

## **BUSINESS SUTRA: A VERY INDIAN APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT**

**Author:** Devdutt Pattanaik, **Year of Publication:** 2013, **Publisher:** Aleph Book Company,  
**Pages:** 446, Hard bound, **Price:** Rs.695

**Chhavi kiran**\*

Business Sutra is a very stimulating compilation of Devdutt Pattanaik which has power to change the notion that business has nothing to do with belief. The author has beautifully illustrated the association of management with beliefs in Indian culture.

Devdutt Pattanaik is Indian physician turned mythologist and a great mythological leader and was a speaker at the first TED conference in India held in November 2009. He is the author of more than a dozen bestselling books on mythology and management, leading columnist for business newspapers like Economic Times and one of the country's foremost motivational speakers.

His designation at Future Group was intriguing. He was Chief Belief Officer at Future Group. The author clarifies it in very beginning of his book Business Sutra, "My job was to neither judge nor change beliefs; it was simply to articulate them. The intention was to expand the mind of those involved in business".

The book is well organized into three chapters' broadly. The opening chapter of the book "Connecting Beliefs to Business" is written judiciously that holds interest of the readers. The essence of the title of book has been well stated and explained by the author "As is belief, so is behaviour, so is business. We call it the 3B framework. This is Business Sutra. Sutra is a string that connects the dots; here the string connects belief with business."

The reason for calling book as an Indian approach to management has been specifically stated by the author "A *very* Indian approach to business reveals the gap in the fundamental assumptions that defines management science taught in B- schools today. It celebrates my truth and your truth and the human capability to expand the mind, thanks to imagination."

---

\* Junior Research Fellow, Punjabi University Regional Centre for Information Technology and Management, Mohali, Punjab, Email: [chhavi.kiran@gmail.com](mailto:chhavi.kiran@gmail.com)

The author takes pain in describing different philosophies and has linked them to Management. Beautiful illustrations have been created which add life to the book. The first image of the book is in form of a human brain divided in two segments each side listing out words assumed opposite to one another like belief-logic, cyclical-linear, infinity-math, synthesis-analysis and the best one being myth-math. Such an illustration surely makes reader think that what does the author wants to convey.

What prompted Devdutt Pattanaik to link management with mythology has been elaborated in introductory chapter itself where he states “The more I explored mythology, the more I felt like Aladdin in a cave of undiscovered treasures”. With this he beautifully illustrates through a 75caricature that management is an expression of the mind and mythology is a map of the mind (root of plant has been portrayed as mind and flower of the plant as management).

According to the author, a modern management system is rooted in Western beliefs and is more focused on accomplishment of quantified objectives. In contrast to it, Indian mythology offers a more subjective and diversified way of doing business.

The book uses varied stories, symbols and rituals drawn from Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mythology to illustrate a wide variety of business situations which one needs to tackle while running and cultivating a successful organization.

In chapter II, “From Goal to Gaze: *Decoding Western, Chinese and Indian beliefs*”, the diversity of human thought has been reflected with an interesting opening example of the race between elephant headed Ganesha and Six headed Kartikeya. “Both decided to race three times around the world. Kartikeya, being more athletic, jumped on his peacock and flew around the oceans, the continents and the stars. The elephant-headed Ganesha simply went around his parents, twirling around himself, and declared himself the winner. When asked for an explanation, Ganesha said, “I went around my world. You went around the world. What matters more?” So the author states that different people have different worlds of imagination. The comparison of Western, Indian and Chinese beliefs and how they affect the behaviour and hence the business has been highlighted.

“Simplicity is the trademark of a genius” as quoted by Robin Sharma is very true for Devdutt Pattanaik. At the end of chapter II, the author has diagrammatically shown a simple comparison

of two very different contexts of India and USA. When USA comprises of 4% of the world's population and has more than 17% of the world's annual wealth generation, India comprising of 4 % of world's population and has less than 5 % of world's annual wealth generation, still they are expected to have the same goals. Various short cases have been used to explain different business situations and relevance of mythology in those situations.

Further Chapter III has the same title as of the book "Business Sutra: A Very Indian approach to Management". A unique perspective for business based on mythology is elucidated through various short stories. It has many ideas and stories and not something that one would like to rush through. It has been subdivided into 5 segments where the beginning segment explores how imagination transforms every human into Brahma, the creator of the yagna , the following 3 segments describes that what determines the quality of yagna , the last segment states the impact of yagna on yajaman(leader). Each of these segments has some unique short stories. The beauty of these stories is that they are not very lengthy to read and hence reader doesn't lose interest in it.

The author says "Business is yagna, the ritual described in the oldest and most revered of Hindu scriptures, the Rig Veda". A whole lot of non-English words have been used like rangoli, tathastu, svaha, maya etc.; but presumably the essence of this book would have lost if they were not used. In this regard author says, "English words are insufficient to convey all Indian ideas." The way meanings of such non-English words have been described is commendable.

The author states that ultimately business and management is all about making decisions. Decisions are taken when alternatives exists and surely every decision has a consequence. This has been highlighted through an excerpt from Ramayana "Dashrath shoots an arrow in the direction of a sound that he believes to be a sound of deer drinking water. It turns out to be the sound of water being collected in a pot. The arrow fatally injures the young man who was fetching water. The young man is Shravan. His old and blind parents do not see this event as an accident. They see it as a murder. They curse Dashrath to, like them, die of heartbreak following separation from his son". Through this illustration author states that an arrow released from a bow is a metaphor for a decision that cannot be withdrawn.

"With new words are created new worlds, as they are vehicles of new ideas." Business Sutra vocabulary forms an important part of this book. Around 150 non- English words that were used

in text have been described in business context and conventional context arranged in an alphabetic manner. A few of best words being 'ghee' which is described as 'clarified butter' in conventional context and further 'the personal income emerging from profit' in business context; 'Ganesha' which is described as 'the elephant headed God who removes obstacles in conventional context' and 'one who can easily wear many hats and so communicates between many departments' in business context.

The different kinds of caricatures have been used by the author that are remarkable and does not make reading monotonous. Plenty of insightful tales and examples of people from all walks of life have been used that readers can relate to.

The book is written in such a format that one cannot think of reading and understanding it at one go. The reader needs to read, pause and then reflect. Moreover introspection is required at various parts of the book. The book ends with a paradox. The last page contains 14 opinions, each with separate quotation marks, and all are single sentences. Most of them are in the nature of a comment, and not a bouquet. Caption of the page is, "How to reject this book". The rationale for this apologetic and apparently modest stand is left unarticulated. It also has some really well drawn illustrations and 'points to remember' sort of sections which are very appealing.

To conclude it'll be wise enough to state that Business Sutra not only establishes relation between business and mythology but also helps readers to get acquainted with different aspects of each mythological story.