

# It happened in India

*The story of Pantaloons, Big Bazaar, Central and the great Indian consumer*

Review by: Chinnappa N.C

Bindu Machurlu Venkatesha Murthy

## Summary

The book depicts the ideologies behind the struggles and dedication in setting up a business from the scratch that nobody else dared to dream of. It projects the layers of an ordinary man who made extraordinary things happen. It dares the younger generation to dream and aspire to create and change things. He re-iterates the fact that it is essential to keep business simple whilst breaking the conventional methods of conducting business. He inculcated a spirit of flexibility in order to create a dynamic organisation. Business is about 'learning, unlearning and relearning'. This book helps us understand the finer distinctions of doing business in India; where just quality does not necessitate customer loyalty. By his observation of Indian customers as ones who come in hordes, all dressed up-as if for a festival, to get good value for money he theorizes the need for businesses to develop strategy in sync with the culture of the locality. In an imperfect world that we reside, it is imperative to strive for excellence rather than perfection. The book begins with the biggest success story of the organisation-'Sabse sasta din' and then

moves on to take us through a journey of his life and how he confronted the odds to create Pantaloons, Big Bazaar, Central and eventually the Future Group that spreads across six verticals.

## 1. Made in India

The first chapter depicts Kishore Biyani's way of understanding Indian retail market, the emotions that determine shopping behaviour which includes greed, altruism, fear and envy. He believed in trying to understand the needs, aspirations and buying behaviour of the consumers. The demand for Indianness by the consumers and predicting Indian consumer behaviour becomes a vital aspect of retailing.

Kishore Biyani is inspired by Sam Walton's REWRITE RULES, RETAIN VALUES. This implies the consumer behaviour changes with time and according to the fashion. And according to Kishore Consumers cannot go wrong; they are always right.

He talks about the new generation living in the liberalized economy setting of the virtuous cycle of consumption led economic growth and prosperity in the

country. This paradigm shift is related to the 3C theory: confidence and change bringing in an unprecedented era of consumption. He learnt new things in every phase of his life. His positivity allowed him to learn even from his critics and competitors to perform better and prove them wrong.

## **2. Built from Scratch**

Kishore's curiosity, obsession with rationality in observing and doing things has been a by-product of his adolescence. His challenging attitude was the result of first *disco dandiya* in his locality. He believes it's the responsibility of the new generation to break the shackles of conservativeness. This can be understood by his desire to be a generalist rather than a specialist.

His yearning to be successful on his own strengths laid the foundation for his entrepreneurship ventures very early in his life. This is seen in the book where he sells 'stone wash' trousers and earned his first profit.

## **3. Defying the Odds**

His journey began with the brand WBB through which the power of branding became evident. Inspired from Italian fashion, explored into the business of ready-made trousers through 'Manz wear, which later became Pantaloon. He

established the first franchise shop in Goa as 'Pantaloon shoppe' which he decided to expand nationwide.

He emphasized largely on marketing and Pantaloon was marketed as *one-stop destination for all apparel products*. His business principle was "to provide the ordinary people what rich could afford" to prevent foreign competition. The success was the result of his ambition, positive attitude, creativity and strong determination.

## **4. The new, new thing**

In 1997 he forayed into building his first modern shopping centre in Kolkata, which got overwhelming customer response. Fashion according to him belonged to larger public inspired from the local context. Through his understanding of customer behaviour, he made a conscious effort to blend the Indian context in what was offered. Retailing is not just about selling products, it's about selling an idea. He incorporated early on the concept of Visual merchandising and category management. He created a comfortable environment and personal shopping experience for the customers. For him '*Customer is the Queen*'. With honesty he won the trust of the investors. He was achievement and growth oriented rather than being money minded.

## **5. For God, Country and Big Bazaar**

Inspired from Saravana stores in Chennai, KB had decided to open up a hypermarket. Less profit, more turnover. The idea of big bazaar reflected the look and feel of Indian bazaars so as to not make the customers feel intimidated by the surroundings.

Food bazaar was strategized by tie ups with largest wholesalers and were given the responsibility of managing the entire backend and frontend. This simplified the business and the company could focus on appealing to the customer.

Big bazaar and food bazaar were the greatest part of kb's success. Asked about the survival of kirana stores, KB said that *"we are the nation of shopkeepers that believe in prosper of kiranas and co-existence with modern retail"*.

## **6. Bollywood calling**

The whole chapter talks about his Bollywood stint. He failed in the movie business but learnt valuable life lessons from it. The two movies that are in his name are "Na Tum Jano Na Hum" and "Chura Liya Hai Tumne". Though his movie business failed, he capitalised by launching an extensive line of film merchandise. It was a great learning for him to accept the mistake and to not lose hope.

## **7. Business @ the speed of Thought**

KB's ideal people who form part of his organization are those who are willing to go through the continuous process of learning, unlearning and relearning. He finds the people first, and then the job. He wanted such people because a stable team ensures speed and continuity of the business. He believes in building relationship with his employees. A crucial HR initiative 'gurukool' was undertaken to train the new employees who joined the sales force. This gave the employees the potential to observe customer behaviour and make quicker decisions

His business expanded at a speed of thought. Business models included destination mall, central mall, radio central, central outlets, gold bazaar, home solutions retail e-zone, KB's rural wholesale market for retailers etc. Thus the umbrella entity Future group was formed which includes every undertakings.

## **8. The Pantaloon way**

The business is not just about financial capital, but is also about human capital and creative capital. The creativity connects the emotions and feelings of customers.

The exclusive domain of fashion was seen as a user focussed, prototype based development tool when taken in a holistic

context would impact the organisational dynamics.

He believes that every big or small idea are given shape by idiom, design group. This team doesn't appoint market research, instead the team spend time on streets and observe people. And then they engage in collective idea-making. Some amount of chaos and ambiguity can play a significant role in the development of strategy.

His introspection of organizational way paved the path to '*Pantaloon genes*', which are embedded in the organisational design, its people, the human dynamics, its incentives and the work culture. Thus their philosophy of "rewrite rules, retain values" became their belief system.

### **9. The business of life**

Here he talks about how one should deal their personal life and the business life. Managing the family is no less important than managing the business. There are certain set of standards which no one can cross.

They took the most necessary step in separating ownership, governance and execution. In turn family members concentrated on building and nurturing relationships with business partners and providing an overall guidance to the business. This decision was taken in the best interest of the company.

### **10. Who says elephants can't dance?**

An organisation needs a Creator, preserver and destroyer to keep pace with the changing reality. And Biyani considered himself a creator and a destroyer. This is clearly stated where every three years they have destroyed their existing organizational design. The whole journey which started as a garment manufacturer has now built multiple retail chain.

They formed Pantaloon knowledge group as their prime focus was to gather knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

Kishore Biyani defied conventional logic of doing business. His learning was through experiments. Most businessmen make the mistake of creating an environment only where they win, they see life and business as a competitive arena not a cooperative one. Relationships are built on principles not on the basis of power and position. Building and nurturing the relationships is a hard edged business driver that helps operate the business with speed. Leadership is not about delegation, it is about abdication. At every level, every person's aspirations & dreams have to be understood & more importantly, addressed appropriately. Therefore, to build great

relationships, sacrifices will have to be made.