

BOOK REVIEW

**Steve Correa, *The Indian Boss at Work*, Sage Publications India Private Limited, New Delhi, 2020, pp. (xvi+ 318)**

Those who look deepest into the past can also see the farthest into the future – goes the old saying. A sense of history and an understanding of as well as appreciation for culture are extremely important to make any significant impact in any field of endeavour including management, leadership or otherwise.

The present book under review is refreshingly lucid in presentation, eminently readable as well as insightful in dealing with a complex theme like Leadership in Indian organizations with its implications for HR and OD. With a rich experience in OB and HR both in India and abroad the author analyses the multi-dimensional cultural nuances of Indian leadership with pertinent insights from Indian philosophy and history and contextualizing them in the milieu of modern organizations with relevant cross references to enlightened thinkers from the west in management and beyond. The very theme ‘Think Globally Act Indian’ clarifies the purpose of this volume – to offer a synthesis of the best of the East (especially India) and the West so that we may discover ‘our holistic self’ (p. 18) in our journey to enlightened leadership for the self, the organization, society and the planet at large.

The book is a rich learning experience for any curious and conscientious reader. The author delves into an exploration of History and Culture, Psychology and Philosophy, Leadership and Management, OB and HR with commendable ease and flow. This he has achieved by following a narrative style that combines the rigour of research with the power of anecdotes. The ‘Spotlight’ in every chapter succinctly captures the

valuable learning points from successful as well as insightful corporate leaders and entrepreneurs who made a difference and left their indelible footprints in the annals of organizational leadership. The conversations with Ashok Malhotra, Naina Lal Kidwai, Manu Saale and Kiran Mazumdar Shaw deserve special mention in this regard as harbingers of fresh air and new light for the leaders of tomorrow.

While unfolding the complex theme ‘What is Indian-ness?’ in Chapter 1, the author highlights a few pertinent characteristics that are worthy of mention. These include ‘Emotions Trump Logic’, ‘Governed by Values, not Rules’, ‘Context Specific and Context Free’, ‘An Orientation, not Geography’ among others. The idea of India had never been restricted to a narrowly circumscribed and conventional geo-political entity but a symbolic reality captured illustratively in myths and metaphors. It is in the background of this twilight vision of enigmatic India that the Indian leaders are confronted with the challenge to understand and unveil ‘Multiple Truths’ and effectively demonstrate their competence in ‘Managing Polarities’. Drawing inspiration from the concept of ‘context sensitivity’ propounded by the eminent scholar and literary figure A K Ramanujan, the author presents multiple interpretations of the highly misunderstood Indian notion of ‘*dharma*’ (loosely translated by many as religion) from the perspective of our duties and responsibilities (p, 30). His emphasis on ‘*Sanatana Dharma*’ (Perennial Philosophy) as the bedrock of Indian culture and civilization may serve as an eye opener to scholars and academics who miss out on

the essential Indian spirit of unity and harmony while dabbling only with pluralism and differences in Indian culture. His interpretation of '*Ahimsa*' (Non-violence) as the orientation of neither provoking nor tolerating violence is strikingly different from its usual simplistic version of silently accepting meekly all misdeeds by miscreants. However, the importance of debate over dialogue accorded by him can be questioned as the modern Indian academia and even the corporate stalwarts perfect the art and competence of debating even to a fault without cultivating the need to engage in dialogues that demands temporary suspension of one's own opinions and sublimation of the ego-self to receive, accept, accommodate and embrace the others, especially multiple stakeholders. Dialogic acumen is of prime importance when it comes to managing and also celebrating differences, polarities and diversity. The culture of debate and dialogue co-existed harmoniously in classical Indian tradition of teaching and learning enshrined in the Upanishads.

