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**Research on Business and Entrepreneurship History of India –
Reflections on the State of the Art and Future Directions**

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Abstract

In this paper we provide a report of the insights from the round table held at the Indian Institute of Bangalore (IIMB) on August 28, 2009. The round table, organized by the N.S. Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (NSRCEL) at IIMB, brought together a distinguished and eclectic panel of scholars to converse about the domain of business and entrepreneurship history of India, the perspectives that they had gathered over decades of research, the broad themes that hold promise for rich research possibilities, and the gamut of methodological approaches available; overall identifying the challenges and the interesting research questions within this domain. The implications are considered for management education in business and entrepreneurial history, covering aspects of curriculum, pedagogy and resources. We also fully document the proceedings of the round table in detail within this paper to enable future work in this space.

Keywords: Business history, Business Research in India, Economic history, Entrepreneurial history

Introductory Note

In this paper we attempt to capture the insights as well as document the detailed proceedings of a round table held at the Indian Institute of Bangalore (IIMB) on August 28, 2009. The seminar brought together a distinguished and eclectic panel of scholars to converse about the domain of business and entrepreneurship history of India and the interesting research questions within this domain.

We thank Prof. Pankaj Chandra, Director, IIMB who was a driving force behind the event and Sri Ramachandra Guha, who graced the occasion with his presence and was pivotal to the organization of the round table.

Prof. K. Kumar, Chairperson of the NSRCEL, IIMB, chaired the panel with the following participants:

Dinesh C Sharma, an independent journalist and columnist with 23 years of experience. He specializes in science and technology, environment, health and medicine, information technology, development and media issues. In 2005, Dinesh was awarded a book writing fellowship by The New India Foundation, the outcome of which was “*Long Revolution: The Birth and Growth of India’s IT Industry*” (HarperCollins).

Prof. Dwijendra Tripathi, former Kasturbhai Lalbhai Chair Professor of Business History at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and a *pioneer* in promoting the study of Business History in India. Professor Tripathi is the founder Editor of The Journal of Entrepreneurship and the author of The Oxford History of Indian Business.

Harish Damodaran, a Senior Assistant Editor at the Hindu Business Line, has over 16 years of experience as a reporter and editorial analyst with the Press Trust of India and the Hindu Business Line and has specialised in agri-business and commodities coverage. In December 2004, Damodaran was conferred a book writing-fellowship from the New India Foundation, Bangalore, which resulted in the book titled “India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business, And Industry in A Modern Nation”.

Mekhala Krishnamurthy is pursuing a PhD in Anthropology at University College, London and is presently in the middle of an 18 month ethnographic fieldwork on transforming agricultural markets. She is a graduate in Social Studies from Harvard University with an MPhil in Social Anthropology from Cambridge University.

Dr. Raman Mahadevan is a senior economic and business historian currently based in Chennai as a Professor at the Institute of Development Alternatives. He has made significant scholarly contributions to Modern South Indian Studies especially in the area of industrial and

capitalist development in colonial South India. He is the co-editor of *South India Economy: Agrarian Change, Industrial structure and State Politics 1914–1947* (Delhi: OUP, 1991) and *Making of India: Land, Population, Institutions and State in Historical Perspective* (forthcoming).

Dr. Surajit Mazumdar is a Professor at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), New Delhi. His research interests lie in the areas of the Indian Corporate Sector and the Political Economy of Industrialization. Before joining the ISID in June 2007, Surajit Mazumdar had a teaching career spanning 14 years, almost entirely at the Department of Economics, Hindu College, University of Delhi.

The following report of the proceedings of the round table was prepared jointly by Prof. K. Kumar along with doctoral students Chinmay Tumbe, Deepali Sharma, Devi Vijay, Ramya Venkateswaran and Srivardhini Keshavamurthy.

SECTION I

REPORT OF THE ROUND TABLE ON BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP HISTORY OF INDIA

Introduction

Prof. K. Kumar opened the proceedings by briefly stating the intent behind the event. At a broader level, there is a strongly felt need at IIMB to introduce business history into the management curriculum to enhance its effectiveness. As a first step towards addressing these requirements, this “Round Table” session, brings together leading scholars from the discipline to review the state of the art and discuss the challenges in carrying out research in business and entrepreneurship history (data, methodology, skills and resources) as well as to suggest ways of bringing in a business history perspective to our management curriculum. It is also expected that the discussions would lead to a research agenda and draw up the broad outline of a business history module that could be incorporated into the management curriculum.

Prof. K.Kumar further laid out the format of the Round Table. The discussion would be carried out in three sessions, of approximately one hour each, with each session focusing on a distinct theme. The first session would elicit the perspectives of the panelists on Business and Entrepreneurship History of India based on their own engagement with the topic. In the second session, the panellists would be expected to articulate their position on the relevant themes and approaches in researching business and entrepreneurship history, as well as the challenges in carrying out such research. This would involve taking stock of the state of the field, the critical gaps in our understanding as well as the methodological challenges faced by researchers in this area. Finally, in the last session, panelists would be invited to present their observations on how to position business and entrepreneurship history within management education, covering aspects of curriculum, pedagogy and resources.

Session 1: Perspectives on Business and Entrepreneurship History of India

Since the panelists were from diverse fields, this session elicited diverse perspectives on the field of business and entrepreneurship history.

1. Business history as a means of understanding the present

All the panelists affirmed that business history provides insights into many spheres, intellectual or otherwise, where we have inadequate understanding.

- a. Prof. Tripathi revealed that his engagement with history was intertwined with his journey to find himself, in his words, “to understand myself as a part of my surroundings. Business history gave me the opportunity to look at the experiences of individuals -individuals who built organizations; individuals who built companies; individuals who responded to situations and responded to change. Then I began to have some kind of understanding of what Indian society is like. What are the forces in Indian society that egg people onto certain things. I began to understand a little bit. That’s the reason that I remained with business history.” Prof. Tripathi maintained that business history was not a sub-discipline of economic history and was more closely related to social history. Business history is in some sense a total history- social, economic, political, legal, history of culture and biography. “Business is a part of life and it is going to draw on all aspects of life”
- b. Dinesh Sharma sought to understand “the whole story”. As a science journalist in the ‘90’s, there was a lot to report on, but many more gaps in the narrative that needed understanding. His attempt to fill in the gaps in the story led to his engagement with New India Foundation
- c. Patterns: Harish Damodaran notes the predominance of the merchant class in India’s capitalist society as against the producers in other developed nations. He adds that most of India’s innovations happen in the field of marketing or finance, not production, and therein lies a puzzle worth probing.
- d. Business history, and more specifically, economic history, was one approach to gaining insights into certain unanswered questions according to Surajit Majumdar. Why do some firms grow, while others decline? In periods why do certain kinds of businesses grow, while others decline? How do new ones come in and how do the old ones maintain their dominance? Or the opposite? He adds that a comparison of India’s industrialization experience with those of standard indicators reveals a stunted case of industrialization “where we have the relative significance of industrial sector -production as well as employment , which has

crossed a peak, at a much lower level than, as has been the case generally with other countries.” Deeper understanding of such phenomena could help us understand the long term implications of this kind of industrialization.

- e. Starting from the discipline of anthropology, Mekhala Krishnamurthy found the social history perspective very useful while carrying out ethnographic studies to understand the transformations happening in society.

2. Concerns with the state of Business history

The panellists agreed that the state of business history in India is far from satisfactory and the time is ripe to start research on business history, as the great Indian middle class has finally unified Saraswathi and Lakshmi. They also identified at a broad level, some lacunae in the state of the of the discipline.

- a. Prof. Raman Mahadevan lamented that entrepreneurship history has never received the attention it deserved- and Harish Damodoran also admitted that there has been a decline of interest.
- b. Much of the work related to the colonial period. There is a need to understand the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's in order to understand some of the significant post-colonial developments – for example, why India opted for an import substituting industrialization model.
- c. A lot of our understanding of entrepreneurship in India remained north centric- very little attention was paid to the developments in the south.
- d. , Business history and economic history have been relegated to the last within the pecking order within the discipline of economics, despite the importance of its role in understanding the economic development trajectory of nations.

Session 2: Business History Research

Themes

Prof. Tripathy at the outset pointed out that the themes emerge from engagement with the subject. Due to long engagement with the subject at different levels and perspectives, the panellists elicited a list of themes that could revitalise enquiry into the business history of India.

These can be categorized as period related, phenomenon related, context based, industry based or looking at evolutionary trends.

- Mr Raman Mahadevan highlighted the need to focus on the period of 1930's till 1950s. In his assessment, this period, despite being very critical to understand the post colonial development, has somehow been overlooked by economic and business historians. He suggested taking a long view approach that integrates both the pre and post independence perspectives. Mr. Mahadevan also highlighted some of the unexplored aspects that relate to the study of this period.
 - The economic impact of partition on Punjab and Bengal, and a broader consideration of the geography of India before independence that included Bangladesh, Pakistan, Burma, and the related economic dislocations.
- The sources of entrepreneurship in different regions. The focus of entrepreneurship history in colonial period had been Northern India- Bombay and Bengal predominantly - where most of the commercial and industrial investments were heralded by the merchants. But the sources of entrepreneurship in other regions were very different, the history of which have not been captured adequately in the literature. For example, during the decades from 30s to 50s, Andhra witnessed a movement towards service industry, agro commercial capital from Tamil Nadu was invested in industries and Chettiars faced constraints on repatriation of capital from other parts of the world to India, which if had been possible would have altered the economic landscape post- independence. Another interesting aspect highlighted by Mr. Mahadevan as having missed the attention of scholars in the field but remained an exciting research arena is the contribution of small and medium scale enterprises to the economy.
- Mr. Dinesh Sharma posed some interesting questions and the necessity to seek their answers. He suggested that if we look at the top companies and try to investigate the historical, policy context that led them to this position, we are very likely to get interesting insights which are often missed. Referring to his recent work – a book in which he had catalogued the developments in IT industry in the past 40 years- he maintained that there still remained some interesting questions about the IT industry that could be looked at. As an example, he pointed out that tracing the history of TCS, the largest software company in India, to identify its origins, would lead us to company would lead to the abolishment of managing agency system, that forced Tatas to look for

alternate revenue stream, which they found in Tata Data Centre, that later became TCS. Few other themes were suggested for detailed study by Mr. Sharma.

- The role of state entrepreneurship in IT – the context that led to the setting up of state enterprises like Electronic Corporation of India Limited and CMC, the reasons behind the commercial success or failure of such attempts at state entrepreneurship.
- The new legion of entrepreneurs who are creating new types of businesses as cut flower business, renewable energy, ayurvedic drugs, medical tourism, low cost aviation, dot com businesses thus reshaping the traditional business landscape.
- The idea of creating industrial estates, electronic cities, hardware technology parks, software technology parks etc, electronic cities came about and the reasons for their success, growth or failure.
- Interesting themes of research thrown up by the knowledge economy - for example study of the rise of new industry sectors like IT industry, biotechnology and the emergence of companies in these industries in last 20-25 years that contributed significantly to the growth of GDP, the policy environment and influences in of these industries
- The changing role of state from a Regulator in the 70's to Facilitator in the 80's and a Collaborator in the 90's and the concomitant change in state-industry relationship.
- Specific industries like beverage industry, its position within a country like India, the often changing role of multinational companies in the industry like Coa Cola
- Changing scenario of banking, the increasing role of private sector in banking in the last 20-25 years and the role played by technology, especially computerization in this industry.
- Biographies of some successful entrepreneurs like Kiran Mazumdar Shaw in Biotechnology, Dr. Pratap Reddy, Dr. Naresh Trehan and Dr. Devi Shetty in health care, Pranoy Roy, Rajat Sharma, and Raghav Behl in media, and business models adopted by their companies.
- Mr. Harish Damodaran emphasised focus on the type of innovations in Indian businesses, types of entrepreneurs and the social context in emergence of family business institution.
 - The emergence and the driving forces behind the new entrepreneur class that is educated and is from a different background than the traditional merchant class

The institution of the family firm in Indian context and its evolutionary path linking to the sources of capital residing in family and social networks.

- The profile of Indian capitalist class, which he observed, was mainly of merchant origin unlike the producer led capitalist class of USA, and the reasons for such differences in profile.
- The source of innovations that were behind the emergence of business activities- which again was observed to be more marketing and finance led and thus different from the west which was more technology and production led - and the reasons thereof..
- In Prof. Tripathi advocated a simple and practical approach of starting somewhere and building on it.
 - As an example, Prof. Tripathy narrated his own experience of starting with an observation of the difference between the economic performance of India and Japan. Not very convinced by the explanations offered from a colonial influence perspective, his further explorations led him to the adoption of technology, which found to be very different in India and Japan, and in turn converged on the theme of technology adoption in the Indian industry. Prof. Tripathy suggested, as a starting point, to study the evolution of businesses, especially concentrating on large houses that would lead to biographies and auto biographies, and give an insight on relationship between business and society, business and economy and business and politics and so on and so forth. Since every big business starts small, Mr Tripathi opined that tracing the evolution of big companies and business groups will help in understanding on how businesses improved and developed; and the influence of social, political and policy forces on this process.
- Surajit Majumdar made an important observation that there is an historical angle to every economy and its motion in time involves path dependent qualitative changes over and above the quantitative expansions. In the present context business firms constitute an important segment of the economic structure and provide an operational arena to change agents who work towards the economic mobility. These agents themselves undergo change with changes in the economy bringing along social changes as well. Therefore there is a gap left by economics in its analyses of an 'economic man' that is to be filled by business historians in understanding what these change agents do for economic mobility that also has social ramifications. These actions of individuals or firms or the questions raised by 'what kind of innovators are there in Indian context can be better

answered by analyzing these actions in the historical context. From this perspective, he identified a few themes of importance.

- The relative growth or decline of firms and the effect of context and time. The internal and external changes and their significance require to be probed in the historical context, for example the emergence of middle class and its link to the growth of salaried white collared work force in businesses.
- The important historical forces behind industrialization in India and its implications for businesses. Specifically, the ‘stunted industrialization’ – transitioning to a service economy before transitioning completely into an industrial economy - experienced by India and the implication of this transition to a service economy for future course of industrialization The understanding of business strategy from a historical perspective. by studying the antecedents of a particular strategy in historical context and its consequences on the environment, and the implications for the trajectory of the business firms.

