

# Inc.

A Smart Pre-launch Trick

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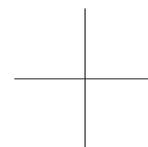
**RAVINDER RAO**  
**FOUNDER**  
**ARUNJYOTI**  
**ENTERPRISES**  
on what it took  
to build the  
**No. 1** company  
on our list of  
India's fastest  
growing,  
midsize  
firms

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# Epic

BUSINESS LESSONS FROM INDIAN MYTHOLOGY,  
COURTESY **DEV DUTT PATTANAIK,**  
**ASHWIN SANGHI AND R. PILLAI** PAGE 36

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NEW RESEARCH

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**Hitendra Chaturvedi,**  
founder, RLC, wants to  
save \$14 billion worth of  
defective and returned  
goods from going to the  
scrap heap.



# THE CHANTS OF SUCCESS

Authors Devdutt Pattanaik, Ashwin Sanghi  
and Radhakrishnan Pillai reveal business  
secrets from our ancient texts

**BY IRA SWASTI**

DESIGN BY PRADEEP G NAIR



**A**ncient Indian texts and epics are a treasure trove of wisdom on the way we live, how we approach work and life, and the influences that make us uniquely Indian. Sadly, these texts haven't found much attention as an area of study in context of modern business—how have they moulded the way we run our companies, and manage our teams? Or, shaped our views on profit, branding and leadership?

In this special feature story, we've attempted to bring together three best-selling authors—Devdutt Pattanaik, Radhakrishnan Pillai and Ashwin Sanghi—each of whom have unlocked the secrets of mythological and historical Indian gems such as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, and revealed them to be prized management handbooks relevant even today.

In the course of this story, we've discovered fascinating insights into the innate traits and cultural inclinations that have defined business and entrepreneurs in India. Take what Ashwin Sanghi, author of *The Krishna Key*, and an entrepreneur himself, points out, for example. Sanghi says the concept of balance between Lakshmi and Saraswati, or money and wisdom, continues to be a cornerstone of management philosophy in India. It's this balancing principle that has helped the country's knowledge economy take-off, he says. Or, author Radhakrishnan Pillai's insight on how the New York Stock Exchange has a bull on its entrance, and the Bombay Stock Exchange, Goddess Lakshmi. "For them, wealth is an animal. For us, it's a Goddess."

Read on to find out other pearls of wisdom, identify the cultural roadblocks that stop Indian businesses, and learn from the leadership principles of great sages such as Ved Vyas, Valmiki and Chanakya.



# Karmic Verses

ASHWIN SANGHI



Even though Ashwin Sanghi's books are historical thrillers based on Indian epics, his entrepreneurial experience has helped him connect the dots between their ancient wisdom and modern day business practices. Sanghi believes that the notion of karma—that our past life's actions have a bearing on our present life and our present actions impact our next life—makes Indian managers more resilient to setbacks in business. There is a feeling of this too shall pass that overtakes to deal with losses better. Conversely, this same notion could make them complacent and resigned to their “fate” or “destiny”. Here, Sanghi highlights three other spiritual beliefs that could shape the way entrepreneurs approach business in India.

## VERSE 1

## Balance wisdom and wealth

The concept of a balance between Lakshmi and Saraswati—or money and wisdom—continues to be a cornerstone of Indian management philosophy. That same balance is apparent even in the *Mahabharata*—when Krishna asks Arjuna and Duryodhana to choose between him and his army before the war—in effect, a choice between strategic intelligence and material possessions. Essentially, he was offering his wisdom as a strategic thinker and a war strategist, or his army. This is probably one

of the most beautiful aspects of Indian management where knowledge and wealth creation are given equal importance. This is partly why we have a flourishing economy in times of a capital crunch right now. Unlike the west, this is not a conscious choice for us. The buzz now is a new concept of building the knowledge economy along with focusing on private equity and capital. But India has always known and practised this. I don't think the IT sector boom would have happened if we hadn't put a premium on knowledge. Nor would have India's knowledge economy taken off as it did. So we don't need to relearn that concept. We've always placed an equal premium on both.

