

Dr. Rajiv R. Thakur



(Interviewed on 07.04.2012 by Jaya Pareek and Pushplata Rajput)

Introduction :

Dr. Rajiv R. Thakur, who did his Ph.D. and Post Graduation in Economics and MBA from IIT-Delhi, is Professor of Strategic Management and International Business Strategy. Presently, he is Director, Jaipuria Institute of Management, Jaipur. In his earlier assignments, he has worked as a Professor at the Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Ghaziabad and Director at AKGIM, Ghaziabad. Prior to joining academics, Dr. Thakur worked with the media industry for over 10 years and was associated with one of India's leading media conglomerate in senior managerial position.

In his academic career, Dr. Thakur has been teaching PGDM and Executive programmes at the leading institutions in India and at universities overseas in Europe, Australia and the Middle East. He has been actively involved in research and publications and has published/presented research papers in international/national journals and conferences. Dr. Thakur has been regularly holding international conferences and organizes MDPs for senior and middle level executives.

Dr. Thakur's contribution in institution building has been appreciated as par excellence, both at IMT Ghaziabad and at AKGIM as Director. He was an active member in the core team for setting up of IMT Dubai and its accreditation by the Commission of Academic Accreditation, U.A.E. Dr. Thakur has widely traveled to the US, Europe, South East Asia, Australia and the Middle East and has gained extensive international exposure.

Interview :

PF : Poornima Faculty

RT : Dr. Rajiv R. Thakur

PF : Good Morning Sir. We are from Poornima Group of Colleges. We may introduce ourselves as Jaya Pareek and Pushplata Rajput, Assistant Professors in the Department of Management Studies. We are grateful to you for agreeing to spare time for an interview with you.

RT : Good Morning. You are welcome.

PF : Sir, to begin with, we would like you to share with us some of your memories of childhood?

RT : I have happy memories of my childhood. I have a big family and I belong to a small town. I had opportunity to move around many cities because of my parents. I am the

only child of my parents. I was not pampered but my parents were very protective and caring. As far as my schooling is concerned, I did my 10th from St. John's school and 12th from St. Xavier's College. I went to R. K. Mission School in Deogarh for one month but I had to withdraw because of some reasons. The spiritual and religious values of that school influenced me much. I am not a very social person but still I am selective with my friendship and it's not like I am consciously selective. It is natural that I would gel with and relate easily with very few people and, if I gel and relate, then I relate whole-heartedly. I cannot be artificial in my relation.

PF : **How was your journey as a student?**

RT : As a student, my journey was not directionless. It was with a purpose. The value system of the family had impact on my study. In terms of career objective, going with that era, the preferred choice was either civil service or engineering. Other areas came as next priorities. My father was also a civil servant so he wanted that I should also go in civil service. Till 12th class, the studies were more syllabus-oriented and there was less of exposure. But when I went in Delhi University I had different world, diverse area of learning. After my post-graduation, I took civil service exam and, in second attempt, I also faced interview but unfortunately, did not get selected in the final list. On the third attempt, I finally withdrew and found my interest in other areas. I joined Times of India Group but my passion for learning was always there. So along with the job, I also did my Ph.D. and had a break and completed my MBA from IIT Delhi, After 10 years of career in Times of India and its international marketing division, I thought that I should go for academics. In 2002, I finally switched to academics.

PF : **Sir, if you do not mind, you may also please tell us something about your family and children?**

RT : I got married in 1996. My earlier wife was in teaching but presently she is running book and stationary gallery. She is a devoted homemaker. We have one daughter who is studying in 9th standard .My daughter excels in studies, music and many other activities. I and my wife give her due independence to take her own decisions.

PF : **Sir, you have come across many people at different stages of your life. Who inspired you the most and why?**

RT : As far as inspiration is concerned, in my childhood, the position and power of civil servant was a guiding force for me but as I moved on, I came across many person in life who guided me in my career. I must make mention about two persons. The first was Prof. P. K. Jain of IIT, Delhi. His commitment towards students was beyond comparison. I would like to share a few things about him. His sincerity towards each and every student and inner commitment was reflected in his attitude. The second person in academic world in terms of leadership and administration was Late Shri C. S. Venketrtnam, Director, IMI, Delhi. His leadership style carried people together. His humbleness inspired me a lot. I learned leadership style and administration from him. I would name a third person also i.e. Mr. Himanshu (presently associated with Nestle). His approach of accountability and perfection in doing things right from the beginning helps me in what I am practicing today.