Approaches

The historical method.

- Ramachandra Guha clarified on the essence of the historical method, as comprising the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidence to research and then to write histories in the form of accounts of the past. To distinguish it from other longitudinal qualitative studies, the method is characterized by the combination of archival sources, primary data, thick description and the craft of weaving the story together.
- Prof. Tripathy emphasized that the norms of the historical research method would be applicable to business history exactly as it is applicable to economic history or social history. However there is no escape from borrowing from other disciplines. Just as a political historian would depend on some of the methods of political analysis, or an economic historian would go into the whole question of what are the broad economic forces, similarly business historians may also adopt, borrow, and spend some time to learn from other disciplines. Prof. Tripathi provided an example from his experience, where a company was supposed to have been gifted to the share holders by another company, and in order to understand this rather complex transaction, , he took the help of

an expert in the accounting discipline who explained using the tools of accounting to explain how this transaction was done.

- Prof. Raman Mahadevan elaborated that the two tenets of enquiry in the historical method revolve around the questions of causation and generalization. As an illustration, he explained that asking questions such as why there was no Bengali entrepreneurship or why is it that the Chettiars didn't move into industry in spite of having the money, will lead to identifying a connected string of causal arguments encompassing several dimensions as well as generalizations on why is it that only some people move into entrepreneurship and others don't. Such questioning, according to him, will also force one to willy nilly look at other parameters such as the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions.

Slicing by time.

- Prof. Raman Mahadevan advocated a long duration approach when he opined that when compared to the amount of work done on the pre independence period, very little work had been done in the post Independence period. But yet, there needs to be a connect between the two and hence the emphasis on the need for focusing on the 40's. The economic impact of the Partition on Bengal and Punjab due to economic dislocation and loss of markets is of important consequence to entrepreneurial history. It was observed that the 40's is very important and one needs to start there as there was a certain broadening and deepening of capital accumulation process between the pre-30s and post-30-40 period, where one finds most groups emerging. This would help us connect history to post colonial developments and therefore this *periodization* can provide significant understanding on the forces of entrepreneurship. Finally he suggested the overall periodization as 1930-1950; 1950-1984 as pre-liberalization; and finally 1984-2008 as liberalization.
- An interesting facet of the historical method revealed by Prof. Raman Mahadevan was that of tracing *alternate trajectories*, belonging to the domain of *counterfactual history* (Bunzl, 2004) which seeks to explore history and historical incidents by means of extrapolating a timeline in which certain key historical events did not happen or had an outcome which was different from that which did in fact occur. The Chettiar investment in industry in relation to the total investable surplus at their command was very insignificant, marginal. Much of their investment remained in the service sector, in

banking, essentially in land. The reason why this happened was because much of the capital was locked in overseas, in land, in rubber plantations, in tin mines, coconut estates and could not be, due to certain historical circumstances, repatriated. It is in the domain of counterfactual history, but had the Chettiars managed to repatriate the capital, India's contemporary economic history would have been very different. The Chettiars were much bigger than the Marwaris and the Parsis in terms of capital according to Prof. Raman Mahadevan, so had they managed to bring it, the entire post independence history, economic history at least would have been very different with the South possibly being a major player in the Nehruvian period.

Slicing by sites and sources.

- Prof. Raman Mahadevan pointed out that much of studies of entrepreneurship in the colonial period is focused on Northern India- Bombay and Bengal which is where much of the commercial and industrial investment resides, with the traditional actor entrepreneur being the merchant capitalist. Looking beyond these regions, one finds that the sources of entrepreneurship are very different which is not being captured adequately in the existing literature with some exceptions. There is a need really for redrawing the *geographical contours of accumulation process* so that we can capture more on the origins and trajectories of various groups, such as those in the Southern parts of the country.
- Mekhala Krishnamurthy spoke of the ramifications of choosing methods, scale and sites of research. The discipline to which the method belongs, the choice of sites of research are things that matter. For instance, an anthropological researcher might choose an ethnographic method that provides intimate data on the here and now, revealing complex interconnections and mobile patterns. It is profitable to choose sites that reveal the structures in everyday life, the wheels of commerce, and the perspective of the world. She illuminated it with examples from her research experience in a *mandhi* town in the market town called Hardha in Madhya Pradesh, where she studies the transformation in communities, commodities and the political landscape.
- Harish Damodaran underscored the importance of the family firm- a still prominent institution in India -as an important site of analysis. The evolution of the family firm over time in the aftermath of the abolition of the Managing Agency system, its continued dominance in the Indian business milieu, its many strengths and possible weaknesses are

all aspects that that need to be deeply studied. The topic is fascinating both sociologically and even from a legal point of view. The impact of the abolition of the Managing Agency system, and how it has affected current day concerns such as corporate social responsibility emphasizes the need to wholly study the institution of the family firm. Further he added that we are seeing entrepreneurs from very different backgrounds, who are not from the usual, traditional merchant class, whose stories could be captured through a lot of case studies.

Slicing by scope.

- Prof. Raman Mahadevan opined that there has been an obsessive concern with the sites of Bombay, Calcutta and Ahmedabad, even Kanpur perhaps, and that has resulted in our focus being glued on the large sector such as the TATA groups, the Birlas, the Singhanias. But we have overlooked the small players who were emerging at this time. Therefore he pointed out that there is a need to go beyond the large, and look at the small and medium enterprises. The rise of a major group like the Hero group and the Munjals, for instance, cannot be adequately understood unless one located them in the pre Independence period as a small entity. Size itself is a question of time and space, as he argued, where a small firm of today can be the big firm of tomorrow.
- Prof. Mahadevan also brought up the study of mortality and its relevance to the study of business history. Post Independence history has to include the study of some of the major players and business houses who had collapsed and the reasons for their failure. There has been considerable mortality at various points of time and this is worthwhile to study more closely. Mapping of entrepreneurs: sizewise, industry wise, region, state or period-wise are all other dimensions that could be included in the study agenda.
- Prof. Tripathi provided an overall approach for the selection of themes, because themes emerge out of an engagement with the subject. He recommended for scholars to concentrate on the large houses as they would give an insight into the historical forces that shaped business behaviour and evolution. Most of the large houses would have most probably started small, such as Mafatlal or Ambani, and therefore the improvement and development of these businesses could also be captured. Further, Prof. Tripathi also laid out his consideration of entrepreneurial history, as a subset of business history, which in turn is a subset of social history more than economic history.

Finer directions.

- Exploring *intimacy* and exploring *interconnections* were two broad philosophies that Mekhala Krishnamurthy brought out from her experience of ethnographic studies at Hardha. In exploring intimacy, one looks at capturing personal histories, biographies, and importantly articulations of change. Tracing life histories of people and communities becomes important, and even the unlikely life stories of inanimate entities (*mandhi*) provided insights about which entrepreneurs moved from the old *mandhi* to the new *mandhi*, how and why. In exploring interconnections, one is involved in reconstructing the networks within a business community, including looking at their “side businesses” and the process of tracking, tracing, finding and recapturing life histories. As a methodology it is time consuming and very challenging to reconstruct the networks together, but extremely rewarding and important.
- Mekhala Krishnamurthy also cautioned about being restricted to interviewing techniques while doing qualitative research, and instead advocated hard core observation as is possible through ethnographic approaches. Such an approach enhances the ability to capture *volatility, mobility, morality and the concept of the future*. As soon as one asks a question in an interview, the interviewee is wont to think, often multiple times, about what they are going to tell you; whereas while one is sitting on the platform and observing, volatility means that one can see the change as it is happening. Mobility is about how one decides to travel between locations within the sites of research and the challenges involved in multifaceted ethnographic research. And last, but not the least, in studying about histories, how does one think about how people are conceptualizing their futures and thinking about the boundaries of morality. Everyday discussion about morality, people constantly articulating what they consider the consequences, notions of character and conduct, the distinction between good and bad, conceptualizations about the past and the future, of generations and units, where the family firm is going etc. are interesting research topics in themselves.
- In conclusion, while several approaches were possible, Prof. Tripathi advocated adopting an approach germane to understanding the evolution of business in the country. Even as a safe instance if we take up the case of what kind of approach has been adopted in business history research in the United States where business history made its first appearance, one may note that Chandler’s work was restricted to the firm as the level of analysis and it did not adequately paint the social context in which this history was located. Company history thus is not total history. The Japanese are still concentrating on firm history or State policy history. Scandinavian countries are focussing on the State and

business; Germany, again state and business, state policy. Our society will have to adopt its own approach to researching business history or in any subject keeping in mind the demand of the society.

Challenges

- Business history as an area of research in India has a long way to go. The work in the area has been sparse and limited to biographies of leading business moguls and the evolution of a few high profile companies. There had been very little organized research. Also, business history is not at the top of pecking order amongst students and researchers. The question is how to generate interest in the area. Prof. Tripathi opined that the only way we can generate interest in the area is by demonstrating that the field provides insights into very many areas which in the normal course, you wouldn't get. It is important to start somewhere, albeit on a small scale and build on it.
- The panelists agreed that a good way to jumpstart research in Business history is by instituting a special chair to pursue research in this area. It's important to note that Alfred Chandler's path breaking work was made possible because there was a special chair that was donated to Business history research. The panelists urged IIMB to setup a centre for Business history headed by the chair, which would be the nodal centre of Business history research.
- Another challenge, as Raman Mahadevan pointed out is the absence of a database of entrepreneurial activity in the post-independence period. Mapping of entrepreneurs, size wise, industry wise and region wise, including those in the tertiary sector is important. The traditional focus on the industrialists should be expanded to include entrepreneurs in the tertiary service sectors.
- Mekhala Krishnamurthy stressed on the importance of the techniques of anthropology in tracking, tracing, finding and recapturing histories. It is a time consuming methodology but a vitally important one to reconstruct and draw the networks.
- Prof. Tripathy summed up the challenges thus – “Challenge is to have business history acceptable in a society where history itself is losing ground. We have to accept that it is not going to be very easy business because we have seen that perspective type of courses have been steadily losing ground in India. We have to therefore start somewhere, where we stop telling stories and start writing history”.

Session 3: Business & Entrepreneurial History in Management Education

The third session of the Round Table revolved around business and entrepreneurial history in management education. The main focus of the speakers was on how to make business history interesting, acceptable and marketable. The topic of business history has usually been linked with management education rather than the historical profession. It first appeared at the Harvard Business School in the United States in 1927 (Fridenson, 2007) and took shape in India at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad in 1965 under Prof Tripathy. The course, however, has been on decline of late.

- Prof. Pankaj Chandra initiated the proceedings by asking three pertinent questions: What does one teach in business history, how does one go about teaching business history and what should be the principles governing the development of a curriculum for a course on business history.
- Regarding the principles, both Prof. Tripathy, and Prof. Majumdar were convinced that any curriculum must be embedded in a research enabling environment so that both the teacher and the student were stimulated by the subject. To this end, the setting up of a funded chair for research and teaching was proposed.
- Prof. Tripathi drawing from his own teaching experience, suggested that the course be pitched at the doctoral level rather than at the MBA level. He added that the course should teach history and not antiquarian studies i.e. the past should enlighten the student of the present and the past should not be studied for the sake of studying it.
- Prof. Majumdar suggested on the other hand, that the course be pitched at a basic level keeping in mind the diversity of students in management schools. A member of the audience also pointed out that the course should facilitate a contextual understanding of events to make it more interesting.
- Regarding what to teach, both Prof. Tripathy and Prof. Majumdar were of the opinion that to develop a historical perspective, the course would have to cover ground from colonial times. Mr. Majumdar suggested that the course content could cover three periods: colonial, post-independence and post-liberalisation times. The last period could

have more global coverage to make it more interesting. However, as a rejoinder, Mr. Ram Guha argued that the course need not go that far back in time and covering institutions and individuals in the past 30 or 40 years would also suffice.

- Regarding how to teach, Mr. Dwijendra Tripathi was of the firm opinion that the course be pitched at the doctoral level as a research based course with students reading research papers and presenting in class. Mr. Ram Guha opined that a course on business history with interesting case studies would entice MBA students in a management school setting.
- Mrs. Mekhala Krishnamurthy pointed out that field work grants for summer projects could be set up whereby students could spend time researching on historical aspects of businesses.
- Mr. Majumdar suggested that if not as a separate course, the historical perspective could also be embedded in other courses of the management school such as corporate strategy and company law and as an audience member pointed out – in leadership and culture studies.
- In terms of the resources needed for teaching, it was pointed out the Prof.Tripathi's Oxford History of Indian Business currently stands as the most comprehensive text. Additional resources could be gathered from other disciplines like economic anthropology and also from old MBA students' project works on various firms. Indeed, students' projects have been used constructively elsewhere to develop course material on entrepreneurship (Bhide, 1996) and the same could be done for business history.
- Prof. Pankaj Chandra wrapped up the session by offering a graded approach to initiate research and teaching of business history at the IIMB. He suggested that the work need not start in-house and invited motivated researchers to keep the activity going after which the institute could take it in-house.

Conclusion

Prof. K. Kumar mentioned in conclusion that the edited version of the proceedings of the round table discussion will be published in due course and thanked the panellists and participants before closing the session.

SECTION II

Researchable Questions emerging from the Round Table

Dr. Raman Mahadevan

1. What has been the economic impact of partition on Punjab and Bengal, with a broader consideration of the geography of India before independence (that included Bangladesh, Pakistan, Burma, and the related economic dislocations)
2. What were the sources of entrepreneurship in different regions of India?

Mr. Dinesh Sharma

1. What were the historical policy context that led the top companies in India to their current positions?

Mr. Harish Damodaran

1. What role did community networks, government and family spectrum play in R&D investments in Indian business houses?

Ms. Mekhala Krishnamurthy

1. How does the role of stakeholders change as Hardha[or any other places] moves from the old mandi to the new mandi?
2. How can we capture regional histories in ways that are relevant to the region itself?
3. In studying about histories, how does one think about how people are conceptualizing their futures and thinking about the boundaries of morality

Prof. Tripathi

1. What has been the evolution of businesses, particularly how have the large houses evolved from being small businesses?

Mr. Surajit Majumdar.

