

REVIEWS

The Manager : Beyond the Organisation.
Arabinda Ray. New Delhi, Macmillan, 1980.
89 p. Rs. 35.00

Mr. Ray's slim treatise is a passionate plea for the blossoming of a quintessential Asian manager, rooted in an historical perspective, willing to confront himself with his own work ethos, and testing himself against a self-set battery of questions relating to basic beliefs about his societal existence (pp. 86-87). Swinging back to the start of his book, we see him dreaming about such readers who operate 'within a consciously fashioned value system where an ideology is prevalent' (p. vii). Ray, in his first chapter grasps the nettle fair and square by raising the issue of wholesale transplantation of values and qualities developed in affluent, Western societies into developing Eastern societies. He mentions about the success of Japan in achieving economic development by capitalising on its traditional social mores (p. 2). Yet, the very next moment he brushes aside this blazing experiment as being only of academic interest to India (p. 3). He appears to convey here the feeling that the bus for social engineering has been missed by India. It is very critical, however, to his own thesis, summed up by us from the last pages of the book, of a quintessential Asian (Indian at that?) manager tethered to an historical flagmast. How and where does one gather the sinews of ideology unless one begins the process of social engineering — however tragically belated might it be. What

is to be the warp and woof, the texture and tint, the flight and fancy of this ideology if it has to be first quintessentially Indian (and may be, if at all, Asian later)? Correctly does Ray observe a little ahead (p. 6) that the battle for such raising such a flower is in the mind of the individual who has to gather the tools by studying himself and his society. True. But what is the method of such study? What are the sources to tap? What are the common signposts to guide individual introspection of the sort Ray suggests? For, the task is to weave a common ideology for organised work in the secular realm. It appears, therefore, a bit enigmatic when the author asserts that the Indian society has certainly reached the point of self-realisation (p. 6). While there could be islands in the ocean of Indian managers where 'know thyself' is a living credo, it is hard to generalise from there and claim self-realisation for the Indian society as a whole. It is even possible to suggest that Indian society in its present mood is sliding farther and farther from anything near self-realisation (Of course we may differ regarding the meaning of self-realisation).

Although Ray begins with the conviction that the primary need of business in developing economies is that of 'intellectualism' (p.6), he creditably restores the balance in the last page of his book (p.89) by assigning equal importance to the 'heart'.

Ray argues well that modernisation is, in the first place, a process by which the country

becomes conscious of itself and its processes (p.8). This indeed is the most serious and primary task ; yet we have been disastrously avoiding the Promethean effort needed for it since independence. Therefore, the hope that managers in a computer society will be the 'agents of change' rests on insecure foundations. Without a measure of what I am and my environment is, as both have evolved over the millenia, I can never be a change agent. And for such study and analysis a tremendous amount of recovery of our lost self-respect for the Indian ethos is a pre-condition. The Japanese experiment is relevant because it proves how self-respect wins the day. Irreverence will not do. We, therefore, agree with the author when he later mentions about the monumental confusion of identity between modernity and Westernisation (p.12).

Ray's coinage of 'conceptual ownership' — as against real ownership — as the mainstay of professional managers of tomorrow — is quite acceptable. And their recognition through abstract rewards, therefore, follows logically (pp.22-23). A very practical issue remains submerged nonetheless. If professional managership is cut loose from life-long (or long term) association with an organisation, how does conceptual ownership sprout and grow? If professional managers behave like professional footballers at the start of each season, then there is not much chance for conceptual ownership to flourish. If by some stroke of luck India comes to have 95 per cent employment each year round the business cycles, but does not cherish social loyalty to organisation as an acceptable value — unlike in Japan — what will happen to conceptual ownership — except may be at the very few top positions?

The author is convinced that the managers of developing countries will require a 'code of ethics' and a 'missionary value system' for their managers — especially when some Governments like the Indian are making Draconian cuts in the cake of managerial remuneration (pp.29-30). But in transferring the responsibility for inculcating such values and attitudes to structured programmes by training managers (p.31), Ray appears to be severely underestimating the seriousness and enormity of the task. It can well be argued that such basic education has to start from homes and schools. Managers in organisations are fireburnt bricks. Most of them may not take a new embossing — they will rather break. And teaching of values is altogether a different kettle of fish compared to imparting numerical or mechanical skills. But his emphasis on personal examples is quite apt (p.32). So, line managers and superiors, and not training managers, have the greater responsibility.

In chapter 5 Ray turns to Arthur Koestler, plucks the concept of bi-societation, and adds on a third cap — that of 'creativity' — to the two already placed on the wobbly head of the professional manager, namely 'conceptual ownership' and a 'missionary system of values'. Naturally, creativity leads on to 'imagination' (p.40). And once again the author expresses his belief (although a little earlier he says that the twentieth century has replaced belief with knowledge) that management psychologists (what is that breed anyway?) would develop training packages for constructive imagination (p.41). We feel sorry to note that such a hope is a belief which even the author's own 'knowledge' would not support. It is a moot question whether mass production of imagination in

seasoned adults is possible — especially by the commercial trainers in commercial organisations of India who breathe and live on air blowing across the Atlantic.

We could not agree more with Ray than with respect to his sage counsel that managerial effectiveness is a positive function of the extent of mastery and management of details (p. 50). For, it implies self-discipline — day in, day out — at all levels. And perhaps today such a flair in our professional managers is of far more proximate relevance than the coveted, chimeric quality of imagination.

Ray bestows considerable space to and emerges with a number of insights regarding the advent of the computer. Thus, managers would in future become far more free from the shackles of routine decisions, will have more time for running and shaping the decision-making system itself, and can motivate and train their subordinates. Management will become less operational and experience-dominated. It will be more of knowledge and intellect-applying activity (p. 62). However, in spite of himself so to say, and against the grain of what he said on p. 3 regarding the bus for social engineering having been missed by India's industrialisation, Ray does accept the need for such an effort when he deals with computers (p. 61). But it is another matter whether mere tact, intelligence, patience and empathy are sufficient and substantial ingredients for social engineering in a country like India.

Ray follows up his thinking on computers by bringing in the concept of 'risk'. He postulates that with more and more free time available to managers, more and more of them would tend to go into entrepreneurial activities (p. 66). The way he develops his reasoning indicates that such managers —

turned — entrepreneurs will set up their own units. Thus, the moment computers enable successful managers to awaken and rejuvenate their entrepreneurial imagination and innovativeness, we are presented with the prospect that they would quit their organisation to fend for themselves. This seems to be Ray's line of argument, for later on he extols thriftiness and similar virtues in the lives of young executives (p. 73, p. 75). Thus, the upshot of computerisation would appear to be that of denuding organisations of managers who are creative, and imaginative — and hence entrepreneurial — because computers would sharply awaken in them their latent potential in this direction by lifting the heavy lid of routine administrative chores. If we have read the author correctly, such a scenario is a fairly complex one and may not be an unmitigated boon to the organisation.

Mr. Ray's book, in fine, is a personal testament of faith, nurtured obviously by deep convictions and equally deep thinking. The very fact that this reviewer was engrossed in looking through the book the way he has, speaks of its abiding merit. Unless he has set for himself a ten-year plan perspective for his books, we shall fondly hope for another volume from him well before 1990.

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Business Management for New Entrepreneurs, T V S Ramamohan Rao. Lucknow, Anuj Publications. 100 p. Rs. 35.00

Prof. Rao's small title — Business Management for New Entrepreneurs — has the quality of brevity to commend itself. Yet, this very quality seems to have taken its toll on comprehension.