PF : Similarly, there might have been some important incidents or happenings during your career so far. Which of them, you consider as the most important and would like to remember always?

RT : I remember the time when I was on cross road pressure to become a civil servant. I was trying harder and harder and not getting through and then taking radical decision of leaving that aspiration aside and getting into the corporate world with a firm determination that 'let me build my career here' which ultimately proved me right. I want to give a message here. Instead of looking back, it is always better to look at other alternative for which you are confident that you can do.

PF : Sir, you began your career in a high profile industry. How was your journey as a media professional?

RT : I was lucky to be a part of media industry, because in media I had advantage of interacting with variety of people, cross section of people, better experienced people and the kind of exposure which I got in media industry, I don't think that I could gain in any corporate field. The media experience of ten years helps me in academics in terms of wider and broader understanding of people.

PF : You have been a part of media industry for a long time. Do you really think that media has been playing a positive role in society or sometimes it is media overreach that is not conducive to national or public interest?

RT : I think it is not always media who is responsible, but there are many sections of society who are responsible and they need to understand their responsibility. On positive side, media is the fourth pillar of society. It has been doing lot of positive work with the changing environment and changing priorities in society. The role of media has increased in terms of speed, timeliness, relevance etc and when we talk of corruption free society, right things and bring these things to public domain we must appreciate the efforts of media. I think that with the increasing role of media, accountability on media increases which media also needs to understand.

PF : Sir, what prompted you to leave the industry and join academics?

RT : By 2002, after spending ten years in corporate, and looking my career ahead and larger perspective of family as well as my interest there was always an academic orientation. At the same time, the other reason was that may be another ten years in corporate world although I had a positive career graph but my family was demanding more time from me. I thought that getting into academics would not only satisfy my inner urge but also I would have a better work life balance.

PF : What difference do you feel when you compare the working in industry and in academics? Which one, according to you, is more satisfying?

RT : In my view, satisfaction level relates to individual to individual in terms of what is his priority, interest and how he connects himself to particular job. There cannot be a universal answer for that. In my opinion, work culture in terms of objective is converging. In education, it is not only imparting knowledge but also adding value

to the students, to make them more skilled, whereas, when we talk about corporate, you work to add value to society, stakeholders and customers.

PF : **Sir, what you consider as a turning point in your life?**

RT : Coming and joining Delhi University was a turning point in my life.

PF : **Sir, you have been associated with management education as professor as well as head of the institution. What is your opinion about the current approach to imparting management education in India?**

RT : In India, imparting education is in evolution stage. It is also on the verge of the beginning of a transition period. When I look at the Indian type of management education, some of the B-schools are very good in terms of their orientation, imparting education etc., while, on the other hand; there are large numbers of B-schools which are still teaching in the traditional way. In my opinion a good B-school is that, which empowers their students for working in the industry in terms of their behavior, attitude, knowledge, analytical skills and exposing them to practical side of industry. On these parameters, there exists a gap. But then, there is a realization that for existence in meaningful way, an institution must work on curriculum, imparting education which adds value to students and make them suitable for their different roles in the society.

PF : **Sir you have worked globally and have experience of teaching in different countries. What, in your opinion, are the good and bad attributes of Indian and other countries' education system?**

RT : See, as far good attributes are concerned, as I said in what we are evolving now we must emphasize not only on information and knowledge sharing but also on enhancing the analytical ability, the thinking ability and the skill sets of students. They should be research oriented, should be more in a questioning mode, looking for solutions. Now when you look at these 4-5 attributes, you will find that in good universities abroad, they will focus more on these aspects, just not on understanding the facts or concepts. They see what would be important for students, how the knowledge and information and its application would help them in critically analyzing the situation and working out solutions. I am not saying that we don't have all these here, but if you talk generally, our emphasis is not so much. As far as, bad thing are concerned, it is primarily the value system because of cultural aspects. For an example, in Indian context you would not expect anyone eating in the classroom or may be you would not appreciate informal kind of dress but these are accepted outside. But, I would not give much heed to this. I would rather think that we must focus more on what positives they have from which we can learn.