1. Why do some firms grow, while others decline? In periods why do certain kinds of businesses grow, while others decline? How do new ones come in and how do the old ones maintain their dominance? Or the opposite? A comparison of India's industrialization experience with those of standard indicators reveals a stunted case of industrialization "where we have the relative significance of industrial sector -production as well as employment , which has crossed a peak, at a much lower level then, as has been the case generally with other countries." Deeper understanding of such phenomena could help us understand the long term implications of this kind of industrialization.

Audience

1. How can Indian business history bring together the perspectives from economic history, social history and also political history?

SECTION III

SESSION TRANSCRIPT

Prof. K. Kumar opened the proceedings by introducing the participants.

Prof. K. Kumar: Let me extend a very warm welcome to you on behalf of IIM Bangalore and NSRCEL for this Round Table on Business and Entrepreneurship History. Business History is a very important contributor to the management discipline as a whole. I would even stretch myself to say that some of the recently emerging sub-disciplines within management almost completely owe their coming into existence to the work done by business history scholars. Having said all this, this whole idea of understanding and developing a historical perspective to business in general and to the discipline that I am engaged in –entrepreneurship- in particular has not been what it should be. This is true in terms of the amount of work that has been going on, in terms of the depth and in terms of the rigor with which we have been approaching it. We thought we should initiate some action, to bring this whole topic of Business History and Entrepreneurship History into the forefront of the academic setting. And the best way to get started was to get a pool of experts in the discipline who could give us a perspective on how they have engaged with the subject over the years, what gaps exist in the discipline, how they can be filled and finally, how the output of the historians' work can be integrated into the management curriculum. This is the broad perspective with which we have approached this session.

I will spend the next few minutes outlining what we intend to do. This first session is mainly a kind of an ice breaking session where I would be requesting each one of the panelists to give their narration about how they engage with this whole subject of business history coming from whatever disciplines they are coming from and what are some of the highlights as they see in terms of engaging with business history. We will probably have the panelists going around taking about 5 to 7 minutes talking about their perspective. And then we will have about 10 to 15 minutes of questions, subject to the time availability, we will have some of the few questions raised by the audience which some of the panelists may clarify and then we will close the first session with that. Then we will take a 10 minute coffee break and then we will re- assemble.

The second session will focus on research in business history. For the second and third session we will have the panel into two groups. The first group will come and talk about research in business history. First of all they will take stock of what has taken place in this field in the last few years, where this field stands right now, what are some of the critical gaps in the way that business history has evolved, and which scholars can attempt to fill in. This will help us to set up

an immediate research agenda in terms of what we could be doing in that discipline. In addition to that, while talking about research the panelists will also talk a little bit about the methodological challenges involved in doing business history research, particularly in a setting like India. So that will be the theme of the second session. After a very brief break, we will move on to the third session. Here we will talk about an immediate agenda as far as the institute is concerned. We will look at how we can develop a business history curriculum and how we can integrate it with the main stream management curriculum which we are delivering in many of our programs. What could be the focus of this curriculum, what kind of pedagogical techniques we could use, and how do we go about designing some of these components of the curriculum. So that will be the third part. So with that we will close the session. I would also like to underline that this is the beginning of an initiative. We don't want to leave it as a one time event and then go back our ways. So to ensure that what we have also done is to ensure that most of our, many of our doctoral students participate in this event. We are also recording, both in audio and video. So we will use this recording to put together whatever has been said today with some of the work which our students would be doing. The aim is to bring out some of these as working papers so that it becomes the basis for continuing the work on an on going basis. So that is the broad agenda for the day. So without any further ado I will request Prof. Tripathi to start off the proceedings.

Prof. Tripathi: I have been with history throughout my life ever since I know myself. Sometime ago, a very close friend of mine asked me why I remained with history. My answer was *I wanted to understand myself as a part of my surroundings*. And this has been in fact the reason that I stumbled upon business history. I came to business history in stages- from general history to economic history and then to business history. Somehow or the other, the general history including the cultural history of India, did not give me the kind of answers that I wanted for myself. The political history left me dissatisfied and I began to feel that economic history was telling me everything about the environment and nothing about the kind of surroundings that have shaped myself, not as an individual but as a citizen of the country. You will be surprised to know that it was business history that began to give me some answers that I was looking for. Business history gave me the opportunity to look at the experiences of individuals.-individuals who built organizations; individuals who built companies, individuals who responded to situations and responded to change. Then I began to have some kind of understanding of what Indian society is like. What are the forces in the Indian society that egg people onto certain things. I began to understand a little bit... That's the reason that I remained with business history. Then at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, I accepted the opportunity to organize a course in business history. Frankly speaking I thought that I will stay there for 2 years and go and have a

safe haven of refuge in our history department. But then, I began to feel very involved with it. I remained involved throughout my career and have remained involved to this day. Now, I said all these things in order to highlight a particular point. That particular point is what I think is the spirit of Business history. There is a notion that business history is a sub-discipline of economic history. I refuse to accept that because I feel that business history is closer to social history than economic history alone simply because business history is a result of forces operating in a society, and if you do not understand social history, you do not understand business history. Many would think that (since) I deal with business history. I must be conservative. Politically I have always been a liberal. I continue to be liberal and I think a good historian of any quality would be a liberal. Thank you.

Mr. Kumar: Mr. Mahadevan

Mr. Raman Mahadevan: Let me at the outset thank Prof Kumar and the others who are organizing what I think is a much needed Round table session with this. I have always felt that Business history in India or entrepreneurial history has not received the kind of importance it deserves. And despite Prof. Tripathi's enormous efforts right through the 70's and 80's, I remember, at Ahmedabad, to really acquire, to provide a certain space for business history , somehow once Prof. Tripathi left, that couldn't be sustained. So I am really happy Prof. Kumar could take this initiative to, in a sense organize this, especially given this enormous change that has taken place in the Indian economy since the 90's and with rare exceptions, Harish being one of the exceptions, who really focused on post Independent India, very little work has been done on the post independence period. Much of the work really relates to the colonial period. So far as my engagement with business history is concerned, the trajectory is broadly that of Prof. Tripathi in that I was a student of history in the Delhi University with my BA (Hons.) and an MA in Modern Indian History and then chose to specialize. The 70's was the period when there was considerable interest and debate in the whole process of development. So we were willy nilly drawn into economic history though there was a course in The Delhi School of Economics in economic history. But we chose not to opt for that because we were not sure what the career prospects after an MA in economic history. I initially wanted to look at the economic basis of partition, because whatever research I had done at my Post Graduate level, I could see that there was a crystallization of a Muslim capitalist class who were beginning to organize themselves as Muslim business men extending support to the Muslim League. I really wanted to probe this and I had the privilege of being associated with the late Prof. S. Gopal who was very supportive. But unfortunately all the material was in Pakistan and I had to give that up. And then I decided to move to the South. Dharma Kumar when he did a review of research in economic history had

mentioned that much of the entrepreneurial history was focused on the North and the Nattukottai Chettiars who are a very important business community much like the North Indian Marwaris or the Parsis; very little work had been done on them. So that is what led me to the South and I ended up working on the Nattukottai Chettiars. It was an interesting study and that interest still continues. I think the story of Chettiar entrepreneurship needs to be retold. I also realized in the course of my research that the history of entrepreneurship was very North-India centric. South was considered the peripheral, as agrarian, rural and therefore not of much consequence, at least entrepreneurially. And therefore I decided to focus on the South and after the Chettiars I did some study on the regional capitalist class and within South, Tamil Nadu was really the nodal centre that I decided to focus on. I have done work on Coimbatore. Then I happened to be in Trivandrum and did some work on Travancore as well. So my current concerns are one with the existing conventional paradigms on entrepreneurial history. We really need to redraw the contours of contours of entrepreneurship, for one. Number two, I think as historians we need to really focus on what I think is a very critical period that is under-researched, the late 30's to 40's, up till 1950. That is the period which has been glossed over by economic historians and the business historians. I think we need to (focus on that period) because that is very critical for understanding the post colonial development, the reason why we opted for an import substituting industrialization model. For much of that, I think we will find the clues I in the 40's. I think we have to dig deeper as far as the 40's are concerned. I am increasingly moving into contemporary history where you are looking at what is happening in the post Independence period. So I think I can stop with that. Thank you.

Prof. Kumar: Thanks Mr. Mahadevan.

Mr. Dinesh Sharma: I have never been a student of history nor been a student of business or economics. I graduated in science and took to journalism for the last 25 years. But as Mr. Tripathi said, you are conditioned by a certain environment and when you seek answers to certain questions and that begins your engagement with destiny. That's what happened with me. As a science journalist, I began my career in Bangalore in the early 80's, 1984 or so and that is when the IT industry was taking its roots here and it was a new era when Mr. Rajiv Gandhi took over as Prime Minister. So I was brought up in my career as a journalist, around this talk about computers coming in, things happening in the 80's. And that continued when I moved over to Delhi. In the 90's liberalization took place. A whole lot of things happened in the software and IT industry. So this question – about the IT industry - kept coming into my mind. As journalists, we always say, if you pause and look back, you find there is a story. Because everyday you write a story and forget about it. So I thought, when I progressed in my career, let me pause and look back. Many

questions kept coming back to me. - For example, India succeeded in software, why not in hardware? Or what are the reasons why India is doing so well in knowledge based software... And even in business and industry meetings one would hear this well parroted answers - that we are good at mathematics, our education system, we have a large work force, we have labour advantages. But I thought are these the only reasons? That is why I started looking back at this whole question. And something interesting happened. When I was in school, the episode of IBM and Coca Cola being thrown out happened in 1977. And as a journalist I found that when in 92, IBM came back. I thought it was an interesting story how this change happened. In my own life I have seen main frame computers which are quite big and now we are seeing laptops. So, there was a technological change, there was a policy change. A whole lot of things happened in 20-25 years. I don't think any other industry has seen such a rapid change in one's own lifetime. So I started looking at this question. I thought I will start with the question of how IBM came or from the point of IBM leaving till they came back. In 1996 they set up an IBM research lab in IIT Delhi. I thought that will be a good period to look at – from, say, 1977 to 1996. And lot of policy changes happened and industry environment changed. A lot of new companies came about. And multi nationals were thrown out and they came back .So I thought let me look at this story. That's how my engagement with the subject began. And when I started investigating about why IBM had to leave, then I had to look at how IBM came to India. And that's how I had to go back to almost the Independence days when Mahalanobis was involved with computing at ISI and then Bhabha got involved with computing, developing analog and digital computers at TIFR. So then IBM was invited by Nehru himself. And the whole story came. It so happened that there were a lot of gaps. There was only one book which I found- by C.R. Subramaniam who was the former CMD of BEL in Bangalore –India and the computer. But that told the story till 1992. It stopped at that point and the book was published in 1991. The story was till that point. And he had a different perspective because he himself was a player. There were gaps in that, in the story line. And also because there was some crucial developments in the 70's which were not reported even in the press, because there was censorship between 1975 and 79 and there was this very major Parliamentary Committee Report on IBM and which was not reported till emergency was lifted in 1977. So I found there were a lot of gaps in understanding of the whole story. So that's how I tried to put the whole story together. Thank you.

Prof. Kumar: Thank you.

Mr. Harish Damodaran: The first thing is, there is a general decline of interest in Economic and Business history- I think probably from the 90's or late 80's. It is ironical because this was the period when the Indian businessman came of age -a curious irony. Probably some of

this has to do with the general anti-capitalist ethos during the Nehru period (that) produced the negative stereo type of businessman. He was seen as a usurer, as a black marketeer. If you see films of the 1970's, like *Namak Haram*. So it is actually with the reforms of '91, that the businessman finally got the stamp of respectability. Also if you look at the middle class, (there is) on the one hand, the literate middle class, the English speaking, English educated: and then on the other side was this commercial middle class, more steeped in vernacular culture and sort of seen as inward looking, less cosmopolitan and so probably was not of much interest. It is with liberalization, and the growth of consumerism as a dominant system, that the so called great unified Indian middle class has come about. When Saraswathi and Lakshmi have been unified, that is probably the right time to start proper rigorous studies on business history. Now the problem of respectability is probably no longer there.

And the other thing has to do with the way capitalism has developed in India as against say, in the US. The US, was looking at the list of great industrialists. Maurice Dobb made a distinction between the revolutionary path of capitalism where producers turn capitalists as against the less revolutionary path of merchants turning capitalists. If you look at the list of US industrialists, Henry Ford had 161 US patents, Charles Goodyear was the man who invented the vulcanized rubber, Ely Whitney invented the gin. Cyrus McCormic -He invented the reaper. And all these people became millionaires during that period. Then you look at George Westinghouse, who invented the air break in the railways, and also the AC system in electric transmission, Samuel Colt who invented the pistol with the revolving cartridge cylinder. And then, Thomas Alva Edison himself. Similarly Issac Merrit Singer. It is not as if there were no people of finance or trade, there were the J.P.Morgans, there were the Carnegie's. But the main thing was that it was basically producer led and there was a culture of innovation. Whereas in India, that has not been the case. It is largely merchant-led. So that is also one reason why we are not much interested. If you see whatever production led entrepreneurship in India, it is may be you will find it in Coimbatore - for example G.D.Naidu. Not many people know him even in Coimbatore, even though he was a remarkable human being. He developed India's first electric motor and had other assorted inventions. Or you look at for example the Ramgarias in Ludhiana, they ran many machine tool shops and foundries in Batala. But these are all very marginal people. The only big business man who really came via, say, the production route is the Kirloskars, or the Seshasayees. Otherwise it has been generally the merchant led thing. I think that is the one thing we really need to look at and probably this is also going to be the undoing in the present scenario where we have opened up and where we are seeing more and more cases of suppliers of technology not supplying technology without equity. It will be an interesting thing to see how businesses evolved

during this period and why is that most of our innovations have taken place in the field of marketing and finance. For example, Vergheese Kurian's Amul is a fantastic thing of collecting small, few litres of milk from millions of farmers. Or more recently, if you look at Sunil Mittal's Bharati Telecom's idea of leasing their entire equipment, which is a very unique thing. And even say micro finance, for that matter. So we are producing lot of new ideas and innovations which have been more in marketing and in finance and not in production. Whether this has had different implications is of interest me as a journalist.

