also be pursued to deduce their trajectories over longer periods in time.

Key words: Spiritual Intelligence, Transformational Leadership, Vignette, Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, Contemporary spiritual leader, Sustainable Development Goals

I. INTRODUCTION

The UN has identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals [1] concomitant with elimination of poverty, hunger and inequality, action on climate change and the environment, improved access to healthcare and education, supported by collaborative partnerships. A leadership that involves altruistic and holistic approach, acknowledging the interrelationships of all beings, is imperative for sustainable development. Effective leadership entails an introversive calibration, in which a leader must primarily be grounded in a clear understanding of oneself, in the context of an interdependent world, in order to consummate significant change. A vision that transcends social, religious, ethnic and economic constraints, which serve to bring in a sustainable, meaningful and just future is inevitable [2]. There has been an upsurge in scholastic literature, on spirituality's benign influence as a holistic perspective, seeking oneness of all beings [3-5].

Since early Vedic periods, India has been disseminating an all-embracive philosophy that binds together the living and non-living beings [6-7]. Since the Vedic age, the spiritual gurus of India, have been rooting their doctrines in universal consciousness. Completely subsistent universal consciousness constitutes the substratum of every individual conscious experience of the concrete reality, surpassing the subject-object separation and spatio-temporal limits [8]. The growing interest in the phenomenological experience of individuals has motivated probes to highlight the elements of convergence of advances in Western science and thoughts from Eastern spirituality. Modern science is actively engaged in catching up with the ancient Indian wisdom rooted in Vedic texts. Many concepts in Vedic philosophy can be validated by empirical evidence [9-11]. This tradition has inspired and riveted people, of diverse nationalities, at large, to receive guidance from Indian gurus and seek residential spiritual training [12-15]. Spiritual organizations like Ramakrishna Mission, Chinmaya Mission, Sathya Sai International Organization and Mata Amritanandamayi Math reach out to destitute sections of societies, and offer solace, through the establishment of service institutions-hospitals, schools, colleges and vocational training centers [16-18]. Contemporary spirituality has been reoriented extensively by sponsorship of activities that are socially and culturally relevant. Accordingly, a confluence of modern leadership and ancestral spirituality can be proposed as an inescapable necessity of current times. Studies show that spiritual leadership is readily accepted even at workplaces of multiple domains [19-21]. Since larger populations have been seeking spiritually inclined leaders, it is fair to state that spiritual leaders can catalyze an inner transformation among their followers [22-23]. Wide-ranging researches are actively carried out, to unambiguously define dynamic, compassionate moral leadership that eventually leads to the formulation of eight major theories. Among the eight theories - Great Man, Trait, Contingency, Situational, Behavioral, Participative, Relationship and Management, the Relationship theory aka the Transformational theory, focuses on the association of leaders and followers [24-25].

II. SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Through intuitive perception, SI is seen as the ability to enunciate interconnectedness, between materialistic experiences of the world and the inner experiences of the individual [26-27]. Spiritually oriented leaders, exhibiting high levels of SI, are dynamic thinkers empowered with purposeful thought patterns, creative ideas, and fertile imaginations, in conjunction with harmoniously integrated soul and mind [28-29].

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Transformational leaders stimulate and inspire their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes, and, in the process, develop leadership capability as well. TL is characterized by their inspired followers offering their services as innovative problem solvers, and development of their leadership qualities by coaching and mentoring [30]. A unified set of SI and TL traits seems ideal, in a leader. Accordingly, studies point out an irrefutable association between SI and TL [31].

