

Professor Jagdish N. Sheth: An Intellectual Giant Among Us

A write-up by the eJain Digest Editorial team

Is Earth a living, breathing and regenerating organism? Jainism believes so. While the physical and biological scientists may disagree with such a statement, they would agree that Earth meets some of the life criteria of homeostasis, unique structural organization, adaptation, and above all regeneration (if not reproduction). Prof. Jagdish Sheth also views the Earth as a living, breathing and regenerating organism, but this pioneer of many innovative and fundamental marketing ideas takes this concept further to influence a quantum behavioral change in people where it is direly required. In his new book "CHINDIA RISING" he has thoroughly analyzed and presented a compelling case of a major economic growth occurring in China and India. He argues that such a shift will not only be beneficial to both China and India but will help the overall development of world economy. However, he also gives a stern warning with solid reasoning, that the entire growth model will fall apart if these countries do not "**Nurture Nature**".

In this issue of eJain Digest, we like to honor the Charles H. Kellstadt Professor of Marketing in the Goizueta Business School at Emory University; Professor Jagdish N. Sheth. Dr. Sheth was one of the Keynote speakers at the last JAINA conference, where ecology was the theme of the conference. He eloquently presented the case of how the core Jain values can play an important role in the market dynamics of the future. What struck many in the audience was not just the intellectual depth, but the professor's cordial style

that brought out that humble "Jagdishbhai"; a Jain community member.

Born in Rangoon in Burma (now Myanmar) as the youngest of the six siblings in 1938, Jagdishbhai had a very humble childhood. His father, a staunch believer in Gandhism, was a rice trader as so many other Gujaratis who had gone to Burma. In 1941 fearing atrocities due to an imminent Japanese invasion, the family left Burma with practically no belongings, returning to their native village of Kandagara (near Mundra) in Kutch-Gujarat. The family survived for almost five years from a very meager income earned by his mother and sister producing certain household products and doing simple chores. Who could possibly imagine seeing a five year old kid roaming around barefooted in the sheris (term for the small village streets in Kutch) of Mundra would become one of the world's renowned marketing guru?

Some relief came when his sister was married in a relatively well-off Mehta family. Based on the location where his two elder brothers took up employment or started a business, the family moved between different cities but ultimately the family settled in Madras (Chennai) in 1952. Jagdishbhai finished his high school in 1955. Jagdishbhai credits his two elder brothers Himatlal and Gulabchand a lot in shaping his future. Himatlal was a businessman. Gulabchand, on the other hand, was a scholar. He had been an Editor of popular Gujarati magazines and was also well versed in the Jain philosophy. It seems



Dr. Jagdish N. Sheth and wife Madhu with former President Jimmy Carter



Jagdish picked up the intellectual tenacity to dive deep into a subject from Gulabchand, while ensuring relevancy and practicality of work from Himatlal. Jagdishbhai proceeded to finish his B. Com (Honors) with the core subjects of Accounting, History, and Statistics. While history was his most favorite subject, one could easily see that these three subjects formed the foundation of his future research and analysis. As a part of his B. Com (Honors), he joined Loyola College for an advanced 3-year course on taxation, where he was the gold medalist.

While at college the person who grew up in Mundra started showing his modern trends. Jagdish joined a youth group called Sahitya Sadan, whose purpose was to encourage and preserve Gujarati literature. Jagdishbhai would not tell us if he had genuine love for Gujarati literature or he had other ulterior motives. Whether it was his impressive looks, scholarly outlook, or a just a great tone at reciting poems; he did manage to impress a young school teacher from a Jain family. Such a milan would be very unusual in a conservative Kutchi-Gurjar Jain community in 1957-58. He would subsequently ask Madhuji to travel all the way to Pittsburg (as his schedule did not allow him to travel to India), where the couple were married in a classical Indian tradition in December 1962. This might be the first wedding of its type for the North American Jain community. Credit goes to Mrs. Madhu Sheth for bringing up the family of two children in the Jain vegetarian tradition. She has since been very active in community services, was President of the Greater Atlanta Jain Center and is now a Director of JAINA.

