

**Business Maharajas****Gita Pirmal****Penguin books India****14th October 2000 - A BOOK REVIEW****Pala Suriya Kala**

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“Business Maharajas” is one of the oldest and trend setting books of Business History. This bestselling book on the leading business tycoons of India was written by Dr. Gita Pirmal a leading author and a historian. This book is being reviewed again though published 15 years back as this is one of the trendsetting books in the area of Business History as mentioned earlier. Born into a business family, she spent the early years of her child hood in the United Kingdom and was educated in London. She did her masters in history and later a Phd from Bombay University. On the personal front Gita was married to Dilip Pirmal, Chairman of VIP industries for twenty years with whom she had two daughters Radhika and Aparna . They were divorced in June 2005 and Dilip later married a Ms.Agarwal from a long standing relationship. Gita had worked as a correspondent to Bombay Times. She also worked as Associate dean with Indian School of Business. She has written for many leading Indian and international publications. She has authored several books which are Business Maharajas, Business Legends ,Managing Radical Change (co-authored with Sumantra Ghoshal) (Delhi Management Association prize for the best management book) ,World Class in India (co-authored with Sumantra Ghoshal, Delhi Management Association prize for the best management book), Business Mantras, Sumantra Ghoshal on Management: A Force for Good (co-authored with Julian Birkinshaw), Smart Leadership (2005), The Smart Manager, managing editor since Feb 2002,India’s

Industrialists, Vol. 1 (co-authored with Margaret Herdeck) . Gita Pirmal thus turned out to be one of the leading authors of Business Management and Indian history.

Gita Pirmal has in her book “Business Maharajas” chalked out the lives of eight business tycoons who are maharajas in their own right, having control to huge businesses and assets. She based her choice of business man who had the best of talent from family businesses. This was because her choice was also contended by many other business tycoons who were no less accomplished.

Many reviewers of the book hold the view that Ms.Gita in the sheer selection of business tycoons for her book cannot be faulted. These tycoons are India’s most powerful tycoons whose combined turnover exceeds 55,000 crores. Gita has chronicled and chalked the growth of these tycoons with many interesting observations and insights to their world of business. These eight business men, Dhirubhai Ambani, Rahul Bajaj, Aditya Birla, R.P. Goenka, Brij Mohan Khaitan, Bharat and Vijay Shah and Ratan Tata are the stuff legends are made of. They have chalked their business by sheer will and determination. After going through the entire book one can say that no two paths of success have been the same.

The chapters give an interesting insight into the lives of these powerful tycoons which makes it interesting to read and gives the readers much to think about. Gita Pirmal has used all her experiences in journalism to be able to tell the story of these individuals. Some critics of the book

also feel that the claim that the book provides insight into the strategies that these tycoons follow to keep their business at the top is not that well justified. The book uses a lot of interesting facts and incidents that have been gathered from various sources and therefore makes an interesting read to the reader but doesn't give insights into strategy and decisions.

Gita PIRAMAL also uses her own background both journalistic as well as the business background to bring about interesting facts and figures in the book. Her connection to the business class as a wife of the chairman of VIP industries, has enabled her to bring about various facets of the personality of the business tycoons and also personality quirks which make it quite interesting as these are not readily available to the public.

Gita herself says in her introduction that the biography might not be completely objective. She says "I don't see how any biography can be objective. Objectivity can, in fact, be counter-productive. For one, it's impossible to be totally detached, impartial and completely well-informed.... Business Maharajas tries to capture snapshots of critical or illustrative episodes in the action-packed careers of eight extremely busy people. It doesn't claim to be definitive or a PhD thesis."

Gita is able to provide insights into the personalities of these men with a lot of flair of a story teller that makes it a real interesting read. She outlines how each individual is unique and how they are different in their own rights. Some interesting facts as to how Ambani could overturn the ploy of investors who really wanted to see his demise and how the tables were turned and how he discovered that public were a great asset to his growth and how he leveraged his growth with their support, are interesting insights that we get to know.

The book also brings out some wonderful quotes like Ratan Tata's quote on alliances "We're too concerned about our individual sovereignty

whereas we should be looking at alliances and aggregation of companies as it so often is abroad. Where partnerships are based on human chemistry and there is a business case, then the two partners really begin to work as one." The following quote of Rahul Bajaj on being swadeshi is a memorable one "I do not want in my own country to share power, authority-making and ownership with a foreigner. I have nothing against foreigners. That is not the point. But General Motors does not have foreign equity. Nor does Sony or IBM. The weak do."

The great take away as Gita PIRAMAL herself says is that none of these individuals resemble each other in any way. They are all unique individuals from being a self made business men with very less support to being born with a golden spoon into a legacy of a business house. Despite all these differences, there were a few similarities among these individuals. At the first turning point in their lives they had a piece of luck coming their way and they all agreed that they had a right break at the right time. These individuals also had a mentor who helped channelize their actions and give the right impetus at the right moment.

The book "Business Maharajas" thus chronicles the growth of these tycoons and gives an insight into the corporate tycoons who have as undisputed kings of their business empires have replaced the Maharajas of yester years. Also this is an interesting contribution to the field of business history which is one of the lesser researched areas of history.