III. A VIGNETTE OF SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Spiritual leader Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, popularly known as *Amma* (mother in Malayalam language), the founder of Mata Amritanandamayi (MA) Math, exhibits leadership qualities that have influenced the masses in substantial ways. She is often addressed as the 'hugging saint', who greets and blesses her visitors, by holding them tight in her loving embrace. *Amma* was born to a poor fisherman family, in a remote village of south India. Right from her early childhood days, she realized her oneness with all forms of living entities – humans, animals, birds, plants, and trees, endearingly accepting the whole creation as an expansion of her own self. Caring for, and serving one and all, including the poor and needy, with selfless love and compassion, she is revered as an embodiment of universal motherhood. The activities taken up by Amrita Institutions, under the mentorial guidance of *Amma,* are consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals identified by the UN. Humanitarian activities like disaster relief, homes for the homeless, healthcare and education, welfare schemes for widows. The MA Math has been the driving force behind few of the massive charitable programs - women empowerment, potable water supply, sanitation, and vocational training. Acknowledging and expressing her reverence for water as one of the fundamental natural elements, *Amma* has steered youth groups to clean-up several polluted rivers in India and abroad, thereby preserving the natural environment and the ecology.

Reviewing the success of her charitable mission, *Amma* [32] often observes, "In today's world, people experience two types of poverty- lack of food, clothing and shelter, and poverty caused by lack of love and compassion. Of the two, the second type needs to be assigned a higher priority—with love and compassion in our hearts, we will wholeheartedly serve the impoverished from lack of food, clothing and shelter".

The humanitarian activities of *Amma*'s organizations have extended worldwide, unconstrained by national, cultural, racial and religious differences. Recognizing her irrefutable leadership and her mission's global endeavors in the service of the poor and destitute, the UN bestowed a special consultative status to the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, in the year 2005. In respectful appreciation of the unfathomable and invaluable treasures of practical spiritual wisdom that *Amma* imparts, she has been honored by diverse international organizations, acknowledging her vision and capacity to lead the world for a better future. *Amma* has delivered keynote addresses at various global forums- Parliament of World's Religions, Interfaith celebrations at the UN's 50th anniversary, UN Millennium World Peace Summit, Global Peace Initiative of Women and Religious Leaders, UN Alliance of Civilizations. Amma has been acclaimed with prestigious awards, including the Gandhi – King award for Non-violence. Fascinated by *Amma*'s practical approach to interpretation of non-dualistic Indian philosophy, people of various religious faiths are drawn in hordes to the MA Math and its humanitarian outlets. According to *Amma*, the selfless actions of individuals purify and strengthen their minds. Selfless service helps in eradication of the ego that conceals the *Self*, and facilitates spiritual progress [33]. *Amma* walks her talk, as she inspires and shepherds her followers towards the cherished goal, through spiritual practices and selfless actions subsumed with love and compassion.

3.1 *MA Math- a spiritual abode*

The MA Math is one of the unique spiritual organizations that afford long term or permanent residential facilities for *Amma*'s followers. Suresh [34] noted that the Math provides residences to almost 4000 people of multiple nationalities, hailing from varied social backgrounds - celibates, householders, spiritual practitioners, and students - transcending linguistic, caste and religious boundaries. All the spiritual, socio-charitable activities, and day-to-day decisions involving the Math, are mentored by *Amma*. Rooted in the Indian spiritual value system, she expounds pertinent human values and ethics. *Amma*'s missions facilitate the revival and restoration of the Guru-Sishya (Teacher-Student or Master-Disciple) tradition of ancient India. *Amma* steers her followers through diverse activities such as *Darshan* (divine embrace), *Satsang* (spiritual discourse), *Bhajans* (devotional singing), and *Seva* (selfless service), safeguarding them from enticement by mental delusions that may ensue from trendsetting modernity and technological advances. Along the same lines, Warrier [35] opined that understanding modernism under *Amma*'s guidance facilitates the transcendence over the imbalances of modern lifestyles. The leadership style adopted by *Amma* has a close resemblance to TL [36].

IV. METHOD

A survey methodology was adopted to assess *Amma*'s followers' perception of her attributes, concomitant with SI and TL

4.1 *ETHICAL CLEARANCE*

Amrita University's Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) scrutinized the proposal for this paper's study, detailing sample selection, measures and procedure. The investigation reported in this study was pre-conditioned on the receipt of a formal ethical clearance, from the IEC.

4.2 *Objective*

To evaluate the Amma-followers' perceptions of *Amma's* attributes, reflective of the convergence of her SI and TL.

4.3 *Null Hypotheses*

- Followers do not perceive SI attributes in *Amma*.
- Followers do not perceive TL attributes in *Amma.*
- There is no perceived correlation between *Amma*'s attributes, signifying convergence of her SI and TL.