## VERSE 2

## Look at the big picture

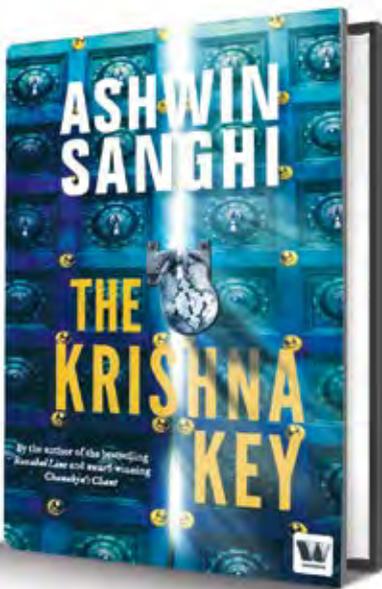
There was a lot of scepticism when Google adopted its informal corporate motto—don't be evil. People said it was foolish. I don't know whether Google is living up to its motto or not, but I have to say that there is a very philosophical and karmic context to it; one that other corporates also must embrace. The notion of karma says there is a system of checks and balances, that there is life after death, and that every action has an opposite

and equal reaction. If you believe in karma, it essentially means that there is a massive personal computer somewhere that is ensuring that every action in our life is recorded and the corresponding effect of that will be given to you in this life or the next. Most corporates tend to forget these checks and balances while doing business. They forget that their short-sighted actions today could have implications on their tomorrow. For instance, if an organisation uses natural resources in a way that is harmful to the environment, it may be good for the organisation's balance sheet for now but eventually the company will have to deal with the environmental consequences along with the rest of the world. Somewhere I believe, this philosophy of don't be evil has been lost in the business world.

## VERSE 3

## Focus on the real

The 5 Vs of ancient wisdom—the Vedas, Valmiki, Vyasa, Vishnugupta and Vivekananda—have guided our inherent belief system. The notion that our bodies are not permanent, that we came with nothing and will leave with nothing, and that change is the only constant are ingrained in us. Yet these fundamental lessons have been lost in business somewhere along the way. We have forgotten the notion that everything is an illusion or the concept of *maya*. Very often, what you see in an organisation is not real. Figuring out what is real and what is illusory is as much of a challenge for corporates as it is for the sages and seers of our age. Several years ago, a finance professional said to me—any idiot can read the balance sheet but deciphering what is going on behind the balance sheet is where the true challenge lies. In that sense, the balance sheet is the Indian notion of *maya*, which tells you the profits last year, the ROI, the amount of tax paid but the real economics and politics behind the balance sheet is the "reality". If we were to understand this age old principle, our organisations will be much better managed. ●



**It was inheritance** that made Ashwin Sanghi an entrepreneur but passion that made him a fiction writer. Managing director of the MK Sanghi Group of Companies that has interests in real estate, automobile distribution, industrial gases and turnkey engineering projects, Sanghi has authored three bestsellers till date—*The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*.



# Mythology Mantras

DEVDU TT PATTANA I K



Renowned mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik believes that the western model of doing business may not serve well in India because it operates in a different context, socially, economically, politically and psychologically.

The Indian way of business is highly individualistic, emotional and relationship-driven, he says. In his latest book, *Business Sutra* (soon to be launched), Pattanaik attempts to show how the “Indian” way of doing business—as apparent in Indian mythology, but no longer seen in practice—accommodates subjectivity and diversity, and offers an inclusive, more empathetic way of achieving success. Here, he reiterates how such an approach to business leads to greater success.

## MANTRA 1

## The importance of relationships

In India, you cannot expect to get results in business without developing relationships. While an average American businessman would rely more on planning and processes, an average Indian businessman relies more on intuition and relationships. While the Western model can be short-sighted (look at environmental issues) and stripped of emotion (because of professionalism), the Indian model can be chaotic (lack of planning) and filled with irrational decisions (due to favouritism). The good thing is: the Western model creates a sense of order but demands compliance and alignment. Likewise, the Indian model gives a lot of creative freedom and an emotional springboard to employees in an organisation. The western model does not give great value to emotional and intellectual growth; what matters is economic growth and skills to enable that. The Indian model on the other hand, can create economic growth through emotional and intellectual growth, if the leader drives it.



**Dr Devdutt Pattanaik** is an author, illustrator and speaker who has penned down 25 books on the relevance of mythology in leadership, entrepreneurship, branding and governance. He also runs two popular TV shows *Business Sutra* and *Shashtraarth* on similar lines, and serves as the chief belief officer at the Future Group.