Mr. Surajit Majumdar: Thank you Dr. Kumar and Prof. Chandra for inviting me for this and for organizing this. I consider myself as a dabbler in business history rather than a business historian. And most of my engagement with business history has been virtually in a state of isolation. I do not belong to any community of people who have been interacting with each other in the process of studying business history. I come from the discipline of economics – a discipline whose known body of analysis does not consider having a historical perspective as particularly important, which is able to dismiss problems associated with or complexities associated with time by making all mutually interrelated variables which it simultaneously determines..So in that discipline, business history- and economic history in general - has been reduced to the third (position). After the theorists, the pure theorists and empirical theorists, the economic historian comes last in the pecking order of economics itself. I began my exploration into business history from an initial perception that an economy is also a historical (evolution). And its motion through time is not just a quantitative expansion - there are qualitative changes where the past is related to the present and the present in turn to the future. And in understanding that motion, particularly in the context of the age in which we live, in which business firms do constitute an important segment of the economic structure. In understanding that motion, one has also to look at this particular feature that business firms constitute an important subset of the agents who make for this historical development of motion. In the process of that, playing the role of agents, they themselves also change. And there are a whole set of important questions that need to be examined which the traditional economics man tends to ignore. Businessmen, in the process of playing their role as individual agents also do things which have social significance. What they do or do not do has significance as Harish was saying. Whether they are innovators of this kind or innovators of another kind has implications. In that there are certain patterns which we cannot explain in terms of just individual firms but (can) explain in relation to larger historical circumstances which induce firms to do what they do or prevent them from doing what they don't. So individual firms also change and how they change and what they do is an important area and therefore it needs to be looked at. I also feel that a change also takes place in the position of

firms. Why firms grow? Some grow. Some decline. In (certain) periods, why certain kinds of businesses grow, others decline? How do new ones come in and how do the old ones maintain their dominance? These are also questions I feel are important and need to be looked at. In the process of this, of course, they change internally also and changes which do have a kind of larger social significance. The simple example in history is the transformation of the business firm in which the salaried white collar work force becomes more important has a historical role in the creation of the middle class as we know it in the world today. And finally, the business community also collectively acts together by some sort of common interest, while perhaps also divided within itself into different factions. (This) is an important social force and its outlook, what kind of role it plays in the larger context of society, is also something that historically evolves through this process of change. So all of these are relevant questions which for me, as somebody whose fundamental interest, is in looking at the economic history of India and particularly of the post Independence period. Placing this history within the larger global context, I thought they were important questions but normally economic analysis ignores. That is how I came into this particular field. My specific area of interest in relation to India has to do with the question of industrialization. It is my observation that whether one looks at the advanced capitalist countries or whether one looks at developing countries or the major developing countries, the industrialization experience of India is not only unique, but Indian industrialization looked at in terms of standard indicators, perhaps would be considered as one of the most stunted. India would be one of the cases of stunted industrialization where we have the relative significance of industrial sector -production as well as employment, which has crossed a peak, at a much lower level than has been the case generally with other countries. Now, what significance does the development of business firms have with the industrialization process is a question that interests me. In particular I am interested in looking at what will be the long term implications for industrialization. The fact that today we have a trajectory of development where the Indian business firms for whom the traditional area of activity has been manufacturing, have now moved away to the so called services sector. Today the involvement of the services sector is actually, from my estimates, much larger than the manufacturing sector. This is rather a fundamental change that has happened which I feel has not been paid sufficient attention to. And so there are questions arising out of it: What are the implications to business which has been an important historical force in creating an impetus in industrialization? When that character itself changes, what would be the implication for the future course of industrialization in a country that has never been completely industrialized?. These are the kind of questions that I am engaged in.

Ms. Mekhala Krishnamurthy: With such a rich set of personal reflections on history, I think mine doesn't really qualify under history at all I just arrived from a small town in central Madhya Pradesh called *Hardha* where I have been studying the grain *mandi*. I have been living and working there for the last 10 months and I have 8 months to go. So I am in the midst of doing my field work at the moment. This research on the grain *mandi* actually began while I worked at the social research group at the ICICI Bank. There I worked on health. But the Bank was a particularly interesting place for an under cover anthropologist because it was currently rolling out its rural strategy which is the time when it allowed me to observe the way in which the corporate, particularly at that time a very strong influence on rural transformation, were looking at rolling out their rural strategy. And then I decided that I will try and do an ethnography of the present and look at the ways in which corporations are expanding into rural India, and actually how they are imagining the *rural* itself because there was a lot of conversation that amused me. So I actually began with this purpose to explore the field only to find that the experience in the field was extremely varied, extremely emergent and nascent and what I ended up doing was locating the oldest institution which I could find, which was the grain *mandi*, to try and study these transformations. So rather than focus on corporate expansion and intervention, I decided to view through the lens of the social history, the life of a grain market. And as I began looking at the kind of literature that I could draw on, one found a bit of a strange story where anthropologists and sociologists of India had spent many years pioneering village studies. And they had spent time on looking at agrarian transformation and social history around the Green Revolution, After which there seemed to be a very hasty retreat from the rural and from economic sociology and economic anthropology as an area of engagement completely which resurfaced post liberalization into a whole host of ethnographic studies on globalization. So you actually seem to go from village to metropolitan cities, to study class and occupation and caste formation in villages to the experiences of call centre workers, to the experiences of the advertising industry, This left a large domain of the rural untouched in the last 20 years. So there was actually very little to build on. For example I found that I couldn't really find a single ethnography of the grain market except a small piece of work done on the Delhi bazaar recently. But a full fledged ethnographic enquiry into, and this is something to do with, I think, as ignoring small towns as well. Small towns and market towns had tended to be transitory points for anthropologists on their way to the villages or on their way to the large city but have left stranded and neglected spaces. So I landed up in this small town in Madhya Pradesh to try and recover some of this space and to try and understand this history. And we do have of course, lots of social histories and quite well advanced ones including some by anthropologists on business

communities. So we have a very famous work on the Marwaris. We have a recent work by Humphrey and Merlo on the Jains. But what we didn't have was enough work on the institutions themselves in which all these communities engaged. So for example, we have Jonathan P. Parry work on Bhilai, which he did for the industrial setting. We did not have a similar work for agricultural marketing setting.

My research in Hardha therefore really focuses on the relationships that make the grain market. In that sense we have some very rich theoretical categories. Because the grain *mandi* is the place where the peasants, the intermediate classes, corporate capital the state and labour engage in an everyday basis in negotiating price, non price dimensions, weight- and this is a place where there is an every day tussle. And these resilient theoretical categories are actually your *kissan*, your *bania*, your *hamal*, your *mukadam*, your *companywallah*, your service *karmachari* and these are the sort of people whose lives and life histories I am currently documenting. And what you see in a place like Hardha is that the producer is transforming consumption rather than production. But, consumption in terms of how the (manner in which) they spend their money is transforming the local industry, local marketing and a lot of those. So, what anthropologists in these kind of studies usually allow you to do is to make links between production and consumption, between the economic and the socio, and to break a lot of these boundaries in all matters.. The other emphasis, I think, when one uses the word entrepreneur itself, it implies something heroic. And when you study it everyday what you are really looking for is stories of every day experience of entrepreneurs at the *mandi*.

Questions and Answers:

Mr. Ramachandra Guha: Prof. Tripathi, your comment that business history has been traditionally regarded as a subset of economic history, and you see it more as linked to social history is a very fascinating comment. In fact I would like to expand on that. In fact I would say that business history brings economic history, social history and also political history. Because the development of businesses is in a particular political environment. From political history, you can move to legal history really because the legislative framework at a particular time and how it changes facilitates, enables, constrains, shapes the evolution of businesses. Then you get into the history of science and technology, which is what some of the panelists have worked in. You could also think of business history as linked to cultural history whether in terms of the popular culture like the *mandi* and so on. Finally business history also leads one to the terrain of biography which is a terrain which historians are very uncomfortable with because they don't really look into individual psychological motivation. But I think if you really study business history, especially the heroic entrepreneurs that Mekhala mentioned, you have also to get into biography. So listening to the panelists, it struck me that business history is a very productive way in which you can engage in very many different parts of history. I mean there is a phrase which the French historians use, total history. And in a sense business history could be total history. Because it is economic history and social history and the history of science and the history, of culture and biography altogether.

Prof. Tripathi: Well. How do we react to a comment to which we all totally agree! I have so much agreement that I have nothing to say except defending my position that I call it closer to social history. In fact it is somewhat unrealistic to talk about a particular branch of history as closer to this or closer to that. When we talk about political history, it is an autonomous branch. When we say it is closer to this, we are only trying to communicate to the listener some private point of view which might be not exactly the same point of view which others have taken. My comment that I find it closer to social history was in the context of the suggestion made in a book that it is a sub – discipline of economic history. I was trying to point a corrective. But I am absolutely with you when you are saying that a particular branch of history is not almost on itself. It draws on so many aspects of it that business history draws on political history, draws on economic history, draws on social history, draws on biography, draws on cultural history. Anything because business is a part of life and it is going to draw on all the aspects of life. I entirely agree with you.

Questioner- Prof. V. Ranganathan: This is a question to all of you actually. How do you create a demand for business history? You know Prof Majumdar interestingly referred to pecking

order. You know. So, what is the contribution of business history to the country in one level and the career prospects it generates for vast majority of people so that they are interested or the better students are interested in them? There is demand for medical and management students, but not for history students. So how do you propose to address it? Unless like the earlier British civil servants you take an anti-utilitarian ethos and you say, anything that is useful is looked down upon and so Greek and Latin comes ahead of economics, commerce and engineering comes much lower. I think the problem would be how to attract the top talent in the discipline and how to make it interesting for other people to look for it?

Dr. Surajit Majumdar: Well, -I think this will be partially a chicken and egg kind of problem. The only basic way in which people can be made interested in this is to demonstrate that this field provides insights into very many areas which in the normal course, you will not get. And this is a struggle in any community, to begin with, the small number which is working in that area has to go through. Beyond that as far as career prospects are concerned, I think, my own teaching experience tells me that it is very hard to convince people, students for example that doing the right thing, not necessarily looking at it from a career perspective might even be worthwhile for them from a career perspective. For example, when I used to teach, I used to tell my students –Look, ultimately whatever you do, you may or may not use this particular discipline that you are in, but you engage with it. There is a certain intellectual development which will serve you in whatever career you may finally do. And most careers are of that nature. You may not have a direct relationship with the discipline you had your training in, but every discipline provides you with some kind of an input. Specifically as far as business history is concerned, I think there are certain areas which could be developed. For example, within business history looking at, say, business strategy from a business history point of view. What is it that induces particular kind of strategies and how do those strategies in turn impact the environment which they have. So what is the interaction between the environment and what its implications are for, say the trajectories that business firms go through. These are areas, I think, are easier to demonstrate to people that there is some value in this. Other areas may require much more work to be done before people actually start appreciating that there is much more value in all this. That is all, in general I can say at this stage.

Ms. Mekhala Krishnamuthy: As a researcher who is currently doing this work on a particular grain *mandi*, I often get this question- so, what is the policy implication of your work on grain market? What is the larger implication of all this work? As an anthropologist you often work in one place. Does what you are saying hold true for the neighbouring *mandi*?. It may or may not. I think, I don't even think we have to aspire for very large number of people getting

involved in this work. We can begin somewhere modestly . I think it is about reaching this information and it is the way of thinking about the world. And I think here there is another challenge about how can regional histories be even taught regionally. In the process of doing field work in Hardha, I am capturing Hardha's history in many ways for Hardha itself which is a form of transmission of knowledge, of history and the past and apprenticeship, learning, which has actually been lost or devalued even in the context in which I am working. So I think there are ways in which we think about how to disseminate this information. It is not only in institutions like IIM's and places where a large number of people would seek career prospects but also in figuring out how they become part of peoples' own sense or region or, place of occupation..

Ramachandra Guha: Case studies can be one part. I don't think we have developed enough case studies. India. Why do we have to learn about what Chrysler did and what Ceat did - I am not saying it is not important. But, I think, whenever this course starts, you can build about 100 case studies.. All over. I think probably, that's one way you can sell this course. We should develop a lot of case studies. Even industry studies. Even say, regional studies.. And you start consolidating, I think that itself will be a very useful exercise. If you can create lot of case studies that are Indian based and not necessarily the latest ones, even the old ones, you know, even that will make a lot of difference.

Questioner -Prof. Pankaj Chandra: Prof. Tripathi, you were the real pioneer in many ways of business history in India; Much of your work is what many people studied. Very early one to begin the teaching and research of business history at IIM at Ahmedabad. Why did it not continue? Why did that enquiry among the society and among other researchers - notwithstanding the low level of research in our country- the whole movement of studying history of Indian business not spread out?

Prof. Tripathi: I will give the answer. But let me speculate on this. By drawing a parallel to what happened when business history as a movement was born in the United States of America. 1951, Dean Donham made a proposal to the Harvard Business School, Harvard University, in fact, to start a course in business history. Despite the fact that the course began at a time when American economy was rolling, neither the course picked up nor did the research. American scholars or some scholars were writing company history and they continued to write company history. I gave this example in order to indicate how much struggle the business history had to undergo in order to be accepted. There were many other reasons because of which business history did not pick up in the United States. But, , my feeling is in America even in 1921 or even in 1930, business was not a pet subject that the historian would like to study. Most of the historians were liberals who looked upon business as something grubby, something unedifying.

The result was that they did not want to spoil their hands. It was something that the liberal historians were keeping away from. This speculation has been shared by some who have written on the subject. In our case, in the case of IIM Ahmedabad, where I set up a course in business history and research, the situation was far worse. Business history started making inroads into the Indian curriculum at a time when business history was not attractive to students, history itself was a dying subject. And it had been on a down hill road since then. Great works have been produced. Works have been produced by historians but history has not been attracting good students. I recall my days as a student at Allahabad where history was among the most popular subject at that time. Since then history has been losing ground. And in Gujarat where IIM was located, history was losing ground even more. The point I am making is that it was not only history which was not attracting students, but history itself was losing ground and we were not getting good students. In the case of business history, there was an added reason. Those who were coming to the professional education were looking for courses that would help them professionally. If I were to tell a student how business history was important for their career, I couldn't explain. I could only say it provides a perspective for thinking. It helps your imagination. But that was not cutting too much ice with anybody. The result was, business history which started as a very popular subject for the first four years, the number of registration went on increasing. But the registration continued to decline as new courses, practical courses, much more inviting courses began to come in. So this is how business history did not pick up as much as it ought to have. There was a very pleasant experience that I had at the end of five years my career. When I started, I had courses for doctoral students and these two courses until I left remained -though I couldn't say sought after courses. The community was not a large community, but I had some of the best students. The courses are always appreciated and they are appreciated even today. So I am not quite sure I am answering your question. But then I believe that when you begin to develop a course, develop a subject at a time, when people are looking for courses to help in their occupational search, then I believe that perspective courses will have to wait for some time.