4.4 *Demographic Data of the survey participants*

The survey was conducted at the MA Math, located at Amritapuri in the Kollam district of the state of Kerala, and at the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham's Amritapuri Campus. The criteria adopted for selection of members of the survey were as follows:

- Participants should be at least 35 years of age
- Participants' association with *Amma* should be for more than 4 years.

From a pool of 154 applicants, 62 participants were selected for the survey, (34 males and 28 females). The participants expressed their willingness to take part in the survey, by signing an Informed Consent Form (ICF).

V. MEASURES

5.1 *Informed Consent Form*

The ICF explained the intent and the procedure of this study. The form offered the participants a clear option, to either express their voluntary consent or ignore the request, to complete the ICF.

5.2 *Case Study Schedule*

The schedule elicits the participants' demographic data- age, sex, nationality, educational qualification, marital status, and number of years of association with *Amma*.

5.3 *Followers' Perception Questionnaire*

A 20-item questionnaire was drawn, based on the characteristics of SI delineated by Zohar [37], and the TL model of Bass and Bass [38]. The items numbered 1 to 12 of the questionnaire represented SI, while the items from 13 to 20 covered TL. A participant's response to the items in the survey was restricted to one of the following: 'Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree', with the corresponding scores of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

VI. PROCEDURE

After a brief rapport-building session, the participants filled in the Informed Consent Form, Case Study Schedule, and completed the Followers' Perception Questionnaire.

6.1 *Analysis of Data*

The data were analyzed, using the latest version of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), based on the following:

- Participants' Demographic factors

- Mean and Standard Deviation of perceived attributes of SI and TL

- Correlation between perceived attributes from these two domains

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 *Respondents' Demographic Data*

There were 62 respondents to the survey (N=62), constituted of 32 Indians, and 30 non-Indians. Thirty-six of the respondents were single, while the remaining 26 were married. Sixty percentage of the respondents were in the age group of 36 to 55 years; 27 of the respondents were postgraduates, 16 were undergraduates, 10 Pre-degree holders and 3 held doctorate degrees; 67 % of the respondents had 17 to 25 years of association with *Amma*.

Table 1: Distribution of Scores of Perceived Spiritual Intelligence

(N=62)

Scores	Interpretation	Number	Percentage (Rounded off)
12-20	Perception of Very High Spiritual Intelligence	56	90
21-29	Perception of High Spiritual Intelligence	6	10
30-38	Perception of Moderate Spiritual Intelligence	0	0
39-47	Perception of Low Spiritual Intelligence	0	0
48-60	Perception of Very Low Spiritual Intelligence	0	0

Table 1 reveals that all the participants, in this study, perceive spiritual qualities in *Amma*. A review of over 150 studies showed positive correlation between spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility on the one hand, and effective leadership, on the other. Spiritual practices in daily life ensue in successful leadership [39]. As attested by residents of the MA Math, *Amma's* followers have numerous opportunities to intersperse spirituality into their daily lives, under her loving guidance.

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Table 2: Distribution of Scores of Perceived Transformational Leadership

(N=62)

Scores	Interpretation	Number	Percentage (Rounded off)
8-17	Highly Influenced	61	98
18-27	Moderately Influenced	1	2
28-40	Low Influence	0	0

Kumar [40] proposed a leadership theory - 'Sattvika leadership' (SL), which enlists a set of actions, constituted of knowledge-based support systems that promote the flourishing of followers. SL fosters psychological capital, women-empowerment, and engagement of followers, while transforming them into morally responsible individuals, enhancing the element of trust in their leader, and among themselves. These findings indicate a similar influence of SL evidenced by transformational effects on *Amma's* followers. Almost all the participants (98 %) of the study (Table 2) reported having perceived TL qualities in *Amma*. TL is materialized when a leader's esteemed qualities such as integrity, honor and justice are imbibed by the followers, as established by changes in their attitudes, beliefs and goals. Transformational leaders exhibit moral obligation or personal commitment to the organization, which may be picked up by their followers [41].