PF : **From your intensive international assignments, could you please share your experience of dealing with students belonging to different cultures and different nationalities?**

RT : I have been at various places abroad. When I was in Cubistan State University, there I came across with a class that had around 50 students originating from at least 26 countries and what I found was that the cultural sensitivity was something which

was foremost. Say for example, you must be very careful while you are talking to them. We, here in India, when do some activity in group, we do not mind if someone completes his/her assignment. We feel that he/she is having a better understanding of the particular concept. Then we request him/her to explain and help others complete the assignment. Looking at the value system, there was one situation when I asked a particular girl why she did not come forward and share her views. The reaction came, “Sir this is something which is demeaning for them, and they would feel bad”. It was very difficult for me to convince her that we were having a collective learning and, as such, we must learn the art of saying right things even if it is awkward, and communicating it in as little words as possible. The more you talk in such a group; it is possible that you would make more errors with respect to diverse cultures. At the same time, they were highly demanding. At the end of each class, the lecture should be such that it convinces them that they have got certain new understanding and some value addition in that, otherwise they would be very firm and audacious in saying that “Sorry Sir, we are not learning and we would not like to attend the class”.

PF : **Sir, you have been involved in training of corporate executives and professionals through MDPs. What challenges you faced while training them?**

RT : The challenge is that you need to prepare yourself as much on the subject as to the level of the audience. You must know the art of just not lecturing but how to deal with the subject or topic which would be based more on discussion and dialogue, a collective learning mode. Because there you have the professionals coming from the industry so there it is more of sharing of experiences and learning from each other. You need to be more of a moderator rather than a lecturer. Your mind set should change that you are not going there to teach or to impart, but to generate discussion, the process. You, as a moderator or a facilitator, must also have learnt something out of that discussion because they would be coming from different organizations, different backgrounds and they would have lot of examples to share and that makes the MDP a learning platform for all.

PF : **Sir, do you think that a teacher is also social activists? If yes, how if no, then how can a teacher help in giving back to the society apart from teaching?**

RT : It would largely depend on one’s priorities, but then I think becoming an effective professional, the understanding of public life, the understanding of society helps. At what stage you have done that or you got an opportunity to do that or the efforts you made to do it, it is certainly required. As I said from my personal experience, I consider my childhood allowed me to be closer to the society and the understanding helps me even today in connecting or looking at things in the right context or the right perspective. When we talk of big multinationals, they pick up people and give them compulsory training or posting for which they need training. To be on ground, they need to be with the field staff. You can not learn the society in a glass room. So it is something which is important.

PF : **We generally find that most management professionals make their career in corporate or some enter into academics or join in government jobs? Sir, don’t you think that professionals should participate in public life or politics which may eventually help in raising the norms and standards that politicians and**

social activists usually follow and thus make significant contribution in the uplifting of the society?

RT : I think, first and foremost, if you are able to create a prospective at certain value and transform the audience that you are catering to that itself is a contribution towards a social change or a social movement. So I think you need to be honest that you are not there for lecture for 90 minutes but you need to understand and be prepared that in that 90 minutes what kind of changes you have been able to inculcate in the minds of your students and if you have been doing it regularly, if you have been successful there, I think nothing bigger can be transformation in the society. Anything beyond that you can do would be a bonus for you and the society.



PF : **Sir, America and European Countries are again in the grip of economic slow down. Do you think that Indian economy will be able to withstand its repercussions?**

RT : Indian economy has already shown its resilience in worst of the time, given the size of its own domestic demand and of certain policies that it has been following. It shows that it can sustain on its own. As far the impact on growth is concerned, effect on growth of certain sectors will be there when these two major economies are not doing so well. As an alternative you would find that Indian companies and India as an economy, are also trying to explore other countries and markets, so that they can have the alternative to survive.