Session-2

Prof. Kumar: We are moving on to the second session. The focus of this session is to address research in business history. And I am requesting Prof. Tripathi to lead this discussion as moderator.

Prof. Tripathi: The program wants me to say something in the beginning of the program, at the end of the program, and in the middle of the program. I prefer to do it only at the end and in

your interest. Never allow an old man to go on speaking, he will never stop. So therefore at present I am not talking about what I have to say. That I will do at the end. I am only trying to explain the focus of this session. The focus should be on entrepreneurship research. Approaches, challenges and themes, whatever they are. I have four brilliant participants who are going to educate me about these. Whatever little I have to say, I will come to at the end. Before I start the session, there was something that I wanted to say about the question that Prof. Pankaj Chandra asked. It will take only, exactly one minute. You know about Harvard Business School, Even there probably business history might have died an untimely death but for the fact that there was a special chair that was donated to the research. That was the major factor. Still there are houses that, I think, want to donate a chair. That, I think is something that you should be aiming at. With that I think what I am going to invite each of the speaker in the same order in which they are sitting, to talk about business research, themes, approaches, and the challenges. I would expect they would take about 10 mins. I don't ration time but we have to close at 12. Keep that in mind and give me 10 mins at least. May I now request the panelists. O. K. Dinesh..

Mr. Dinesh Sharma: I will straight away get down to the topic of this session – themes, approaches and challenges. Because this whole question of how do you make business history interesting, acceptable, and marketable. I think that is the question foremost in the minds of many people sitting in this area . One way to do is, as I said in my remarks before, look at some interesting questions and start investigating. My area of interest is of course contemporaneous - going back 20-30 years. I am not going back to the pre-independence days. And this is a very fertile area as I have discovered while studying the IT industry because although I have tried to catalogue the developments in past, there are still things that need to get probed. For example, TCS is the largest software company of the present. If you look (closely)- because that is how you can make history interesting- . Its origins lie in Government policy. Mrs. Gandhi's socialist thinking led to the abolition of managing agency system. And that's when the Tata Sons used to get the most of their income from the managing agency system. And when the system - I mean the proposal - was to abolish it, they thought of how to keep the income of the Tata Son's going and then they thought of starting the Tata Data Centre because that time there used to be main frame computers and data for different companies would be processed . Because companies individually did not own computers. And IBM and ICL used to have data centers. The House of Tata started thinking of having a data center so that work of different Tata companies could be done there . That's how the Tata Data Center was started. And from that data center came out the Tata Consultancy Services. And that is the time when Tatas got into different consultancies- engineering consultancy and data consultancy - beginning with their own set of companies. There

were several companies of the TATA group. TCS was not started as a software company or IT company- (it was started) to generate needed income for the parent company, , because all other income was (abolished) dried up. Tata Data center became Tata Consultancy. Even the official history of TCS does not mention this fact. The official history of TCS starts with when Mr. Kholi took over - between '67 and '65. The Data Center was set up earlier by Dr. Kanodia . He ran it for one and a half years. But history doesn't mention it. So when you start looking at the top companies today, you go back to interesting aspects like that.

Then there was a whole concept of State entrepreneurship- because of the scientists in Departments like Atomic Energy, and Space - Space was born in 1971. I can't help going back because the subject of developing computers came up at TIFR and Department of Atomic Energy got involved. Then they thought now we have the technology, why not productionise it. And the scientists started saying State can act as entrepreneur and that's how the idea of ECIL – Electronic Corporation of India-was born. Computer Maintenance Corporation - CMC was born much later. So there could be an interesting study of how state entrepreneurship was conceived and how it failed or how it succeeded. There are two examples . One – ECIL- was a commercial failure. CMC was a commercial success. The reason behind that is the people who headed them. ECIL was headed by A.S.Rao who was a hard core scientist involved in the computer design, right from the days of Baba from the 50's and 60's . When ECIL was set up by the Department of Atomic Energy, he headed that. CMC was again promoted by the State. Prof. M.G.K. Menon was the one who wanted the Computer Maintenance Corporation to come and take over because IBM was leaving (India) . And IBM was a large commercial entity. So they needed another commercial entity to replace IBM in its maintenance business. So, although the state set up CMC , a commercial man, Dr. Prem Prakash Gupta, who was with ICL was brought in to head CMC. So that changed the outlook from day one of CMC whereas ECIL was brought up in a different culture. State enterprise failed in ECIL and fructified in CMC. There could be interesting things like that even in contemporary history.

And then there are lots of themes which could be explored in the new economy or the knowledge economy. IT is one of them., and then Bio-technology development is there. All these new companies, new sectors which have developed are contributing a lot to the growth of GDP in this country. So it has been 20-25 years since they have been around and there has been no serious studies on any of them. Of course, on bio-technology, there was a study a British scholar, but he looked mainly at the policy making in bio-technology and how the interaction of industry and business is changing, and the changing role of business and industry in policy making. Bio-technology is a very good example where, in the policy making process, industry has been

involved right from the beginning. The Karnataka bio-technology policy was based on a task force headed by Kiran Mazumdar Shah. So it is practically the agenda of the industry that is reflected in the State policy.

There has been a change in how the State's role has been changing – from a regulator in the 70's, facilitator in the 80's and a collaborator in the 90's. So the role of the State is changing in terms of its relationship with some of these industries. Bio-technology is a good example and it needs to be probed as to how industry has played a role in policy making.

There have been a number of other new areas like Renewable Energy, You have lots of new companies which are doing big agro businesses. There are cut flowers from Bangalore - I wrote recently about how this cut flower business is getting into the larger area of agriculture. This company which was raised in Bangalore is buying land in Ethiopia and creating land bank and trying to influence the whole food economy of the future. Our food might be grown in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe and it is leading to imbalances there. And so a lot of agro businesses have come in. These are all new entrepreneurs. They are not coming from any big business houses. They don't have any big backing or business history of their own. They are all new entrepreneurs who are coming into business.

Ayurvedic drugs is another area where there is lot of activity. There is the health and wellness industry. There are corporate hospitals. Medical tourism. This whole business of dot coms which have flourished. Low cost aviation. These are just broad themes They may look contemporary But they also have a history that goes back and we have to look at who are the major players and how these people came from different backgrounds. And made it big. The beverages industry is always interesting. How Coca Cola was thrown out. And how George Fernandes made it a big issue that Coca cola shares the secret formula with the Government of India in the 70s. How 77 a cola drink - came out and why it failed or why it succeeded? The beverages industry could be a very interesting study line...Lots of questions, which need to be probed.

On corporate R&D , some work has been done .Then Mekhala touched upon and talked about this Green *Mandi* business., I think there are large gaps in understanding how private sector banking has changed. The financial institutions have changed. ICICI is a big player now.. But nobody has looked at this sector in the last 20-25 years. How computerization and technology has played a role in this sector? We referred earlier to sectoral studies of the new economy - some of the sectors I have touched upon here.

Then there could be biographies of entrepreneurs , people who have made it big - like Ajit Balakrishnan of Rediff .com.. How he started his career in an advertising agency, got involved with PSI,- . He was earlier a marketing guy and later was involved with a computer company

because they were not able to sell their computers. He did turn that company around. Then he became a dot com entrepreneur himself. And Kiran Mazumdar Shah - she made it big in 2000 but her company started in the 70's. Dr. Pratap Reddy who came back and really opened up this whole area of corporate hospitals. And Dr. Naresh Trehan in Delhi, Dr. Devi Shetty in Bangalore. We have had a lot of changes in the television industry - how it has grown?. Some television software houses have become media moghuls of this country. Raghav Bhel, Prannoy Roy, Rajat Sharma. We may not like Indian TV, but personal worth of Rajat Sharma in his company is 400 cores. So these are the companies which are making money. What are the models they are all offering? These are all interesting subjects that need to be probed too.

On this whole issue of small scale industry - how this sector has grown in this country, how this idea of having industrial estates was thought of. Electronic cities came in different cities - mainly for hardware manufacturing. They were sort of moderate success - not a huge success. But how come software parks became a huge success? There is again, as I said earlier, the CMC versus ECIL pattern in this. There could be a study on the SSI's or the industrial estates failure in contrast to the STPI's becoming a huge success. That is how the policies change or the people behind the policies change. I have really gone into how the kind of bureaucrats we had in the Department of Electronics mattered. That has made the difference. It is not the political will, or it is not just the government policy but the people who made the difference to how STPI became a huge success. And how certain bureaucrats tried to develop certain linkages. And it also matters that which politician is in power. Railway reservation policy could succeed because Mallikarjun listened to a lower ranking official who had this idea of computerizing. So the so called bureaucrat and the politician nexus matters in policy making. And this makes interesting study. And if you go back, IIT Kanpur was set up under the Indo -American project. American professors were there for 10 years and there was a lot of intellectual input that came from America.. It was thought that like Stanford and other universities led to the development of the Silicon Valley in America, it would lead to the same development around IIT Kanpur. But it did not happen. There are reasons - that needs to be explored. These are some of the things I had in mind.

Dr. Raman Mahadevan: Dinesh has made things easier for me by spelling out the large gaps that we have in the post independence period. He spelt out what I think are very fascinating areas which we need to study. Now I start with periodisation. I feel that we need to take a long duree approach because in the concept note Prof. Kumar had forwarded, he had talked about the need for focusing on post independence. Rightly so. Because in relation to pre-independence very little work has been done focusing on the post independence period. But yet, I

feel that there needs to be a connect between these two periods. That's why in my opening remarks in the earlier session, I emphasized the need for focusing on the 40's. I think the 40's is a very important period and one needs to start there. Now for instance, historians disregard the fact – something for which all of us are responsible -that before 47 what is Pakistan and Bangladesh today were part of India. Till 37, Burma. But we are so conditioned by the present that in our history, we ignored the earlier history of Pakistan and Bangladesh. What is the impact of partition? It was enormous. The economic impact on Punjab and Bengal entrepreneurially, was loss of markets- and economic dislocation. For Punjab in fact, their main point of transit was Karachi before 47. They never looked to East and they had to overnight change to look eastwards. Otherwise they used to look westwards. And there are several other issues. I won't go into all that .But I really need to look at 40s because I personally feel that there is a certain broadening and deepening of capital if you look at the accumulation process between the pre-'30 and post '30-'40 period, you find most groups emerging. It would help us to connect the present history to the post colonial thing. So I feel we need to look at this period for significant understanding and establish the implications.

[I would now speak about] *Forces of entrepreneurship. Alternate trajectory. Sites of accumulation, sources of entrepreneurship.* Now if you look at the history of entrepreneurship in the colonial period a point I had made in the morning as well- that much of it is focused on Northern India- Bombay and Bengal, where much of the commercial investment and also industrial investment happened. And the traditional route was the merchant capitalist. But if you look beyond these regions, you find that the sources of entrepreneurship are very different -which is not being captured adequately in the existing literature with some exceptions. Now there is a need really for redrawing, as I would say, the geographical contours of accumulation process so that we can capture the point that Harish was making. There is much that was happening even in the colonial period. You cannot understand the rise of a major group like the Hero group for instance, and the Munjals unless you locate them in the pre Independence period when they were small. Size itself is a question of time and space. You may be small today. You can be big tomorrow. We need to correct that.

And so far as South is concerned, today it is booming. But you can see the nascent trends of this in the pre Independence period. Whether with reference to Andhra- Kamma capital , back in the 30's and 40's had sort of started moving into the service sector and in a small way into industry as well in the 30's and 40's , something which Carol Upadhyay has captured and so has Adapa Satyanarayana who was in Osmania University.

And as far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, I have been looking at it very closely. And of course, Harish has also looked at it for the post Independence period. You find agro commercial capital moving into industry in a very big way. The major thrust to the investment in Tamil Nadu, and for this I stick my neck out and I make the statement, did not come from merchant and capitalists. Though the Chettiars were there, the Chettiar investment in industry in relation to the total investable surplus at their command was very insignificant, marginal. There were a few groups, but much of their investment remained in the service sector- in banking,. Essentially in land. At least in the colonial period they were not able to make the transition. And the reason why this happened was because much of the capital which was locked in the overseas, in land, in rubber plantations, in tin mines, coconut estates could not, due to certain historical circumstances, be repatriated. It is in the domain of counterfactual history but had the Chettiars managed to repatriate the capital, I think our contemporary economic history would have been very different. Because I have made some rough estimates of the capital which they had. They were much bigger than the Marwaris and the Parsis. Much, much bigger. So had they managed to bring it, the entire post independence history, economic history at least would have been very different. I mean you would have had other players competing. South would have been a major player in the Nehruvian period.

Now again, I need to go beyond the large sector. You see, because of obsessive concern with Bombay and Calcutta and Ahmedabad, Kanpur perhaps, we have also, willy nilly focused on the large sector - the Tata group, the Birla's, the Singhanias's. But we have overlooked the small players who were emerging at this time. So I feel we need to look at the small and medium enterprises because outside these major centers, it is the medium and small who were very important.

Look at mortality. We talk of success stories. We don't talk about mortalities. Why business failure? Why do some houses collapse? Post Independence history has to start with the failure of some of the major players. Many of them collapsed and are no longer there. Some of them have managed to survive. There has been considerable mortality at various points of time. One has to really look at this more closely and see why some firms collapsed and some were successful. You need to redraw the geographical capital, need to integrate business with economic history and locate it. A point which was made earlier that we really cannot look at business in isolation from the broader political and social context- a point which Ram was also making.