Table 3: Distribution of Scores of Influence on the Respondents (Perceived Spiritual Intelligence scores + Perceived Transformational Leadership scores)

(N=62)

Scores	Interpretation	Number	Percentage (Rounded off)
1-20	Highly influenced	38	61
21-40	Influenced	22	35
41-60	Moderately influenced	2	3
61-80	Less influenced	0	0
81-100	Least influenced	0	0

The results in Table 3 are emblematic of the great influence (96 %) of *Amma*'s spiritual qualities and TL traits. The combination of *Amma*'s SI and TL attributes may very well bear testimony for thousands upon thousands of people, from all over the world, longing for her *darshan*. They are eager to patiently wait for hours, to receive even a few seconds of her compassionate embrace. *Amma* is known to have hugged more than 32 million people in 500 countries across the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia [42]. Undoubtedly, *Amma*'s followers are drawn in by her extremely alluring personality, as they volunteer themselves in various selfless activities at the MA Math, or in activities directed by the Math. Highly motivated by her physical presence, *Amma*'s followers adhere to a strict discipline in their spiritual journey; the number of followers seeking residential status, in and around MA Math, has been on a steady increase, with the passage of time.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Spiritual Intelligence, Transformational Leadership and Influence

(N=62)

Spiritual Intelligence		Transformational Leadership		Influence	
Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
13.73	3.47	9.27	2.56	23	5.78

The mean SI Score is 13.73; according to Table 2, the score of 13.73 is interpreted as 'Perception of Very High SI'. Hence, the Null Hypothesis, 'Followers do not perceive SI attributes in *Amma*' is rejected. The mean TL score is 9.27, which corresponds to 'Highly Influenced', from Table 3. Hence, the Null Hypothesis, 'Followers do not perceive TL attributes in *Amma*', is rejected.

Table 5: Correlation between Perceived Spiritual Intelligence and Perceived Transformational Leadership

		Spiritual Intelligence	Transformational Leadership
Spiritual Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1.000	**0.8048
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.00001
	N	62	62
Transformational Leadership	Pearson Correlation	**0.8048	1.000
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.00001	
	N	62	62

**Significant at confidence levels of 0.01 and 0.05

The value of R (Pearson Correlation) between SI and TL is 0.8048, which reflects a strong positive correlation that implies high SI scores are in tandem with high TL scores (and vice versa).

The P Value, associated with the correlation score R= 0.8048, is < 0.00001. This indicates that the SI-TL correlation is statistically significant at p < 0.05 and p < 0.01. Hence, the Null Hypothesis, 'There is no correlation between perceived SI and TL' attributes, is rejected.In a study, conducted to assess the effect of TL on followers' duty orientation and spirituality, Krishnan [43] found that TL promotes Karma Yoga and oneness with others, which augments organizational identification and normative commitment. Organizational identification depicts an affiliation to an organization, where the individual identifies himself or herself with the organization [44]. Normative commitment is characterized by a mindset of obligation to stay with the organization or support change initiatives in the organization [45]. TL addresses the needs of followers by enhancing their oneness, and the goals of organizations, by enhancing followers' organizational identification and normative commitment. A similar trend could be observed among *Amma's* followers and individuals working at Amrita institutions.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The objective of the present research was to assess the followers' perceptions of *Amma's* attributes, pertinent to SI and TL. Almost all the participants, in this study, reported perceiving spiritual and TL qualities in *Amma*. The investigation also showed that the attributes of SI have a positive and significant correlation with TL.The leadership traits exhibited by *Amma* - a combination of SI and TL, can be viewed as an all-encompassing leadership that blends the elemental domains, which forms the core of human existence comprising of the body- mind-heart-spirit (physical-logical-feelings-spiritual).As recommendation for future research, extension of this study, over a larger population, would substantiate the reliability of the findings, and provide a deeper insight into the nuances of leadership. A unified investigation, encompassing qualitative and quantitative analysis is projected to yield a holistic view of leadership characteristics. Longitudinal studies on the antecedents, consequences and moderators of SI and TL could be undertaken, to deduce their trajectories over longer periods in time.

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