The importance of contextual leadership has been highlighted in Chapter 2 where the author elaborates on the influence of Space ('*Desh*') and Time ('*Kaal*') on leadership in thoughts and words, behaviour and actions. While discussing the tension between the self and society along the situation-self-role-identity quadrant the author illustrates interesting points and counterpoints with examples of pairs of characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata like Yudhishtira-Duryodhana, Bhima-Jarasandha, Nakula-Lakshmana, Sahadeva-Hanuman with Arjuna-Karna at the centre. Interestingly enough, the author goes on to present the four categorizations of leaders (prince, warrior, healer and wanderer) by Pulin Garg and the four Gods of Management (Apollo, Zeus, Athens and Dionysius) by Charles Handy and finally the porcupine dilemma by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer – the powerful metaphor of two hedgehogs on a cold night! His insights into evolutionary contextuality are

quite relevant as there is nothing like a static, frozen context. One cannot but agree more with him in his observation on non-exportability of culture. Culture exported to and grafted in an alien milieu is bound to result in cognitive dissonance and culture shocks. Cultural homogenization in the name of technoeconomic development is one of the major threats to the identity and survival of the indigenous cultures worldwide especially in the developing and underdeveloped world. It suppresses and silences the voice of 'the others' who are unique, distinct yet different from the dominant machismos.

Chapter 3 is probably the most interesting and important section of the book. In this chapter the author presents the indigenous model of the 'DESI LEADER', the Indian leader with 11 facets representing a smooth flow along pairs of polarities – Directive and Nurturant, Emotional and High Intellectual, Spiritual and Worldly, Individual and Collectivist, Short-term and Long-term Leverages, Expressive and Restrained, Androgenous – Moderate Masculine and Feminine, Ambitious and Competitive, Dependent and Independent, Embraces Profit with Purpose, and finally Relationship Builder. Oscillating between the extreme poles of these pairs in varying contexts of Space and Time, the Indian leaders elude and bely all attempts to stereotyping and categorizations as they do not yield to the structured and rigid frameworks of western management theories as well as conventional models of leadership.

The influence of education and training in shaping the leaders both formally in academic institutions and informally in the ambience of the family is of supreme importance. In Chapter 4 the author traces the impact of academic curriculum and pedagogy in institutes of higher learning like IITs, IIMs and JNU on the aspiring business leaders in an ambience and culture of fierce competitiveness. A more substantive critique of the structured academic programmes would have added

more value to this chapter especially in dealing with such critical problems like development of linear thinking and binary vision and mindset among the majority of the student community in modern times. Chapter 5 takes us through a detailed discussion and analysis of the impact of the Indian family culture on future leadership. Here the author highlights the structure and characteristics of the patriarchal Indian joint family with its multifarious nuances and conflicts and its impact on developing resilience, endurance and a relationship orientation in the leadership mindset. Chapter 6 is more historical in its content analysing the effect of the colonial rule, the English education and the Indian Freedom Movement and traces the evolution of the Indian Family Business in Post-Independence India.

In tracing the Psychology of Indian leadership in Chapter 7, the author provides useful insights into the Concept of Boundary and its Mismanagement. Pertinent references made in this chapter to Object Relations Theory, 'The Invader in the Mind' (attributed to Gouranga P Chattopadhyay) and the concept of 'White Man's Burden' from Rudyard Kipling's poem provide interesting reading. Chapter 8 deals with the patrimonial, bureaucratic and relationship oriented, benevolent-dictatorial '*Karta*' model of the Indian leader at Work notwithstanding such aberrations as Nepotism, Sibling Rivalries, Clannish Behaviour and Dependence Syndrome. While Chapter 9 throws light on Clash of Cultures, Chapter 10 unveils the '*Shakti*' model of Feminine Leadership in India with illustrative and inspirational examples.

In Chapter 11 the author offers his valued advice and a future roadmap for the young leaders of tomorrow by exhorting them to win with Indian-ness, set their own values, knowing their boundaries and by creating their own purpose or mission. His final words "Walk yourself!" sounds as an echo of the perennially powerful mantra of the Upanishad – '*Charaiveti*'!

On the whole the book offers a smooth reading experience and some potent and useful insights for academics, students and practitioners in Management and Leadership in the field of OB, HR and OD especially to young aspiring leaders so that they can achieve an authentic synthesis of the best of the East and the West with the message of 'Think Globally Act Indian'. However, a few critical observations and suggestions may not be out of place in this regard.