The action plan. This is something which I thought for one, we need mapping of the entrepreneur. This is post independence. Focusing on pre Independence, enough work has been done. Whatever gaps there are, one can identify and work on. But what is more important,

mapping of entrepreneurs size wise, industry wise including those in the tertiary sector. Unfortunately as the story ends, there was a fascination for looking the pure industrial capitalist, who never existed in the colonial period at all. But somehow there was this obsessive concern with the industrialist capitalist. We forgot those who were not industrialists. There were many who were into the tertiary service sector. So we need to look at the tertiary sector - Region or state wise or period wise. Suggested periodisation would be 1930-'50, '50-'84, pre-liberalization period and 1984-2008 – the post liberalization period. Then of course need a center for business history to be nodal center for resource and data room. What better place than IIMB registering Indian History Association as part of IIMB which is very important because in Europe you have a Business History Association. They have their own Journal, own association, annual conference and encourage research by encouraging M Phil, PhD in business history.

Mr. Harish Damodaran: The thing about how to generate demand for business history. Actually it is vary interesting to see that many new entrepreneurs have come out of the IIM's. At least I can think of three of them. One is R. Subramanian of Subhiksha. Then Narendra Murkumbi of Renuka Sugars.. Then Raghavendra Rao of Orchid Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals. I remember talking to Jignesh who set up MCX. He says that he was inspired to come into entrepreneurship after reading about Premchand Roychand, who predated later day scamsters like Harshad Mehta. Now we are seeing entrepreneurs from a very different background. They are not from the usual, traditional merchant background. So it is not difficult, I think, to create curiosity. There is a market. You just need enough to create studies.. A lot of case studies. One institution, I think, we need to study deeply in India, about India, which is specific to India is the family firm. How it has evolved over time even after the abolition of the managing agency system. The fact is we still remain the family firm oriented business. It has lot of strength, because you didn't have other sources of risk capital. You never had in India the J.P.Morgans and Carnegies. So it was basically the community networks and family spectrum, and it helped. Now I can put my son. I can put my nephew. And that's how it was. So this has been one of the strengths, one of the biggest. It has also been a big source of weakness as I was discussing with somebody. The problem with most of us is we love our children a lot, you know. So when we accumulate, we want to accumulate for my daughter, my daughter's daughter, or her granddaughter... Whereas this is not the case with, say, the Americans. Americans don't care for their children beyond a point. So what you accumulate, you tend to give away. Whereas in India, with all this social capital, the burden is falling on the government. Social capital, I would also include R&D .Most of the R&D in India is coming from the government. It is inefficient. But that's the case because nobody looks at, like for example, why is it that business men want to start their own engineering

and medical colleges? There is absolutely no case. Why don't they use that money to endow institutions? If you see the balance sheets of Yale or MIT or Stanford, student fee contributes hardly 10% or 15%. It does not even cover faculty costs. But though our Hindu Dharma preaches this detachment, the fact is we are very much attached to our material things. And the first company which has broken this mould is probably Infosys. I don't think Nandan Nilekani sees his daughter or son as running Infosys in the future. And that is why we need to study the institution of the family firm fully.

Ms. Mekhala Krishnamurthy: I will speak a little bit about the discipline and think a little bit about method and sites of research. And I will demonstrate this through my current research. As I mentioned in the first panel, I am doing research in *mandi* in the market town called Hardha in Madhya Pradesh.. And Hardha is predominantly a *mandi* for soya bean, wheat and channa. It is part of and is in the Narmada valley. It is a part of this big fertile belt in Madhya Pradesh from Malwa to Nimhar. You often say that understanding of the rural seems to swing from the shining to the suicidal. We focus a lot on farmers' suicide and on the other hand there is this supposedly booming rural economy that is to be studied. I suppose Hardha falls more towards the shining side from that perspective -vibrant and dynamic economy. But what I found very interesting when I got there is the old *mandi*.. The old *mandi* in Hardha, as you see in many small towns, seems to be a place of passing construction. Everything is left half done and the capital runs out. So whether it is roads or houses, people begin to build and then leave it unfinished. The old *mandi* house is remarkably well preserved. And this old side is literally separated from the new *mandi* which is Madhya Pradesh's largest *adarsh mandis*, very bustling, quite dynamic, is separated by a small road. The old *mandi* has a yard of 3 acres . The new *mandi* is a huge marketing complex of 60 acres. And basically it is what you were talking about, mortality, many traders just did not manage to cross that road. So the history that I am telling is when this old *mandi* shifted to the new *mandi* which is around 1982. Your history of '84 to 2008 actually works very well for me because that was actually the time they shifted the *mandi*. And essentially this shift is what *mandi* people will call transformation of *pathas*. So systems changed. From this one old, this five minute distance and the most important *patha* that changed here which has not changed in other agricultural markets is actually the *adath patha* , or the commission agent system or the *kutchi adathyas*.. Those farmers who took commission from or those traders who took commission from farmers. The other big thing that changed was the commodities. So in this period, that it shifted in the early 80's, you went from cotton , *thur ulsi*, *undi*, *tilli* to soya bean, wheat and some residual *channa*. In many ways our pulses crisis tells you a lot about how the pulses disappeared in this area with the disappearance of cotton. And with this transformation

also came the transformation in politics. So precisely the time cotton stock entered Hardha *mandi*, there was a big change from a cotton trader being the main political force in this market to a soya bean farmer who was a *Jat*, which brings us to history that occurred with that transformation.

So essentially one of the things I have been spending a lot of time doing is tracing life histories. Of the firms that used to operate in the old *mandi*, many of whom did not make it to the new *mandi*, and the new entrepreneurs came in. For example, there has been quite a few *munims* who are now daal millers. So, returning to the *munims* and talking to them about transformations. Similarly with trading firms. The *Phadias* and the *phutkas* who are the smaller village trader and - the community traders. The *phutkas* are the smaller village traders and then the *phadias* are the wholesale traders. How has this shift occurred? Similarly, the fact about how the traders came into the *mandi*?. A lot of them through the kutchi *adithya* system from old *malgujars*. They were the *zamindars* or the *jagirdhars* who because they had close relationship with farmers were able to set up these businesses. So one is actually tracking life stories.

And then there are the unlikely life stories of a *mandi*. So for example, there are two Brahmins who are very actively involved on side businesses. One was the water carrier, he was the *pani wallah*...His family came from Marwar and his family became the official water sellers of the *mandi* - not sellers, but distributors. And they used to be paid through grain. Now, by collecting a lot of grain over a period of time, this man has bought land and is running a restaurant and has become quite a prominent local force. The other Brahmin is the *kachoriwallah*, who started a small business in 1964 and has remained securely a *kachoriwallah* with a side business as an astrologer. And what is interesting here is that he is struggling even more because of what has happened - in his *kachori* business, he sticks with groundnut oil which is very expensive while all others have shifted to soyabean oil. This- groundnut oil- is his signature. But as a result, he said, on the one hand groundnut has become more expensive and on the other hand *chillad*¹ has disappeared. He is not able to price properly because everybody keeps giving him Rs10. He said "I can't keep returning Rs 4 to everybody. So I have kept the price at Rs 5". So there are all these kind of stories -life histories - one has to trace when one is looking at markets. And also the relationship between communities. For example, the *hammals*, the labourer, many of them are Muslims.-Extremely legendary Muslims like Sher Khan Mukadham and Shambu Mukadham. And their stories about how as labourers, in the old *mandi*, milk was abundant, ghee was abundant... And they drank much less apparently. So they drank milk not alcohol. And how well they sustained. Now they have to buy everything now milk is not available, not abundant etc. So one of the things I find extremely important and has been a very exciting and also time

¹ Small denominations of currency

consuming process is the process of tracking, tracing, finding and recapturing these life histories. So I think that is one methodology and it is a time consuming methodology. It is a very challenging methodology to reconstruct, to draw these networks together . But extremely rewarding and, I think, extremely important.

The second thing which anthropologists do is, I think, some ways the most neglected. Sometimes we talk about the qualitative research and we tend to focus on interviews . But it is actually observation. So I have spent the last 8 months or so, really observing this part. Which means you go to the action platform and you spend a lot of time there. You sit in traders shops. You spend a lot of time there. You sit in the sarkari office, the *mandi* office, you spend hours observing, engaging and that is actually where you pick up. The problem we always have with interview is you believe in what people tell you. But if you observe, they are not telling you. You are actually just engaging with the processes. I find that as a skill, to learn to do ethnographic observation is very difficult and it is also something we really don't value enough. We have a real challenge in thinking about how to use and value this data. One of the things you observe, if you sit on the platform is volatility. You observe the way in which markets actually move, prices are actually disseminated, and how people take decisions to sell or trade on a given day. And when you can ask them the same questions, you won't receive the kind of response you get by observing it. Because, as soon as you ask about it, they think twice or even ten times about what they are going to tell you. While you are sitting on the platform, you can see price information coming. You hear about the *dabbha*, which is the *mandi* word for the commodities exchange. Jignesh's MCX or NC DX is called the *dabbha* and the *dabbah* transmits itself on a minute to minute basis through the mobile phone. And this has led to a great sense of what is volatility today and what used to be volatility. So traders will tell you "we used to give a bag of moongas bribe to the telephone operator and stop the price information from coming into the *mandi*". Now every single person has a mobile phone. And price information is transmitted on a daily basis. That has led to a big change in the way in which physical chain is being experienced. I saw a younger trader, really very articulate, interesting person, fourth, fifth generation of trading, belongs to the largest trading firm in this area by name Panna Lal and his grand father is still alive and a very rich source of information . So he said "*Aaj aisa lagta hai chhaya admi ko chala reha hai*". The shadow is casting the man. And one of the things about observation is that this point he said simply while receiving a text while prices had fallen by 15 rupees. He said, "What is going on?" So these kind of articulations, I think, you can capture when you just live and become part of the market.

Similarly, a completely different experience when you sit in a wheat market where the Government of Madhya Pradesh, by announcing a bonus bought all the wheat- pretty much 95% of the wheat of this *mandi* went to the government procurement through the societies. So traders pretty much sat this out. And these are things you can only understand when you sit and observe how they just kept out of the market. You know, they jokingly said that in the olden days farmers used to take one crop, but today government is the trader who is taking one crop. And what you also realize is very interesting political commentary about the nature of this bonus. So for example, farmers will say that once you have had your roti with ghee, you won't have it suka any more. So this bonus is being seen as a very important entitlement. Similarly (you observe) traders who just reflect on what is the power of the Government and how the sarkar really asserts itself and the role of the State. Observation t is a very , very time consuming process. So one of the challenges is time - how much time research is allowed, particularly anthropological research, ethnographic method, but also archival work – all these are very time consuming endeavors.

The third aspect is mobility. Now, anthropology went through this crisis where we used to spend a lot of time, based on the traditional idea of out there into the village or into a particular site and spending years studying communities. Suddenly, although historians have provided an important character saying that the mobility and volatility are not necessarily new - anthropologists discovered everything is moveable but our method is really sticking in one place. How do we really travel? And this led to what has been fairly popular and well accepted by anthropology - multi faceted ethnographies. So when one thinks about mobility, there are a few things one has to contend with. For example the relationship between the *mandi* and the *bazaar*. Relationship between *mandi* and the *bazaar* is something one has to track – how the money is exchanged in the *mandi* and then invested in various places.- in land, in other markets, in the land market , the market for inputs ,credits, seeds ,fertilizers, the input market as well as the consumer durables. So trying to track the changing relationship is tracking one movement..

The second movement is between the *mandi* and the plant.----and this again brings us to very interesting and very important regional histories. So, for example, the regional histories of the soya kings. In Madhya Pradesh, the soya bean plants. And so there again you have to move from the *mandi* to looking at plants and millers.

The third movement is across the *mandi* and the *mandi* board which brings you to histories of reform. How does one study the ways in which the reforms are actually being brought about? It takes you to Bhopal, it takes you to Delhi , which takes you to a larger political economy environment in reform. And the fourth movement is the *mandi* and the *dabbha* -commodities exchanges. This brings you to forms of capital, what the *mandi* trader will call *punji paties* -

those who are working out there. So this is the point about mobility and how does one really do commodity chain analysis - start somewhere and travel.

And just the fourth broad point I will mention is morality and the future. In studying about histories, how does one think about how people are conceptualizing their futures and thinking about the boundaries of morality. The *mandi* is the place again where there is a lot of everyday discussion about morality -where people are constantly articulating what they consider the consequences. Peoples very strong sense of how this is connected to your conduct . The profit and loss of a firm. The way you think about what is good trade and what is adulteration. How margins are shifting and how they have a whole series of different forms of implications? So I think, morality and the future as well as the past are something that epigraphic matters are well suited to look at. It will bring you to the whole question of where the family firm is going, how people are thinking about generations, about units, etc. These are areas of research that pose challenges.

