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BOOK REVIEW

“REDISCOVERING THE ANCIENT WISDOM” Book Review – ‘CORPORATE CHANAKYA’

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Today’s business faces many moral challenges in competitive global economy. Everyone is struggling to be more successful, to enhance the next quarterly earnings estimate, to keep their job, to earn a big bonus, or to outsmart the competitors. The temptation to cut corners, omit information, and do whatever it takes to get ahead occurs every day. Many businessmen, employees and executives succumb. Sadly, the temptation becomes highly infectious and soon people actually start to feel like deviating from the path of righteousness and accepting it as normal practice. These practices erode the trust that needs to exist between employers and employees, between business partners, between executives and shareholders. Without trust and ethics, the business will not be able to prosper. All CEOs refer to this struggle for power and supremacy as it was a warfare strategy. The book “Corporate Chanakya” provides a strategy centric approach for the emerging leaders to face the challenges and teaches the nuances of achieving success by following right means.

Radhakrishnan Pillai is the author of this old age formulae for success of today's leaders. Pillai formally educated in management did his MA in Sanskrit and a doctorate in *Arthashastra*, in which Chanakya documented his ideas on leadership, statecraft and strategy. The author realized the fact that each modern management theory had already been explored thousands of years ago in *Arthashastra* albeit in a different context. With a deep respect for Chanakya's genius, Indian management and Indian wisdom, Radhakrishnan Pillai shared in this book the ideas on how Chanakya's practical solutions bear relevance to the principles of Indian management and how to apply the same in solving day-to day problems in modern businesses.

Chanakya, originally called as Kautilya and Vishnugupta, also as 'The King Maker' was considered as an expert in varied and specialized fields like management, economics, politics, law, leadership, governance, warfare, military tactics, accounting systems and several others. It is in the books, '*Arthashastra*' and '*ChanakyaNiti*', he documented his lifelong work that aids in building a nation on sound economics, based on spiritual values. The 6000 sutras have been classified into 15 books, 150 chapters and 180 topics by Chanakya himself.

Radhakrishnan Pillai having inspired by the works of this leadership guru, dwelt into three broad areas in this book say, 'Leadership', 'Management' and 'Training'. This book has 175 chapters in total, seventy under Leadership, seventy under Management and thirty five under Training. The author presented practical illustrations with appropriate sutras from *Arthashastra* on different aspects of leadership, management and training.

Under 'leadership', chapters on power, qualities of a leader, competition, people and situations to be avoided are presented to show that ancient wisdom expressed by the enlightened sage has all time relevance and can still be of practical use to the budding executives. Employees, finance, teamwork and strategy are the chapters under 'management' that provide practical advice for all levels of businesses. Trainees, boss, organization and advice are the chapters under 'training' which provide inferences and lessons for aspiring entrepreneurs, executives and managers.

These chapters seek to identify the key traits that are indispensable for a sound leader to stay on the top, in creating laws, controlling office, delegating work, managing power and responsibilities, multitasking, managing of employees and team work, decision making, working through problems, handling competition, disaster management, maintaining ethics in business and social responsibility etc. According to Pillai, the leader, the chief executive or the chairman of a company, has the most important role to play in taking the organization ahead. A leader has to guide the organization and help it achieve higher goals and set new trends.

An executive manager plays a key role in the successful functioning of a company. The author gives a detailed guideline for selecting managers who are fresh trainees and also those who are experienced and need to be directly recruited for higher responsibilities. Accordingly a

fresh trainee should possess the desire to learn, effective listening ability, ability to reflect, ability to reject false views, technical competence, intelligence, perseverance and dexterity, eloquence, boldness, presence of mind, ability to bear troubles during emergencies, uprightness, friendliness, firmness while dealing with others, strength of the character etc. Stating all these qualities the author defines a leader and then gives the recipe to become one.

Every organization has to grow from being just a profit-making machine to a contributor to society, an enterprise for the well-being of one and all. Mr. Pillai insisted that there are factors highly essential to gain true power like intellectual power, physical power, financial power and the power of enthusiasm and morale. Most productive organizations that ventures into new markets, scale high targets, work toward a deadline, find their roots in these powers. According to the author the leader, manager, market, client, customers, finance, team and consultant are the pillars upon which the organization shoulder any responsibility and face all challenges.

The unique articulation of this book lies in the original references of sutras from Koutilya's *Arthashastra* with the relevant verse quoted (Number in brackets). The author believes that the science (of *Arthashastra*) brings into being and preserves spiritual good, material well-being and pleasures, and destroys spiritual evil, material loss and hatred.

The book is very well balanced in narrating not only what a leader/ manager should do, but also what he/she should not do. Mr. Pillai advices a leader should avoid doing the following:

- ✓ Discarding the good and favoring the wicked,
- ✓ Harming others in a way that was not used before,
- ✓ Indulging in wicked deeds and suppressing good deeds,
- ✓ Performing actions that should be avoided,
- ✓ Trying to get for himself that which he does not deserve,
- ✓ Misuse of power,
- ✓ Punishing unfairly,
- ✓ Doing harmful things and destroying beneficial things,
- ✓ Failing to protect from thieves and robbing himself,
- ✓ Spoiling the excellence of work done,
- ✓ Dishonouring those worthy of honour,
- ✓ Opposing the elders,
- ✓ Not paying for what is done,
- ✓ Being complacent,
- ✓ Not carrying out what is settled,
- ✓ Missing a small issue going unnoticed,
- ✓ Disturbing employee's prosperity and well-being etc.,

A good leader inspires every follower and makes him productive. In the presence of the master, everyone feels safe and secure. Pillai states that: to be an ideal leader or a good boss is an eternal challenge as one has to balance between discipline and love. Love with discipline and discipline with love is the solution he suggests.

Mr. Pillai finally concluded by saying that all these ideas and knowledge from *Arthashastra* will help any business to devise tools and techniques with the help of which a sustainable business model can be created.

Very little is the disappointment in this book yet Mr. Pillai could have quoted more real life examples in the contemporary management context to uncover the fathom of the phrases used.

This book can be taken as a source of guidance for the emerging entrepreneurs, businessmen, managers and leaders as it would help in rediscovering the ancient wisdom. This book is for multiple readings till a time one has internalized its contents. I am one with the author in suggesting to the readers not to read the book superficially but to delve deep to enjoy its practical benefits.

The reviewer feels very much refreshed with and influenced by the ancient treatise *Arthashastra*. Thanks to the author and his scholarly interpretation and exposition.

The book is published by Jaico Books and is moderately priced.