After borrowing about Rs15,000 from a Jain trust, family and friends, Jagdishbhai embarked on his academic journey to USA in 1961. He joined the MBA program at University of Pittsburg, where he would subsequently also get his PhD. While, at Pittsburg, Jagdishbhai was particularly interested in Psychology and was impressed by the works of Abraham Maslow. In one of his MBA term papers in Behavioral Sciences, he examined the working of institution like government, religion, corporation, and family and came up with some bold predictions. On the government front he predicted that communism will fail and those

governments that will promote entrepreneurship and independence will see growth in their economies. On the corporate front, he saw the values shifting from the production model where fear (job security) was the key factor behind workers' productivity, to those companies where the workers will be given independence to be creative and productive. On the religious front he had an interesting perspective; a) when safety and security are the primary concerns, one needs God as a protector, b) when things become somewhat stable, one need God that loves, and c) when self-esteem and independence take the front seat, one looks for the God within.

Jagdishbhai started his academic career as an Assistant professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management followed by a few years at Columbia University. Probably the most productive fifteen years of his research career were spent at the University of Illinois. Thoroughly enjoying the campus town environment, he clearly made his mark in the field of marketing, as his stature grew, to become the Chair of the Department to an Endowed Professorship, namely the Walter H. Stellner Distinguished Professor of Marketing. He was amongst the first to start collaborative research with the psychology department. He was a member of the University's Tenure & Promotion committee for over 9 years. Based on the advice of the academic program committee that he was a part of, UofI became one of the first universities to start the trend of merging the computer science department with the Electrical Engineering department. It was also during his tenure at UofI that he started advising AT&T and also training their executives, a relationship that grew over time. He was the advisor when AT&T broke-up into Baby Bells and ironically advised some of these companies to merge again in the subsequent years. Relationships with the telecommunications companies led him to move to Southern California to start a Center for Telecommunications Management, at the University of Southern California in 1984. USC awarded him the position of Robert E. Brooker Professor of Marketing where he stayed until 1991. It was again the relationship with BellSouth that motivated Jagdishbhai to move to Emory University in 1991, where as an Area Coordinator he started the Center for Relationship Marketing.



At Emory, he continues to be the Charles H. Kellstadt Professor of Marketing.

Many of the career decisions and moves from one location to another were mostly guided by three key principles - nurturing the needs of the family, ability to do highly productive and creative work, and paying his dues back to the society. Early in his career Jagdishbhai took an interesting step of taking up an assignment of a Visiting Professor at IIM Calcutta, in the fourth year of its formation. He felt it was the right time to take his two children back to India, and also serve the mother country. In order to expose his children to the world, he later took up an assignment at Copenhagen School of Business in 1976. Even though there were many opportunities and invitations at larger metro areas, he decided to go to University of Illinois, which is a campus town that promoted raising the family up with strong values. The move to Emory was also geared in part to avoid the extended daily commute of LA metropolis. Jagdishbhai strongly believes in contributing back to the very roots where he has gained a lot. He has an active "Sheth Trust" involved in various charitable activities. He has set up multiple endowments at Uofl, Pitt and at Emory to support various academic scholarly activities or International pioneering work.

In 1989, Jagdishbhai was given the Outstanding Marketing Educator award by the Academy of Marketing Science. In 1991 and again in 1999, he was given the Outstanding Educator Award by the Sales and Marketing Executives International (SMEI). Jagdishbhai was also awarded the P.D. Converse Award for his outstanding contributions to theory in marketing in 1992 by American Marketing Association. In 1996, Jagdishbhai was selected as the Distinguished Fellow of the Academy of Marketing Science. In 1997, Jagdishbhai was awarded the Distinguished Fellow award from the International Engineering Consortium. He is also a Fellow of the American Psychological Association (APA). 2004 marked a stellar year for Jagdishbhai as he was awarded both the Richard D. Irwin Distinguished Marketing Educator Award and the Charles Coolidge Parlin Award which are the two highest awards given by the American Marketing Association.

Description of Jagdishbhai will not be complete without some mention of his groundbreaking research. If we were to list each and every research publication, published books, book reviews, academic & professional honors, number of doctoral students who graduated under him or dissertation committee that he presided, major consulting assignments, other articles, and news worthy interactions, we would fill a complete book! Decent amount of this information is available on his web site; www.jagsheth.net. One can easily say he contributed to at least one fundamental marketing or a change idea during every decade of his academic presence. His initial publications were more geared towards basic concepts of marketing, however his later publications seem to address many interdisciplinary and global economic subjects.

The Endowed Professor Jagdish Nanchand Sheth has clearly made exemplary academic, social, and professional contributions. We in the Jain community are proud to have such an intellectual giant among us. The challenge for this marketing genius is to combine all his skills and experience to effectively sell the concept of "**Nurturing Nature**" to the world, a concept that is desperately needed to save the Living, Breathing and Regenerating Mother Earth.