## MANTRA 2

## Inclusiveness: welcoming but inefficient

Being inclusive of all people in an organisation can create a sense of belonging among employees, but it could also lead to inefficiency, if not managed properly. I believe inclusiveness is a result of the faith in the concept of rebirth in India. When you believe you live only once, your purpose in life is to do the right thing; there is no room for another way. The value of your life is the sum total of your achievements in this life. On the other hand, when you believe you live many lives then you know that the value of your life, no matter what you do, is zero because the denominator of your existence is zero. The point of life then becomes to

allow introspection and strive for understanding. It makes people more inclusive than exclusive. Subsequently, it makes organisations more diverse as they allow all kinds of beliefs to thrive, even those that discomfort them. But, this comes at a price: when everyone is included and all ways of functioning accepted, a workplace can end up being very inefficient.

## MANTRA 3

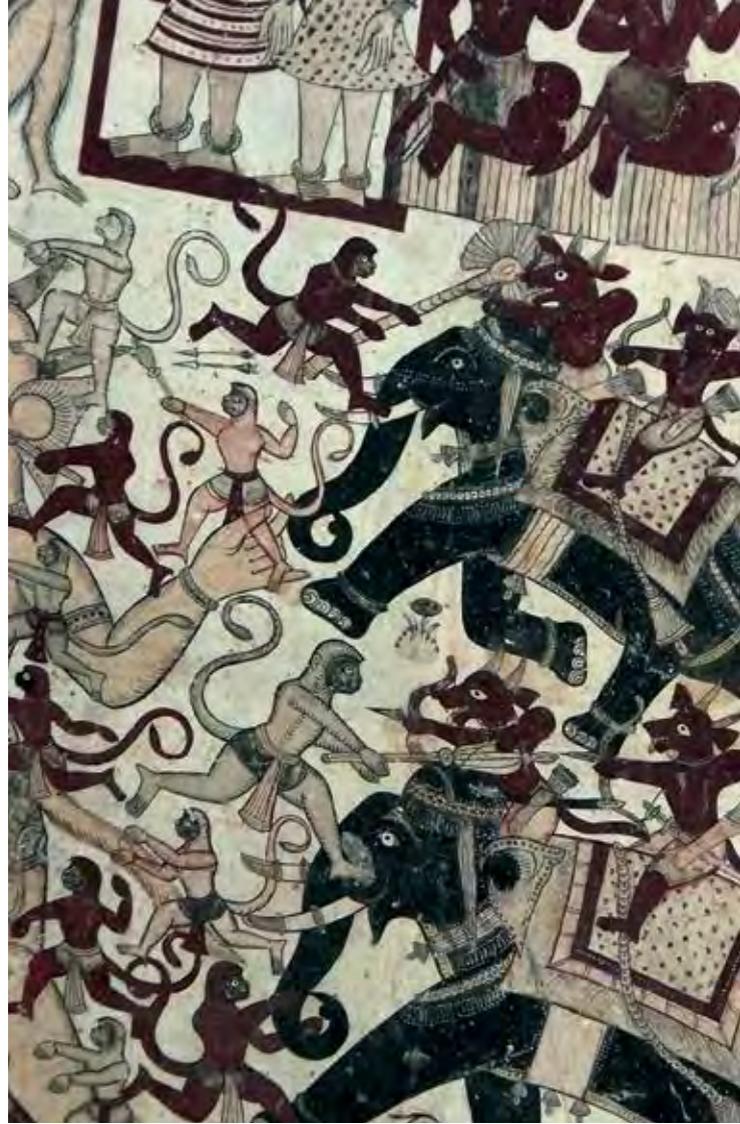
## Approach business as a *ranga-bhoomi*, not a *rana-bhoomi*

The word *rana-bhoomi* signifies a battlefield. In the contemporary business world, all organisations function like a battlefield; modern management is, in fact,

inspired by military strategies. So, we "compete" and "fight to win" and seek to "grab" market share. The whole approach to business is violent; the whole point is to win, stand on top of the list of market capitalisation, and grow at any cost to the satisfaction of the insatiable shareholder. Is that good? Does that mean we are still animals, or even worse—eternally hungry and paranoid, never content, and mocking those who sleep in the shade after eating their fill?

