

BOOK REVIEW

JAIN BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT AND ETHICS: AN OVERVIEW

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Indic religious traditions offer a path of moral and ethical conduct that becomes embedded in everyday life and living, extending beyond the self to include society, and further in the practice of one's chosen profession. This makes the religious tradition a way of life for a believer. The values imbibed through the religious tradition form the core based on which stands ethical conduct in one's personal and professional life. Each day throws up situations where the pull and push of values and ethics are tested, acted upon, endured, and sustained.

India has a strong tradition of family-owned businesses that have lived through generations contributing towards economic, social, and cultural growth of the nation. How do these businesses conduct themselves? What holds them together? These questions often find answers in a tradition that does not fall within the ambit of conventional management textbooks.

It is in this context, that the book *Jain Business Engagement and Ethics: An Overview* can be viewed as an important contribution to the existing literature on management and management styles of the corporate sector, whether privately held or otherwise.

A general management studies reader may find the title intriguing as it focuses on a particular religious tradition and community. It is important to understand this significance for two reasons: one, the Jain community, though a religious minority, contributes a significant amount towards the Indian economy through their business enterprises as well as social welfare activities. How do they do it? This leads us to reason two: the Jain religious tradition, through a structured form of practice, instils in every individual a method to help lead a life of high moral values and ethical conduct, which therefore becomes second nature to the individual, and collectively within the community.

Jain scriptural literature points out that the first Jain Tirthankara Rishabhdeva or Adinath laid the foundations of not just the spiritual path to salvation through *ahimsā* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-attachment) and *anekāntavāda* (acceptance of multiplicity of viewpoints), but

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also introduced the first tenets of urbanization for a skill-based knowledge economy to flourish – *asi* (tools), *masi* (writing), *kṛṣi* (agriculture), *vidyā* (knowledge), *vāṇijya* (trade) and *śilpa* (art). With spiritualism and skills running parallel, it sets the ethical foundations of an individual, and the community in general.

This research-based book, with contributions by leading international and national scholars, and deftly edited by scholars Shugan C. Jain, Prakash C. Jain, Malay R. Patel, thus presents a conceptual framework with empirical evidence to arrive at a Jain Model of Management Style and Ethics.

Structured in three parts, the book is interspersed with anecdotal and analytical examples, references, and appendices that open possibilities for further research.

PART I discusses the **Conceptual Framework** setting the premise, tone, and approach of the book. Contemporary business studies have focussed on a Western approach to business even in cultural contexts that may not always be in sync with them. Therefore, beginning the book with an understanding of the *Western approach towards Business and Ethics* by Volkmar Ensslin brings the reader from the familiar, known perspective to the new Indian, specifically the Jain perspective of management style, as articulated by Dr Shugan C Jain in the second chapter on *Core Concepts and Values in Jainism*. The next chapter *Towards a Jain Model of Business Ethics* by Malay R Patel makes it interesting to compare, contrast, and synthesize Jain values and ethics with contemporary management styles and conduct.

PART II takes the reader on a journey of **Jain Business Engagement Through the Ages**. Divided into three chapters written by Shugan C Jain and Malay Patel, this section takes a historical perspective of business activities tracing it from ancient times through the Medieval period and Colonial Rule in India, until the present contemporary times. Examples of key business leaders from India, the USA, and Europe give an insight into their business activities and contribution towards the society in keeping with Jain traditional values.

However, a few instances of how these business leaders may have negotiated or faced and resolved business challenges drawing upon the Jain values and ethics would have given the reader a more relatable and practical understanding of the Jain management style.

PART III on the theme of **Jain Values and Entrepreneurship** discusses economic behavior and decisions of business leaders based on their religious premise and influence. The first two essays in this section – *Jains and Entrepreneurship* by T. Mohanadoss and *Max Weber and Jainism: Some Notes on 'Jain Ethic'* by Prakash C Jain advance the arguments on the influence of religious sentiments on economic behavior. The essays posit Weber's propositions in the contemporary context and their continued relevance in the rationalization of Jain entrepreneurial behavior.

The essay *From Principles to Profit: Jain Values in Business* by Paul Palmarozza elaborates on the 'global marketplace' with profit-motive and how the importance of trust and ethics becomes crucial in the current business scenario. Palmarozza, while outlining different approaches to ethical business for the larger good of enterprise and society, summarizes that

inherent human values are expressions of the key tenets of Jainism – *ahimsā*, *aparigraha* and *anekāntavāda*. This chapter circles back to the premise of how spiritual values imbibed in life have a significant meaning in the conduct of professional activities.

The last chapter in this section *Precious Resolution: The Use of Intra-Community Arbitration by Jain Diamond Merchants* by Manuel A. Gomez highlights the role of the Jain community in arbitration outside of institutionalized forms.

The structure of the Jain community and the interdependence that exists between the ascetics and laypersons have a huge role to play in Jain composite culture including that of “private governance, procedural justice and private enforcement” in the social context.

Jain Business Engagement and Ethics: An Overview gives a unique perspective adding to the existing body of literature on management styles. More importantly, it gives a deeper understanding of the spiritual-social structure of a community and its influence and implication in the ethical conduct of business enterprises. An important book to have in management institutes, particularly those that offer courses in family-owned businesses. Besides, in a highly complex society that witnesses cut-throat competition and compromises on values for the sake of profit-making, this book comes as a pathfinder for budding entrepreneurs, as well as an experience in revisiting values for established business persons.