Prof. Tripathi: Now, there are three types of questions that are to be addressed. - What are the challenges, what are the approaches and what are the themes for research. Challenge is simple—it is to have business history acceptable in a society where history itself is loosing ground. That is the greatest challenge that the academic institutions are going to have. . In case we want to promote this particular kind of research, we have to accept that it is not going to be very easy business because we have seen that perspective type of courses, in fact have been loosing ground in India ever since India became free .I recall a very beautiful statement that my former teacher Dr. Saraswathi Prasad made, ” *jab se Swatanratha Devi ka akraman hua, tab se Saraswathi Devi root gaye hai*”². () The ‘perspective’ type of courses have been going down. The problem is of the approaches. The approaches to research any particular subject are subject to the kind of conditions in the society, kind of conditions of the subject.. You cant talk about the approach that has been successful somewhere and the same approach can be successful elsewhere. Say, for instance, what kind of approach has been adopted in business history research in the United States where business history made its first appearance. And we think we should adopt the same kind of approach. I believe we would not be able to go very far. For instance, from company history that was the earlier in vogue before Alfred .D. Chandler began putting those company histories together and coming together with conclusions. That was O. K. But Chandler looked at the firm, looked at the managerial strategy, looked very basically at the firm level not at what was happening at the societal level. It was firm centric kind of study. *The visible hand*, I do not know how many people read it. Everybody must have heard about it but to read that is not very easy. So

² Since the time that the Goddess of freedom has been attacked, the Goddess of Learning is offended.

if you look at that, it is a firm centric approach. And it appears for some time that Chandler is going to rule the roost for some times to come until basic questions began to be asked about that particular approach in the United States itself. A man who claimed to be a supporter of Chandler, and claimed to be the defender of him, in fact became the greatest critic. He never acknowledged that. He was William Lazonick. Always praised Chandler . But he went beyond that. His whole approach was – you can't look at the firm unless you look at the society, the State, and the total surrounding. So he went beyond that and now at a later stage, people in the United States began asking – is that enough?. Is that enough to look at the society-can't we look at the segments?. What happened to business charity(?). What happened to --in business and so on and so forth .Point I am making is, there is a complete history to a very large canvas that is being taken up as research in the United States. Can we follow that today? We can't. It is very fashionable to look at the West for all kinds of inspiration. Can we today - at this stage where business is really surging -can we follow that kind of broad canvas? We can't. We have to adopt a certain kind of approach that can be germane to understanding the evolution of business in this country. And this is not something we will be doing differently from what others are doing. Because while Chandler became the overall guru for business history all over the world, , Chandler is still not being followed all over the world. Japanese are still concentrating on firm history or State policy history. Scandinavian countries, whatever work they are doing, they are doing on the State and business. The same kind, if you look at Germany, again State and business. Each society will have to adopt its own approach to researching business history or in any subject keeping in mind the demand of the society, keeping in view the state of research in that society. Today when we are at a very rudimentary stage, we have to therefore start somewhere where we stop telling stories and writing history. Company history for instance is kind of autobiographical or biography. There is a kind of role that can play in the writing of business history - the kind of role that biography and auto biography play in writing political history or social history . But company history cannot be total history. It cannot give you the insight into the relationship between business and society, business and economy and business and politics and so on and so forth. Therefore we have to think about what kind of emphasis, what kind of focus we are going to put in our research so that we on the one hand continue to produce biographies and auto biographies – I mean the company history. At the same time create the overall guide of literature by giving us an understanding of those biographies and auto biographies - the place of business in the society. This is why contrary to many people, I believe that the evolution of business concentrating on the large houses would be able to give that answer. Every large house started very small- Dhirubhai Ambani started as a trader, . Tata started as a trader, Mafatlal started as a

person who was carrying cloth on his shoulder and selling clothes from door to door as a peddler. Since every business starts as small, if we translate it to large houses, large businesses, we will be able to trace the evolution of how business improved-how businesses developed. In their translating to large houses, we will be able to see what is the influence of social forces, what is the influence of political forces, the influence of State policy. All those things will be coming together. So I would say today the approach should be concentrated on the large houses, the large businesses because they would give us an insight into the historical forces that shape the business behavior and the business evolution.

And I think while I am on this theme, I would in passing ,like to pass a comment on the whole question of entrepreneurial history or business history. My own preference would be to use the term business history rather than entrepreneurship history. Because , entrepreneurship stops at a point of time and merges into business. And therefore if we study business history, willy nilly we study entrepreneurship history.

The theme I think comes as a result of the engagement with the subject. The theme doesn't come from the sky. Theme comes when you study a subject. I am giving an example from my own experience. Years ago, I began looking at a question that was bothering me ever since the 1960's. At that time, comparison between Japan and India was very, very common. And I was always told Japan developed because of the Government. being a native government, India suffered because India was a colony. Somehow or the other the answers given did not satisfy me although I had done no research. When I began to look at the comparative picture of Japan and India I began to find many reasons to question that kind of analysis. But I am not going into that. One thing that struck me was the whole question of technology. Here is a country which is using the kind of technology that the west was giving but with modifications. And while modifying those technologies, Japan was ,creating new technology. Why is it-,I began to ask questions- that Indian industrialists accept a technology that was given from the West almost blindly – irrespective of whether the technology was suitable or not suitable? We went on accepting that technology blindly -even those who were very patriotic, very nationalistic, did the same. I began to ask this question and therefore a theme came to my mind -why can't we look at the technology in the Indian industry.

The point therefore is, when you are taking up research, you are interacting with a subject, with the themes.--Therefore the question is to hand down a list of themes, a list of subjects that you can carry on with research but where to start research..Whether you are starting with company history or you are drawing evolution, or you are talking about large houses, whether you are talking about small scale business, whether you are ending the entrepreneurial fate of a

business or you are going at the end, the global phenomena. So I am not talking about anthology or themes. I am talking about the approach to selecting those things.

Audience: I would like to understand whether there is an essential historical method and is there a discipline as such which can inform as to how we can capture the contours of change. So is there such a method and is there a paradigm that is called a historical method.

Prof. Tripathi: Methodology in history - one is the historical method. There are accepted norms of historical method. You collect your data. Analyze your data. Come to a conclusion. So therefore that methodology is general methodology in history. Don't forget that we are talking about history - business history as history. So the norms of historical research would be applicable to business history exactly as it is applicable to economic history, applicable to social history and so on and so forth. Whether a business historian would need to or borrow some of the methods from other disciplines that impinge on history -well it is something the historian has to live with. Doesn't a political historian depend on some of the methods of political analysis?. Doesn't an economic historian go into the whole question of what are the broad economic forces?. So in the same way, suppose I am looking at the performance of a particular business unit, I have to depend on some of the methods adopted by other disciplines adopt - borrow, probably spend some time to learn. For instance, the particular kind of work that I was doing where a company was supposed to have been gifted to the share holders by another company. All that I was to find out was why. I couldn't find it out. I took the balance sheets of the two companies to a person in the accounting area and he showed me how one fund was transferred to another. This kind of borrowing takes place in every discipline.

Audience: What is the historical method?

Prof. Tripathi: Depends on the accepted tenets of historical method. There is no question about that.

Dr. Raman Mahadevan: One needs to look at business or entrepreneurship within the larger context of the process of change that have overtaken society. So the historical method would include this whole question of causation and generalization. These are the two major areas of enquiry. To simplify by way of illustration, why is it that the Marwaris moved into Bengal at a point they did. -post First World War Then the industry- whatever little industry there was, mainly jute- was dominated by the. European Managing agencies that were essentially Scottish. But then at a certain point of time the marwaris moved in .. As historians we would want to know why did they do so and why is it that the Bengalis didn't move in? Why was there no Bengali entrepreneurship? Now in fact, ironically, in Bangladesh, the garment sector is controlled by extremely dynamic entrepreneurs who are even beating Tirupur - Tirupur is losing out to

Bangladesh. But there was no history of Bengali entrepreneurship. It makes us rethink why it that the Bengalis didn't move in is. It is said that they were playing it safe; that permanent settlement had induced a class of land owners who were reluctant to move into industry. So you are looking into causation. You are looking into generalization. So that would be one method.

At the level of the firm, again to illustrate, why is it that the Chettiars didn't move into industry? They had all the money. If capital is the only factor- , if you have substantial capital, and if the rates are return on investment are reasonably attractive, why is it that only some people move in and others don't move in? So one is willy nilly forced to look at other parameters. The fact that by the time the Chettiars moved back from Burma when there was a crisis, and they had the money , they found that the situation had already crowded. There were already people who had moved in. It was much more competitive. As money lenders and bankers they were used to a certain amount of risk. You are giving the money. You expect the person to, you foreclose it on land. If he doesn't pay up, you get the land. But investing in industry, getting the technology and at a time when technology had to be imported- I am talking about the colonial period- you see what is involved. You have to acquire land, you have to invest in technology, you have to organize labour. As money lenders, you don't organize. You only come in contact with labour in so far as they borrow money from you. But here you have to organize and you had to deal with the working class. You had to deal with technology and most importantly, markets.. Now you have a unified national market. But when you go back in time, you had regional markets. Tamil entrepreneurs were largely operating within the Tamil market. Getting anything from Coimbatore to Chennai itself was a Herculean task when transport was not very well developed. You had essentially the bullock cart. Of course, motor vehicles had come in by the 1930's. But it was an expensive mode of transport. Railways was there but was not as densely connected. So marketing was a problem. One needs to look at all this. That would explain why there was much more risk why many entrepreneurs couldn't move in. The people who could move in had a very astute understanding of the industry. So those are the kind of things one would look at .

Questioner- Ramachandra Guha: Harish's remarks about the importance of family firms and studying family firms is very important. But if you look at the history of entrepreneurship, then would one consider the Indian political party as family. And of course in this State, the JDS is a good example. I mean at the National level it is the Congress. But what the Congress did, it is often ignored.. Indira Gandhi converted the Congress into a family firm. She set a precedent which almost every other party followed. It is arguable; it is an arguable hypothesis, that in the case of the Congress, the conversion of the family firm was motivated by managing, egocentricity and a desire for power. But in some of the other cases such as the regional parties, it is really a

question of entrepreneurship and that will mean money as you pointed out for successive generations. So that's one thing- whether one considers, whether that should be a part of the history of entrepreneurship - the conversion of political parties and their families. You may be interested in Nandan Nilekani. Actually in fairness, Narayan Murthy did before Nilekani (dissociating entrepreneurship from family). . And in fairness, Gandhi was the first who did it. Gandhi coined the term of trusteeship and trusteeship, in Gandhi's idea of trusteeship individual characters does not pass on his wealth or shares to his children but to next level of competence which is what Narayan Murthy and Nilekani think many, many years later. But Gandhi himself followed an example. It is interesting Gandhi's old writings are of incalculable worth. Gandhi willed his writings to a trust, not to his children. They were a huge amount of capital, intellectual capital that could be converted to financial capital. But it was all left to trust.

Prof. Tripathi: The questions, there are many curiosities. But that is the beauty of the session that leaves you with questions and not the answers. So I would like to thank the panelist for raising these questions and raising your curiosities. And I hand over the platform to Prof. Prakash Chandra for the next session.

Prof. Pankaj Chandra: When we started to talk about business history at IIM Bangalore almost a year ago, we started asking this question- what do we teach? When it comes to a professional educational institution like the IIM, we have programs that run for younger managers. We have programs that we do with people with experience. People who are interested in public policy come in. We have doctoral students here. The question which runs through our mind -when we talk about business history in a class room setting is -what do you teach?. How do you teach business history? Is there a certain pedagogic direction? Is there a diversity of pedagogic tools that one can use? What is the realm of teaching material that one draws upon? And so maybe there is an opportunity for us to leap frog, design it anew, to try to create something which is far more encompassing, far more questioning- and at the same time very contemporary at this juncture. So that's really at the crux of it. With India changing so dramatically, how much of very early history should we bring into our curriculum and what is the role of more modern business experiences that we bring on to the table? How do we reflect what has happened in the past to projecting what might be happening in the future? Actually many of the young managers would be quite keen to understand.

Lastly, where do we place Indian experience within the pantheon of global experiences? Do we restrict ourselves very much to the Indian experiences? How do we draw upon global experiences of all kinds? Some got mentioned here and I am very sure some of economies which are very similar to ours, that might also educate us interestingly.

So I just thought I will pose a few questions to you and hopefully we are not going to develop a curriculum in the next one hour but if there are some ground level principles, thoughts we can put on to the table, then we would like to start the process. Prof. Surajit Majumdar: I would talk about this in general terms drawing on my experience of curriculum development in my own subject in the University where I taught and also some degree of familiarity I have with business history. I would look at this as something where, to begin with, one has to look at constraints that are there as well as the possibilities that are there and within that try and work out what can be done. There is no such thing as an ideal one can keep. One is constrained by what are the capacities one has, resources one has, and of interest people may have, what the student intake of an institution is - which in a case like IIM would be fairly diverse in terms of the background with which they come. And therefore one cannot approach it like an M.A. in Economics for which students are coming with graduate training in economics and they would know some basic things. Here people are coming from diverse background. You probably will have to assume a much lower level in the particular field when you are thinking of it. So there are a series of constraints. There are also possibilities. And one would be well advised to look at this historically. That the set of constraints and opportunities can also be changed over our time. And in this regard I think the post graduate education part of the IIM and the research part of the program can feed into each other in more senses than one. It is my experience that research itself is not something which attracts many students. The time horizon that people are thinking is very short. So in the normal course, one does not expect that there is an interest in doing research. However a lot of students do get interested in research if in the stage of education prior to that - even if they come with a different intention to that stage - they find something which excites them. So, for example, in a post graduate program, a student may come in with the idea of doing that program and going back into a job. But the student also changes in the process of that program - if the student finds something interesting and exciting, then decisions about what to do after that may change. So I think the research program in a sense can be fed in by what goes on in the course. And the research program can also influence the post graduate program in terms of what inputs it can give and the kind of environment it gives to even the post graduate students who come in. If they come into a place where there is a research environment, where people who have been in the field longer than them, are doing research, talking about them, discussing them - that is also something that can interest people. So this process can enhance capacity. To begin with, I think what one would have to think of is in what sense historical dimensions can be brought into what is otherwise normally taught in a management institution. I am not very familiar, I have a very vague idea of what all is taught in a management institute but based on that

very idea, if you are looking at corporate strategy, there is a historical dimension that can be brought into that. If you are say looking at institutional forms of business, there is a historical dimension that can be brought into that. If you are looking at say, company law, how is it that company law has evolved over a period of time in response to what circumstances. So, if in many of these areas historical dimension can be brought in, which in the sum total, produce with the students who go through these programs, an inclination towards a historical perspective. So that is of course something that is possible but it depends on the material available --- but in different fields different experts would need to apply their minds based on what material is available which may of course change in the course of research in this area. And this element can become stronger over a period of time.

The other part would of course be to have straight forward business history courses. I think we should give some sense to management students in India about the historical evolution of Indian business, through different stages, and I think ways would be there for going back fairly to the past and not just take them to the present because otherwise that historical perspective doesn't really come. So, broadly in terms of what happened in pre Independence era, Indian business growing within the economic space of India in the context of foreign capital of one kind dominant and having to face, a foreign rule. Post Independence- in the pre liberalization period, given the kind of economic strategy that was in force, how does the business adapt to that, what kind of changes come about. And then the post liberalization period with a new different context whether they are operating primarily within India or abroad, still operating in some kind of global space. What kind of changes have come about?. Some kind of a course which could give them a sense of this would, I think that could be one possibility that could be explored.