PF : **We have been reading about FDI in multi brand retail sector which step has been stalled due to compulsions of running a coalition government. Sir, in your view, will this kind of economic reform and others such as overseas investment for the beleaguered aviation industry will be possible in the near future?**

RT : I don't know how you define the reforms. It can not be really defined by one or two parameters like FDI in retail or FDI in aviation. It is a larger debatable topic whether FDI in retail and in what form of FDI in retail should be allowed and what kind of benefits it would be providing. As far as reform is concerned, in true sense, larger

benefits should percolate to the cross section of the society. The challenges where you need to reform should be such which makes your manufacturing industry competitive, your other industries competitive, reforms which help your enterprise to come forward. Those types of reforms certainly have certainly slowed down because of the compulsion of the coalition government, but as I believe, there is always a positive time. I hope for positive years or the time to come. I think within these limitations also. If not today, if not immediately, it will be time when things will be positive, government may change, even the coalition partners may have a rethinking on their stands and that may lead to certain positive decisions.

PF : **In the Union budget 2012-13, seemingly there is no adequate thrust on raising educational standards in the country. What is your opinion about allocating specific resources to universities for promoting research from the point of view of long term implication on innovations required in the changing global scenario?**

RT : This question is not something which is specific to this budget. This is a realization which has been there for quite longer period. So far, the points and problems have been highlighted and as we understand, India's potential for future growth can not be exploited without the enterprise or entrepreneurship or innovation or creative thinking or something which original research can produce. For that, we need resources. This is something which all of us know why good researchers move out from the country, why there is no enough motivation for someone to pick up a profession like research or as an academician

PF : **Sir, there is mushrooming of private universities and institutions all over the country. So is the case in Rajasthan. Do you think that this is being done ignoring the fact that the quality is being sacrificed at the cost of numbers?**

RT : Yes I agree that we have a larger number of institutes. But then, I think we always have a natural course of correction which means that only those institutes will sustain who deliver quality or add values. People and students will also come forward to such institutes only. In my view, larger responsibility of maintaining quality would lay on the institute itself. So today, we can say that there is imbalance of number and quality but in larger run it will correct itself.

PF : **Despite having a busy schedule and lot of commitment how do you balance your personal professional and social life?**

RT : I don't have a very active social life, but, yes that doesn't mean I confine to myself. Wherever I consider that social life is required and is meaningful, I certainly welcome and I come forward in associating myself. As far my family is concerned, within family we also don't have too much of distance. After work hours, whatever time I have I reserve it reasonably for my family and I think spending happy moments together in those hours keeps us happy. I don't have any problem in my family life work balance.

PF : **Sir, what is your success mantra and how do you spend your leisure time?**

RT : My success mantra is to be sincere , honest ,accountable, simple and connected with ground realities .There is no alternative to hard work but that doesn't mean you have to be workaholic. I feel that you need to identify potential in an individual and give him every opportunity to flourish and grow. You need to develop them. Another important thing is that respect your colleague or anyone in this World first as a human being. Designations and positions come and go but there is no substitute to anyone being respected as human being. I think that way you have better commitment from people. Having such attitude, you have better followers; people look to you for any kind of support and you look at them for the same reason.

I spend my leisure time on a few things which I would enjoy myself, which makes me happy. It could be just lying down, watching TV, reading, traveling, but this is the time when I do not work.

PF : **Any advice that you would like to give to the teachers particularly those teaching management for their benefit and the benefit of the students?**

RT : My advice to teachers would be that they add value to the students, make significant changes in them, identify their capabilities and priorities and help them give their full dedication to work.

PF : **Sir, last question, what is your message for the younger generation to make them succeed in life?**

RT : I must say that younger generation have large potential and they are exposed to large opportunities. My message would be that they must appreciate these opportunities, identify their interests and potential and honestly work on them. Believe in themselves that they can do it, avoid short-cuts which have unfortunately become a prevalent practice today, Don't think small. Think big, dream big, have bigger objectives before you. With all these things, I am sure they will be able to achieve their goals. The success mantra is that in given circumstances one has to find a way out and where one can excel.

PF : **Thanks a lot for sharing some of your life experiences with us.**

RT : Thanks.
