
Book Review

Indian Models of Economy, Business and Management

Author : P Kanagasabapathi,
Publisher : Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi, 2008,
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At the end of the last millennia, Peter Drucker remarked perspicaciously that: "*Only yesterday most of the tasks today's organisations discharge were supposed to be done by the family. The family educated its members. It took care of the old and the sick. It found work for members who needed it. ... These tasks can be accomplished only by a truly autonomous institution...*". This statement is redolent of a very significant element of the Indian business ethic, namely, the cardinal status of the distinctive "family business" model. After all, one can deny the author's assertion that "Many of the industrial and business centres of India, run by the family based non-corporate sector, are emerging crucial to the global businesses" (p.2), only at one's own risk. Aimed at students of management and economics, the book, *Indian Models of Economy, Business and Management*, by Kanagasabapathi, a teacher of long experience, and an adept researcher at heart, intends to reveal "...that most of the Indian models are quite different, much simpler, more sustainable and designed for better results" (Preface).

India-centric Approach to Management

It is a truism to remark that all the B-schools in India have evinced keen interest in poring over headlong and adopting (almost uncritically) the West-mooted models of economy and business, which only get mirrored in the virtually continuous publication of books, unremarkably titled, Modern Management,

Management and Globalisation, Principles of Management, among others. Coursing through this plethora of publications, one finds the book under review, a welcome relief and a significant addition to region-specific management literature. What Kanagasabapathi, as a writer, has done is to highlight the fine elements of Indian system of management and way of doing business, and further gives enough evidence of the ensuing decline of the Western ideas of how to manage and run a business.

Developing the argument that the "basic models in the West are in a crisis" on the basis of the premise that there are irretrievable links between an economic system, business method and a management model, the author gradually informs the reader by giving a broad, though not comprehensive, outline of different economic and business systems. And in doing this, it is admitted that a nation's economic system has of much of influence on how business is transacted. If such be the mutual association between economy and business, how then, asks a concerned

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Kanagasabapathi, is it possible to have a "universal policy prescription", be it for the colossal economy or for a petite business firm? This brings to fore the necessity to recognise, identify and appreciate the elements like entrepreneurship, family orientation, savings habit, faith and importance of relationship, and role of ethics that were and are a part of the Indian business value-system. It is this value based system of business attitude that has given India an edge over the highly individualistic and unethical way of doing business and running an economy in the West. Indian businesses have always been aware of, in contrast to the Western model, of the significant role of cultural values and community norms. Hence, it is time, the author asseverates, for the world to acknowledge the importance of the principled business systems that evolved in India, and not be blindly led to believe the Western corporate-centric models of commerce.

Questioning veracity

What come through from a reading of this book is that the author seems to be a die-hard Swadeshi - one who believes in India's predominance and inherent supremacy, for a variety of reasons, no doubt. However, such a stance comes with ideological and methodological problems that get adequately amplified in the book. One major area of dissonance is the naive usage, and later the predisposed interpretation of data, from Angus Madisson's *The World Economy*. One looks askance as to how data dating back to 0 CE (Common Era) could be conjured up, and that too, in modern categories like "India, China, Europe", when nothing of such categories even existed. In the name of eulogising a nation, what really transpires, sometimes unknowingly, but nevertheless, erroneously, is that romantic ideas of the past are constructed from undependable data sources. There is no way one could have ever conceived of some regional entity like India or China some two thousand years, let alone compile data on their GDP.

The other issue of dissension that a reader faces is that of using "archaeological evidences", travellers' "records, inscriptions and writings" to buttress the arguments and point of views on India's pre-colonial pre-eminence in the global arena.

The overriding question would be to ask what were the "India" sources referring to, and how does one assimilate the data into mainstream economic discourses. Had the author addressed this question, rather than using the sources uncensored, it would have heightened the pleasure of reading the book, and would have opened a new vista for further cogitation and deliberation.

Once these frictions are surmounted, it is necessary to recognise the presence of the very perceptive region-specific case studies that the author had, along with others, carried out. The findings of the case studies are well embroidered into the text of the book. Especially when the author writes about business models (chapters 5-7), a lot of interesting and insightful issues come through the case studies cited. Being highly local-based and intensive in nature, one hopes that these case studies be made into separate monographs, so as to reach a larger audience, with their complete flavour and information. Another area that may warrant attention is the absence of rigour in putting across points, though the books was not meant to be entirely rigorous. However, the book must be credited for the stand it has taken: "...to challenge the models that are not relevant" (p.257). In this way, this book can serve as a starting point for such a challenge, so that one can constructively engage in "reformulating our attitude towards the Western approaches" (p.256). There is an obligation to take cognisance of the Indian economic and business models, for Kanagasabapathi sanguinely states that "...India is destined to play a larger responsibility, not just only for her people, but for the rest of the world as well" (p..290).

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