

Book Review

IN SEARCH OF CHANGE MAESTROS

Pritam Singh & Asha Bhandarker, Sage, 2011, pp.461, Rs.850/-

The most wonderful things in the world come in the “Pack of Seven”, be it seven seas, *Saptarishi*, *Saptaswara* or seven wonders. So the book “In Search of Change Maestros” by the academic stalwarts Pritam Singh and Asha Bhandarker revolves around seven magnanimous leaders of time, who dared to transform the face of corporate India.

The cover page itself depicts the interesting and eye catching photo of Mahatma Gandhi surrounded by photographs of seven business icons – Kumar Mangalam Birla, M Damodaran, Sajjan Jindal, K V Kamath, Sunil Bharti Mittal, A M Naik, and Kiran Mazumdar Shaw. This is in stark contrast as Mahatma Gandhi was the torch bearer of Indian freedom movement, but his leadership style resides in the heart and soul of not only every Indian but in every global citizen. However, the inspiration of transformational leadership of father of the nation is the spirit behind the corporate czars, and thus, the cover page attracts every genre of reader, be it academic, social, political or corporate reader. The selection of seven change maestros by authors itself is a result of intense survey and systematic research. In the preface of the book, the eminent authors aptly mention “...every human being can achieve lion-hood-leadership-through the power of grooming and feedback, which helps people become aware of their inherent potential, few have been able to actualize this... This work can also serve to remind leaders in the making to wake up the lion of leadership lying dormant within, which perhaps did not manifest itself in the absence of inspiring and appropriately documented role models...”

The book “In Search of Change Maestros” is spread in the span of ten chapters. The first chapter “Change Maestros’ Kaleidoscope” contains the profiles of change maestros and essence of their leadership style. The eight driving principles – contextual sensitivity compelling vision and purpose, winning streak, people connect and engagement, meaningful contribution with speed, creative destruction for transformation, evolving self and culture architecture, express the saga of development of these leaders in the shape of a lotus. In Part I, while narrating the rationale of the work, the authors, based on the observation as trainers, coaches, and consultants in the corporate world in the last thirty years, clearly expressed the concern of the paucity of Change Maestros in the Indian corporate world. They further stated that most Indian corporate leaders, generally, tend to display a hierarchical mindset, show distancing and status-conscious behavior, and utilize institutional power to rule rather than for institution building, creating wealth, and meaningfully contributing to society. Part II, under the head “what makes a change maestro?”, provides the seven themes emerged from the extensive work with CEOs, board-level workshops as well as study of literature. Part III is about contours of research methodology adopted for the study.

The chapters 2 to 8 are based on the in-depth case study of each of the seven change maestros articulated around self, business and context level which is a result of intense research. Chapter 2 titled as “Kumar Mangalam Birla: Looking Within, Looking Around, and Looking Beyond”, quoting a story about how a Grandmaster (known for his rare capability to mentor great kings) groomed a Chinese Prince to become greatest King of all time, the authors state that if Kumar Mangalam Birla a man though born for greatness, having being born into one of India’s pre-eminent industrial houses, he stands tall on account of his own strength among the business czars of India today, it is not only

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because he was lucky to be born great, but also that he achieved greatness. The case study “M Damodaran: Renaissance Artiste” in Chapter 3 states that Damodaran has demonstrated throughout his career exceptional capability of managing change with continuity, appropriately balancing yesterday with tomorrow, and integrating seemingly contradictory forces by seeing opportunity in every problem rather than focusing on the problems in every opportunity. The architect of change, he not only brought back the lost glory by reenergizing the future of two giant companies- UTI and IDBI, but also turnaround three banks – Union Bank of India, Indian Bank, and UCO Bank – which were in a perilous state.

Chapter 4 under the head “Sajjan Jindal: Romancing Limitless Growth” talks about how Sajjan Jindal at the age of twenty-three, fresh out of college, commenced his long journey to build JSW from being a mere Rs.93 crore company in 1993 to becoming a Rs.12,700 crore company in 2008, in a short time, with the ambition to attain Rs.50,000 crore turnover in 2012. Chapter 5 under the head “Kundapur Vaman Kamath: Enfolding the future within the present” is a story about how he transformed ICICI from a preponderant development bank into a vibrant, dynamic financial powerhouse, through his overarching vision, foresightedness, capability to sense looming danger, risk-taking, and entrepreneurial innovation. Chapter 6 under the head : “Sunil Bharti Mittal: The Game Changer” is about the story of Bharti Airtel and its architect, Sunil Bharti Mittal, who in many ways, made game-changing moves in the telecom sector using conventional approaches, boldly questioning established business models.

Chapter 7 under the head “Anil Manibhai Naik: Toward The Next Orbit” narrates the story of L&T under A.M. Naik – a dreamer who believes that excellence is a journey, not a destination, who believes in ceaselessly striving to do better than before, who relentlessly reaches out to become the best and who constantly creates the next curve both in his life and in the organization, and takes the organization to the next orbit. Today, in Naik’s era, L&T has become one of the most vibrant and creative groups in the Indian corporate world with continued zeal to align its business strategies with national priorities and interests, and ceaselessly trying to move into the next orbit. Chapter 8 entitled “Kiran Mazumdar Shaw: Entrepreneurial Path Breaker” powerfully portrays the story of Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, an entrepreneurial path breaker and the great organization Biocon, which she has successfully built. She has made a rare place for herself and her organization in the pharma world. Her life is one of strong determination and endeavor to transcend limitations, finding innovative approaches and solutions, and relentlessly executing her dream. Kiran has earned the titles of “India’s Biotech Queen” and “Mother of Invention”.

Chapter 9 and 10 interestingly envisage the comparative picture of organizational culture built by the CEOs and also find the pattern of dominance, the key success drivers, factors of change and the impact of change maestros in the organization culture in an integrated fashion. All these chapters are supported by research analysis, and details in the appendices at the end of each chapter for easy reference for researchers and academicians.

The language and vocabulary are spellbinding and mesmerizing; it takes the reader to a very high platform of thought and provokes a sense of continuous reading due to its flow and contents. It is an intellectual treat to read an incomparable, invaluable masterpiece of great academic value that is lucid, expressive, attractive, artistic, inquisitive, and inspiring through each word and verse.

The Indian leadership wisdom is seldom quoted in such wonderful manner. As quoted in the foreword by Brijmohan Lal Munjal, Chairman, Hero Honda Motors, leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomenons on earth. It is even more apt for Indian thought leaders. My quest for having a great book on great personalities is definitely quenched though, we would like to see more such corporate gems are covered in the next endeavor of the authors when they could write about leaders like E. Sreedharan, V. Kurien, Anil Khandelwal, Ratan Tata, Azim Premji, Narayan Murthy, Shehnaz Hussain... so on.

The book is worth a priceless collection for libraries of any B-Schools, corporate, academicians, researchers, or personally by management lovers, social activists, economic pacers or individual reader in choicest collections of the books.

– **V. Narendran**

– **Rajeshwari Narendran**