
Book Review

Fifty Years of Indian Management – An Insider’s View by Arabinda Ray, Oxford University Press, New Delhi (1999); 124 pages; Rs. 295/-

In this book the author surveys the fifty-year period of Indian management commencing from 1948 when India’s first Industrial Policy Resolution was adopted. In his words in the preface : “This is no knowledgeable or even responsible recording of history : it does not follow chronology or quote authoritative commentators. It is, instead, a personal view of how the process (*of development of the Indian manager*) unfolded, ..., a collective SWOT analysis”.

Lack of any discernible framework, chronological or otherwise, makes the task of review difficult. The ten chapters of the book can be broadly divided into four segments. The first, comprising five chapters, deals with the process of emergence of professional management in India; second, in two chapters covers what the author calls ‘Changing Profiles’ of the Indian managers; third, in a single chapter briefly recounts the contributions made by some successful persons like Russi Mody and his likes. The fourth segment, divided in two chapters, concludes with a SWOT analysis of the current generation of the Indian managers. Written with an anecdotal flavour and containing essentially the personal views of the author, the book does not merit any rigorous or critical review. Accordingly, in the following paragraphs only a general overview of the contents of the book is presented for the interested readers. All quotes are from the book.

In the first four chapters, the author identifies the process of emergence of professional management in India through the managing agency system, in early years after the World War II. He describes the dilemmas and conflicts faced by the new entrants to this emerging profession both in their work and social lives. Some the anecdotes offer insight into the mores of the days bygone and provide some hilarious readings. In Chapter 3 he cursorily deals with the growth of formal management education in the country. He devotes the fifth chapter on public sector but the coverage is very general and lacks depth. The sixth chapter entitled ‘Changing Profiles’ is, thematically speaking,

the core of the book. Here he traces the evolution of the Indian managers from individuals of “questionable sophistication”, during the immediate post-war period, to the “bushy-tailed MBAs matching the brightest in the world”, at the end of the twentieth century. In doing so, he starts with the boxwallahs in the managing agencies and then talks about many things like the oil companies, MNCs, rise of accounting profession up the corporate ladder and so on, in a somewhat incoherent fashion. In chapter 7, which is essentially an extension of the previous chapter, he deals with some specific areas like plantation, advertising, hotel and tourism, and so on, because he believes “No history of management can be complete without looking (at them) ...”. His narration in these two chapters is sketchy and devoid of any meaningful substance, even in anecdotal terms; excepting in parts (like Managing Agencies in Chapter 6 and Plantations in Chapter 7). ‘A Representative First Eleven’ which is his eighth chapter is purely his personal choice and does not call for any comment. The first of the last two chapters in the fourth and the last segment, entitled ‘In a Changing Society’, is essentially a repetition of what has been already said in the earlier chapters. He starts with a stereotypical description of the early managers and ends with a call for “closing the ‘we’ – ‘they’ gap both at the work place and in the market at large”. In the last chapter, he does a SWOT analysis of current day Indian managers. He identifies their “intellectual and academic attainments” as their strength and their “notorious lack of commitment to the community at large” as their major weakness. He says : “Indian managers are good doers but not necessarily great thinkers” (*Then, what happens to their “intellectual and academic attainments”?* – *one may wonder.*) He sees in globalization of the Indian economy a great opportunity for the Indian managers, provided they can make their firms cost-competitive and develop necessary “negotiating skills”. Destabilization of professionally well-managed companies by change of ownership and lack of required degree of acceptance of the role of professional management in the success of organizations are identified as threats. But the biggest threat, according to him, is the existence of “islands of affluence in the midst of seas of poverty” which, he feels, “management must recognize and take concerted action to deal with for its own survival” (*He, however, does not elaborate on how do the managers deal with such problems which requires, according to him, “great political acumen”.*). He ends with a hope that “sooner rather than later penetration of the rural market

by consumer goods and services will motivate discerning managers to create general awareness of the beneficial effects of a good management on the economy and the value of stability". (*Quite an uphill task for the "bushy-tailed MBAs"!*)

All in all, the book fails to live up to its promise as engendered by its title. We expected a much richer exposition, even be on an anecdotal note, from as variedly experienced a manager as the author who had the rare opportunity of observing the momentous changes in the scene of Indian management as an active participant.

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Meaningful Work : Rethinking Professional Ethics by Mike W Martin, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000. pp. 252+XIII.

The book under review, consisting of four well-written parts seeks to widen professional ethics to include personal commitments, especially commitments to ideals. In doing so, it focuses on neglected issues about meaningful work, moral psychology, character and the virtues, self-fulfillment and self-betrayal, and the interplay of private and professional life. Integrating personal commitments into professional ethics is an important task on which the author throws sufficient light.

The work begins with an exploration of the roles personal ideals play in giving meaning to work, in interpreting professional responsibilities, and in inspiring voluntary service. The first part, "Meaning and Personal Commitments", explores the roles of personal ideals in giving meaning to work, interpreting professional responsibilities and inspiring voluntary service. The second part, "Caring and Client Autonomy" carries a discussion on ideals of caring about clients and the limits of these ideals. The third part, "Shared Responsibility and Authority" discusses related issues about the interplay of personal ideals and respect for organizational authority, including religious organizations. The fourth part, "Threats to Integrity" explores three dangers :