Prof. Tripathi: Any answer to the question about what kind of approach we should have, what kind of teaching we should have should be related to the question - what we think of history. I think it is important for us to know, at least it is important for us to remember that historians' interest is not past. Historian is not committed to the past. He is committed to the present exactly as the economist is committed to the present. Exactly as the sociologist is committed to the present. The only difference is that the economist's laboratory is the present and the historian's laboratory is the past. If you look around, most of the historians are liberal in their outlook. They would not have been liberal if they are wedded to the past. They are wedded to the present. So if when we are thinking about a course in business history, we are thinking about a course which might enlighten us about the present, which might help us understand the present business. And that gives us an insight into what should be taught, what should we call it, where should we start it, and where do you end it and how do you organize it. The first question - what should we call it

- we have answered earlier. My preference is business history because business encompasses entrepreneurship and therefore is a much larger subject.

The point is where we should start. This is where I think the difference will arise. As I said, my interest as a business historian is to understand the present state of business. And therefore the course must start somewhere where the transition to the modern world/modern business begins to take place. There is a difference between an antiquarian. An antiquarian means a historian. An antiquarian looks at the past for the sake of past. For the historian, past is only a backward integration of the present. So I must start where the transition takes place. It depends on how you define transition. Depends on where you pin point the data transition but you must keep in mind, this course must start at a place where the transition takes place. My own understanding is, that in order to understand transition, you have to start somewhere in the colonial times. You can't talk about slavish attitude to technology without understanding what was happening in the colonial period. You can't understand even the managerial structure today unless you understand how the managerial agency system was born and developed. If I asked the graduate students of the business school what you understand by the managing agency system, I will be surprised if more than 5% of the people answer that question. They won't be able to. Point I am making is therefore, think about the date of transition to the present and that will be the starting point of that course. My preference and my understanding is that this should be the colonial period. What about the colonial period and how do you define it? In my way of thinking, I define it somewhere around 1750's but you can estimate your own period. Why I define 1750 is a question I don't want to answer at present. I would think this is the kind of course we should have. The point is what we should do to see that the course really flourishes. Because there is no point in starting a course that no one is willing to study. I will have - to answer this question- be a little autobiographical. I tried to have this course in IIM Ahmedabad at the post graduate program level. Institute faculty decided that we should have a small course for the first year. When I had this course at the doctoral level, the reception was very good. I found that, all the sessions that I had, not only were all the people coming with no history background at all, they understood it, they studied and they worked hard on it in order to understand the course. I continued to have appreciative feedback and remark from them even to this very day.

I would therefore think, I should pitch a course at that level with the proviso that those people, at the post graduate program level, if they want to have the course they could have the course with the permission of the instructor - I do not want this course to be free for all and sundry. Why I am saying at the FPM level is because there is a major emphasis on research in this particular level. Because unless you are doing research in business history, you cannot teach.

You cannot teach Evolution of Modern Industry by Gadgil and stop with that. That is the preliminary work. And I would like to believe that you cannot after 20 years, stop at Oxford History of Indian Business and think you have taught everything and the book would be outdated by that time. So you ought to have a research based kind of course and therefore at the FPM level.. And from this it follows that if we are planning a course of that kind, and if we have a research program going on at the same time, and an easy method to have a research program would be to try to have a chair. I am sure there will be people who are willing to donate chair in business history because that could be then the focal point of research and teaching at the same time. And that therefore would ensure some kind of longevity to the program of teaching and research.

As I said earlier, I believe that business history would have died a premature death even at the Harvard Business School but for the donation that was given by the Strauss family that has continued to support that course and teach that program to this day. These were some of the thoughts coming to my mind when I came here thinking about what kind of teaching program we should have in business history. Questioner: (Vasanthi Srinivasan?)--- When you were engaging the students, what kind of methodologies did you use? The reason I am asking is, a lot of perspective courses, I think our struggle is in the kind of pedagogy that we use. So would you have some insight?

Prof. Tripathi: 1965. This is when I started the first course. At that time, I tried to weave together industrial history and accounts of business houses. Say for instance, I would take the textile industry. It had some kind of a back ground to industrial history, to textile industry .And a brief account of how textile industry grew, I would to the best of my understanding with the material available, I would take up one particular house, put together material to the extent available and give it to the class. That through this method the body of literature developed over a period of time which I continued to use in teaching and which fed my research all the time. Frankly speaking, I would not like to remember what happened to the course but I do remember what happened to me in the process. Believe me I would not have been able to write the Oxford History of Indian Business but for the kind of learning that took place in me from that process. So this is how I started.

I changed the strategy when I started the course at the FPM level. Because at the FPM level there were very small group of students- two, three or four- t I made it absolutely a reading course. I would put together the whole list of works that were available on this kind of thing and would say read for the perspective and read for the details. And after reading, one student would make presentation to the class and another student, therefore there were two making the

presentation, it became a point of joint learning. It worked and I would like to believe if the remarks, if the opinions expressed by the students are any criterion, I think it was a very successful study. So I would therefore think if there is a research based course which is open to post graduate students also, it goes to develop some kind of personality, some kind of reputation. What is more, the course will go on feeding research all the time and become more and more exciting to the people who are teaching. Intervention/ question (Prof. Y.L.R. Murthy) --- Actually stating the problem differently, is the problem with the curriculum or is the problem with the student?

To put it briefly, it is easier to teach vision to the Marwaris than to the new age Brahmins who come to the B -schools. Is that why business culture is not developing in B schools because we don't seem to be looking at the typical output of a B- school? He becomes, roughly speaking a private sector babu. But when you look at the business culture we are talking about and the business research we are talking about , that is all about Marwaris and Chettiars - that seems to be a world very different from this. Is the problem with the student and not the curriculum?

Prof. Pankaj Chandra: Just to add a sub question- by teaching of business history to a student, t what are we trying to achieve through that process?

Prof. Tripathi: If I buy your observation- I must tell you bluntly that I don't buy it - but if I buy your observation, then I believe that you will say it is not the problem of curriculum , it is the problem of what you call culture . If you are saying that then I believe that those people who really are interested in business history do not need to be taught whereas those who are interested are in fact not interested in business itself. I personally think that cultural determination as a basis of understanding is a wrong understanding. I am not saying that culture doesn't have impact on me. But culture itself is not static. When you are saying culture, that culture has moulded the Marwari, you are really saying that culture doesn't move. Culture moves with history. It is not a t handmaiden . They are companions. If that is the case, I believe that to offer a cultural explanation for any phenomena is starting at the wrong end of the spectrum. It may not be problem of curriculum itself . It is the problem of the forces operating in a society, at a given point of time that conditions the acceptability of a course.

When I was doing my Master's and Bachelor's, history courses were very popular because we had just come out of colonialism and questions about your own identity were live, we wanted to answer those questions with reference to history. After that those questions ceased to be important and the question of bread and butter became more important. And unfortunately history was not seen as a course that might solve the problem of bread and butter. How is it that until 1969, the business schools- at least I have the experience of IIM Ahmedabad- had to go from

door to door to get the students? Because engineering students at that time were not coming to management - they were going straight to the industry simply because they were in demand. 1969 was the recession and the recession changed the whole thing. Our problem at that time was to prevent the engineering students from coming rather than encouraging them to come. The point I am making is, when the bread and butter question became much more important, history began to loose out. It is not a question of curriculum - it is the question of accepting a particular course. Then, I believe, your curriculum- particularly history curriculum cannot be taken into account, to give the bread and butter. But history courses can be moulded in order to be able to answer questions that are part and parcel of courses that are related to bread and butter problem. I was asking you earlier how many of you can explain to me how the managing agency system functions. You can't do that, simply because it is gone. At the same time, if I would say that look at this managerial structure of a particular company, and I would say, tell me how does it function this way, then I believe you will have to go back to managing agency system because a part of the managing agency system - without the knowledge of the people who are practicing management today - is a part of their thinking So if you are teaching that kind of business history, you are making this particular course a part and parcel of those courses that explain to you, the situations which are part and parcel of your bread and butter. So I believe that when you say that curriculum is not the problem, curriculum is the problem. My answer therefore is very personal in the sense that I don't believe in cultural determination and my answer is related to the kind of experience I have with IIM in the particular course.

Intervention (Ramachandra Guha): Sir, I think there is something to Prof. Murthy's point. It is not just the curriculum .I think the students also could be the problem. And there may be a way of looking at it. For instance, Prof. Tripathi's remarks about linking business history to bread and butter problem, I suppose Harish's remark about case studies is very important. To have the right case study, so that, if you have case studies of institutions and individuals as part of your course, it's obviously both a mode of instruction which makes it more vivid and real and also, easier as the student is accustomed to, rather than only get them to read articles in the Journal of Economic History and so on. So case studies can be one way of doing it. And of course, one of us made a point about contemporary history, that business history also has large chunks of -30, 40 years, not just post Independence.. So if, shall we say, the case study of Infosys is shifted from the strategy of business policy course to the history course, you will automatically get more students. So I think linking curriculum and students -through the case study approach and bringing contemporary history are very important . Last 30, 40 years, not long ago, just that

long,. But to make use of the case studies to connect the student to the world ---. I think one may attempt.

Prof. Tripathi: When you say about curriculum, consider for example, Chandler, who is now considered to be the godfather of business history through out the world, and when he began to be taken seriously and how is it that his business history book became a required reading for the business policy courses- strategy and structure .He took about 5 companies. Their analysis and he came to the conclusion that structure follows strategy. As a result even today , even the visible hand- the magnum opus - is not part of business policy courses but strategy and structure remains. What we meant is, you can have case studies but if your courses are organized in such a fashion that they begin to see that they are related to the problem that we have today, I believe they would be taken.

Ms. Mekhala Krishnamurthy: Connected to the point of saying 30,40 years of history being taken, a lot of the sociological studies, and anthropological studies that we would actually see as history were done around that time. So what would today be read as historical material but was actually done in the present, around the times you are talking about, I think would be very important. I don't know one is for the business history course. But certainly there is quite a rich literature in anthropology , in economic anthropology and sociology that may be interesting to include in our IIM_courses. So these perhaps can be integrated into the existing courses as well if they are not there.

The second quick point to make is that, I was talking to an old man in the *mandi* who said “*Anubhav lehna ek kala hai*” -, the idea that even to take the learning from experience is an art. The old way in which learning used to happen in these markets is ---apprenticeship. You had to learn how to draw lines at the very beginning. And, I realized that, I did a lot of my learning to do field work as an under graduate because we used to have field work grants as an undergraduate at the Harvard where we could spend summer doing small studies. I think that would be something to think about when you can integrate field work at all levels from under graduate through your doctoral students. . How can we make it, somehow, less of an isolated experience or something that is added on to a course but something more substantial. Part of these communities of thinking or intellectual work, your early training as well as your excitement to do research begins sometimes there. May be even small field work projects, grants for those kinds of things will be quite exciting and perhaps could be integrated into summer experiences and analysis.

Audience: To talk on the purpose of business history in business education, I was wondering that important lessons about leadership and culture building and how culture is evolved - can be learnt through the business history. If you look at Tata's history and talk about value based

organizations and socially responsible organization, can be beautifully done. You look at Marwari for that matter. Managing talent is a huge concern and I think to talk about nurturing talent, that is the kind of philosophy that is followed in most of the family businesses -so a whole lot of lessons about leadership and culture can be done through business history. When I remember about history per se , if you, for the moment remove the word business from business history and from the business education, I think teaching history has been a huge challenge . When I remember my school days in the 50's, remembering those dates and time and place was a huge challenge. But recently when my daughter was doing her MA in history, and I learnt along with her those books, it was very enjoyable. Because at this point of time I was trying to understand the social context and somewhere I tried to find myself. So my submission is that if our teaching can facilitate people to understand the context and facilitate the people to find themselves , I think we can make the business history as much interesting as any other subject in the business education.

And finally, I was just recently listening to the CCS projects. It was about Reliance and how things have happened in the recent past. And I was reminded when I was a student in IIM Ahmedabad in 1982, and I tried to learn. So if you can look at the CCS projects on particular organization , contemporary concern studies over a period of time, I think you would have captured history of the organizations.

Panelist (Surajit Majumdar): I will make a small point there, which is that, as Prof. Tripathi said the whole set of forces go into shaping what is the culture of the student. It is not something that is fixed. But however, I do understand from my own teaching background, that when one is actually engaging with the student, one takes the student with what all the baggage the student comes..That part of the culture that is already shaped from the past is not something that one can act upon. The curriculum and pedagogy which is part of the forces that are subsequently going to act on shaping that student's culture is where there is scope for maneuver. So what curriculum, what pedagogy to have should be based on some sense of what kind of student comes. Once one has begun with the idea that this is a field which needs to be developed, from that must also follow the development of abilities and resources for all this .And my idea would be that, perhaps in a field like this, not to have a very functional approach to what it is going to give you .What is going to give you tomorrow may not even be born today. You have some general ideas, yes this is going to be useful but what may finally come out of it may be things not necessarily anticipated at this point of time. Many researches may throw up things which you don't anticipate when you start with it. Students who come to a management institute may end up with a variety of careers. And in different careers, this may serve a purpose in a different way. If they become entrepreneurs, in one sense it works. If they go into to become

corporate Babu's also, then there is one kind of thing. They may go into management education - there it plays a different kind of role. So they may go into different areas and you can't find direct relationship between this kind of thing and this why output may not be the best approach to follow.

Prof. Pankaj Chandra: Last, seems to be three broad strands that seem to be emerging. One is that of integrating much of this thinking through most appropriate pedagogic tool - whether it is a case, or a discussion, or a lecture, or a film. The second, really leads to who is the audience, and I think different audience would require different kind of engagement. And I think the doctoral program would be a very different way of engaging as far as learning business history is concerned. And so would be actual managerial executives. I would not drop them out from our entire consideration because when they come in, their experiences are of a very different nature from the very young PGP's who come into the program who may be looking into a different exposure. And by the way, the PGP's, themselves also look for very interesting value courses. They may be quite interested themselves in trying to understand and unravel what is happening today in the business environment based on what happened in the past and so on and so forth.

And the third, really is how to build this culture of, or this environment of research to drive teaching. And that is through the chair and perhaps a Centre in times to come if we are up to it and so on and so forth. I think there is a graded approach which one could perhaps take in getting an activity going best. People put together, may be all over the country. I think we don't have to teach a course all by ourselves to begin with. There are some people here. There are people elsewhere, whom we could draw upon and experiment with a course going forward and then see how it leads and in the meanwhile, these days champion someone that might just emerge whose own engagement is much longer time through research than just teaching a few sessions.

Prof. Kumar: My very heartfelt thanks to all the panelists.