The tenor of the book is primarily cultural and psychological though it draws upon spiritual wisdom of India from time to time. The author candidly acknowledges that he is standing on the shoulders of such giants (p. 20) as Sudhir Kakar, M N Srinivas, Gouranga P Chattopadhyay, Pulin Garg, Jai B P Sinha, Zahid Gangjee and Ashok Malhotra who were some of his primary sources of inspiration. However, the most glaring omission is the lifelong seminal work and phenomenal contribution of S K Chakraborty, unquestionably the pioneer in the field of Indian Ethos and Human Values in Management who spearheaded a global movement that saw its crystallization in the creation of the Management Centre for Human Values at IIM Calcutta way back in 1992 with its mouthpiece the Journal of Human Values, a SAGE publication. Even the works of the later crusaders in this movement like Debashis Chatterjee, the present Director of IIM Kozhikode, Subhash Sharma, Director of Indus Business Academy, Bangalore and Ramnath Narayanswamy of IIM Bangalore did not find space in this volume. The author has highlighted the culturally accepted '*Karta*' model of Indian Leadership but missed out on the spiritually anchored '*Rajarshi*' model of Enlightened Indian Leadership which is combination of the roles of the '*Raja*' (the king, the dynamic executive) and the '*Rishi*' (the enlightened seer) as enlivened in Arjuna and Shri Bhagavan (Krishna) in the Bhagavadgita. In fact, deeper exploration into Indian spiritual wisdom would have

enriched the work further as it may be mentioned here that Indian spirituality is deeply psycho-philosophical from the very beginning whereas in the West while Philosophy dates back more than two millennia, Psychology as a discipline in academia and practice originated a little beyond last two hundred years.

The author has drawn inspiration from multiple sources beyond the corridors of management academia and corporate leadership. It might have been worthwhile to explore and highlight the leadership values and qualities of Swami Vivekananda, the founder of Ramakrishna Mission (created even before the House of Tatas), the first Indian international organization, with headquarters in India and growing every day with more than 200 Centres worldwide even today 120 years after the demise of this awe-inspiring spiritual ambassador of India in the West. Vivekananda embodied an authentic synthesis of the best of the East and the West, the past and the present, tradition and modernity. In fact, Swami Vivekananda had deeply inspired Sir Jamshetji Tata, the founder of Indian industrialization, during their voyage to the West in the same ship as co-travellers. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, another exemplary leader who was the Founder Leader of Indian National Army, had summed up the leadership qualities of Swamiji in his inimitable expression: "Reckless in his sacrifice, unceasing in his activity, profound and versatile in his wisdom, boundless in his love, exuberant in his emotions, merciless in his attacks, and yet as simple as a child – he was a rare personality in this world of ours. If Swamiji had been alive today he would have been my Guru." Even if one ransacks the entire gamut of world Leadership literature it will be extremely difficult to find a match of such qualities as demonstrated by this genius of an inspirational and enlightened leadership within a short life span of 39 years! The author has mentioned about Rabindranath Tagore in limited context but the exemplary academic and institutional

leadership demonstrated by this literary master and humanist philosopher in his Vishwa-Bharati (Global India) experiment could also enrich the volume with more pertinent insights into 'Think Globally Act Indian'. Thinkers, educators, noble men and women from all over the world had voluntarily joined the movements of Vivekananda and Tagore to serve the cause of India and the world almost a century ago. Coming to Women Power, the role model of leadership enlivened by Sister Nivedita, the spiritual disciple of Vivekananda, remains a glowing example of courage and sacrifice that may well be studied for inspiration and insights. Nivedita not only played an active role in Indian Freedom Movement by supporting the firebrand revolutionaries but also negotiated with the British Empire to ensure the creation of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, a dream and vision planted in the mind of Jamshetji Tata by Swami Vivekananda himself during their voyage to the West.

These are observations and suggestions that may add value to the book if incorporated in future editions but it must be admitted that Steve Correa, in his maiden venture as an author, has made a significant contribution to the field of Leadership worldwide. It will substantially enrich the East-West Dialogue to enlighten the field of Management in a globalized setting. While the book comes as a timely and valuable addition to the spectrum of Leadership literature with its focus on HR and OD, it will also serve as inspiration to young leaders committed to making a difference in our organizations, society and the planet at large and most importantly in our own Leadership Consciousness in the times to come.

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