Entrepreneurs should instead create their company into a *ranga-bhoomi* which means a playground where affection dominates the enterprise (notice how we chuckle at the idea—it's because we have bought in the myth of the ruthless enterprise and the dog-eat-dog world). Yet, there is a possibility to create an ecosystem where we grow by enabling others to grow emotionally and intellectually. This eventually leads to everybody growing materially.

Author and academic Dr Radhakrishnan Pillai believes the principles of Chanakya, one of India's greatest leaders, can help train today's entrepreneurs to manage people and businesses better. According to Pillai, Indians are born entrepreneurs who had traditionally been engaged in trade for centuries. But, the series of invasions India witnessed have brought in both a sense of mediocrity and a job-seeking culture. Yet, he says, even today most Indians would ideally like to start their own ventures. So, what makes Indians entrepreneurial? Dr Pillai ventures a few answers.



# Chanakya Neeti

DR RADHAKRISHNAN PILLAI





## NEETI 1

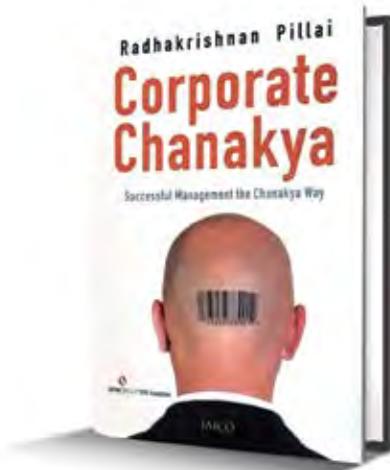
## The ability to adapt is essential for sustainability

It is a well-known fact that the flexibility to change with the changing needs of the business and the environment is the secret to a long lasting business. And the good news is that Indians have a natural ability to do this. How else would Wipro have moved from being a *dalda* company to become an IT giant? Or Mahindra and Mahindra which was traditionally an automobile company diversified into fields like finance, software and tourism? If Indian companies were not adaptive to the changing times, they would have been washed away when the markets opened in 1991.

But it's not just important to adapt to environmental changes in business, but to



**Dr Radhakrishnan Pillai** is the founder director of the Chanakya Institute of Public Leadership, a training school that aims to create a new breed of public leaders by teaching them management principles of India's ancient leadership guru Chanakya. He has also authored *Corporate Chanakya*, a bestselling book that has been translated into 10 regional languages, made into an audio book and a training film.



people needs as well. For instance, in family-run businesses in India, if the father or mother is running the business, the son or the daughter slowly changes the business to make it more professional, and adapts it to the next generation. I think the reason we are so good at this is because we have grown up with a lot of diversity in our living environment. India is a country that is hundreds of countries put together. We deal with numerous people from different states speaking different languages on a daily basis. Interacting with such diversity has taught us the power of adjustment and adaptability quite well.

## NEETI 2

## The power of goodwill

Indian entrepreneurs believe a lot in goodwill, referrals and word of mouth publicity. If you look at Indian family-run businesses, expenditure on marketing and branding is very low as compared to the west. In fact, you'll find several thousand crore businesses that don't even have a website in our country. They just don't feel the need to do business that way. A lot of business transactions here are carried out over simple, verbal commitments based on trust. If an Indian entrepreneur says she'll deliver a business worth ₹1 crore and she doesn't, she loses her credibility in the market forever. Having said that, if an entrepreneur wants to build a global company, word of mouth marketing will only be the first step and she will have to use other forms of marketing to establish the business internationally.

## NEETI 3

## Great leaders seek excellence

If you look back at history, India used to be a land of prosperity and good governance. However, many centuries of foreign invasions have made us content with mediocrity. Think about it. In a nation of 1.2 billion people, there are only a handful of world-class, globally competitive businessmen. Moreover, most Indian companies are used to copying trends from the west. Why aren't there enough trendsetters among us? Is it because we've always been taught to be content with what we have? We are happy being successful. We don't aim for excellence, or to be world leaders. Indian entrepreneurs need to emerge from this mindset. They should seek to become leaders. As the saying goes—"You never win a silver medal, you always lose a gold medal." Indians need to learn to never accept the number two position and search for only the gold.