

CHAPTER

4

An Ancient HR Practices & Cross Comparison Relations in the Indian Industrial sector

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Abstract:

This paper addresses gaps in research related to study and understanding of Human Resource Management in the context of Indian working culture of industrial sector. HRM practices in India specifically in the context of the industrial sector. The timeline industrialization in India, growth of HRM and major transition across Indian industrial sector post economic liberalization – 1991. Lacuna in communication of goals, review of performance and use of key PA techniques like Assessment Centers for objective analysis of multiple evaluation parameters takes an initiative for betterment of the employees of the organizations. Indian managers following a paternalistic way of management find it difficult to adhere to the process of stringent and objective performance appraisal systems. They generally tend to follow an ad-hoc system of appraising performance which is more subjective, and relationship oriented than objective and statistically measurable. Their conflict in catering to their professional role while maintaining balance with their social role is reflected in a superficial commitment

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to the process of performance appraisal and true value determination of the subordinates.

Keywords: *Ancient HR Practices, Working Culture, Performance Management, Cultural Management, Compensation Management, Job Market India.*

Introduction

HRM or human resource management as a strategic function that encompasses management of its critical human assets for gaining competitive advantage in a dynamic business environment. HRM is the function performed in organizations that facilitates the most effective use of people to achieve organizational and individual goals (John Ivancevich and Glueck, 1989). The concept that 'human resource' is valued assets that can help tide an organization over turbulent waters has been very aptly realized in the recent times of economic turmoil by businesses worldwide. The genesis of this concept however lies with the onset of the behavioral movement in the early 20th century when eminent researchers like Mary Parker Follet, Chester Barnard, Elton Mayo and Douglas McGregor realized the most important component of any business 'its manpower or human resources' that made the difference towards better efficiency for any organization. Termed the 'Human Relations Movement', researchers tried to understand how issues like working conditions, workplace relations, job satisfaction, work variations etc could impact efficiency levels of an organization.

Armstrong (1992) defines HRM as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets the people working there individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives.

The Michigan school (Fombrun et al., 1984) believed that HR systems and the organization structure should be managed in a way that is congruent with organizational strategy, also therein termed as the 'matching model'; the emphasis was on understanding the entire cycle of Human Resource Management beginning with selection, to effective appraisal, giving rewards to developing high quality employees in the long term perspective. Round the same time period, the Harvard school of thought (Beer et al., 1984) developed the 'Harvard Framework' (Boxall, 1992) that first held the belief of considering a long

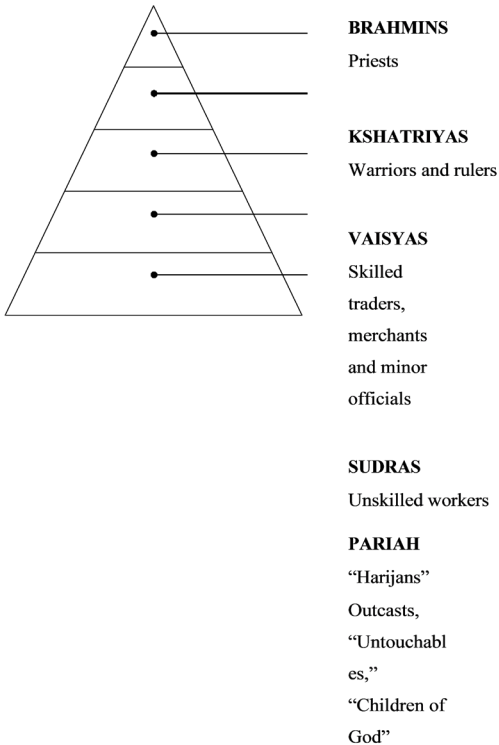
term perspective of people management as potential assets than merely variable costs. Beer et al., 1984 went on to state: Human resource management involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and its employees its human resources.' They were also the first to believe that line managers should accept the responsibility for alignment of competitive organizational strategies and personnel policies rather than totally depending only on personnel managers for effective management of their people. This model went on to exert considerable influence on management thoughts of countries across the world and also the functioning of organizations by creating a difference between personnel management and human resource management. HRM has been a field of study with increased complexity and multidisciplinary approach. (Cakar and Bititci, 2002) through their research demonstrated the levels of inconsistency in the study of HRM with respect to HRM models from a business process perspective. The focus has been on understanding what HRM means in the Indian context across the industries (Singh, 2005; Rao T. V., 2009), how this particular discipline is helping firms cope against MNC competition (Som, 2002, 2006, 2008), cross cultural context in terms of comparison with the US and UK (Amba-Rao, 1994, 2000; Badhwar et al., 1997, 2001, 2003, 2004). However, most of the literature has been generic in nature studying the Indian context of HRM across all spectrums of the Indian industry with considerably less focus on understanding the specific aspect of this discipline to the Indian industrial sector. Evidence of little research and review on this specific sector has addressed major issues related to values (Sinha, 1980, 1988, 1990; Singh, 1990), leadership (Sinha, 1984) and performance management (Amba-Rao et al., 2000; Rao S., 2007) or has been based in understanding union and industrial relation issues (Flagan and Deshpande, 1996; Ramaswamy and Schiphorst, 2000; Bhattacharjee, 2001; Bhandari and Heshmati, 2005; Bhandari, 2010) with less focus on understanding issues of organization, management and impact of HRM particularly on functioning in the industrial sector. Human Resource Management in the context of Indian Automobile. Through literature review (secondary data), and help of prevalent cases pertaining to this sector, the following points are addressed. However, research related to India has been limited with more

focus being on cross cultural comparisons between US, UK and Germany. The timeline for literature review has been taken from 1970-2025, as it encompasses the period of industrialization in India, growth of HRM and major transition across Indian industrial sector post economic liberalization – 1991.

The history of human resource management in India:

Management as a concept is not new to the country. Historically it is stated that Kautilya (the most reputed economist and management guru of Indian History, advisor to King Chandragupta Maurya) provided a systematic treatment of management of human resources as early as 4th century B.C. in his treatise titled “Artha Shastra”. This book or treatise details logical procedures and principles in respect to people management referring to the *rajya* (state) as an organization and the *raja* (king) as the head or CEO of an organization. Kautilya being the eminent advisor, through his *sutras* emphasizes the need of humility in the king and his *mantris* (managers) while following the path of dharma (ethics & righteousness) in management of an organization (*state*). The importance was on self-management and self-evaluation before considering oneself truly capable of leading an organization as a competent leader keeping welfare of people and the organization before one’s own motives. The text although written centuries back in an ancient script (*Sanskrit*) draws parallel to today’s modern organization systems and issues. (See Muniappan, 2005 and Rangarajan, 1992). Similarly, the *Bhagwad Gita*, considered one of the most holy texts of Vedic literature written during *Mahabharata* is a practical guide to all aspects of life including management of self and thereafter management of people and resources. Concepts like optimum utilization of resources, decision making, leadership, ethics, motivation, morale and outcome of performance (deeds) are clearly marked in the verses of this great book as ongoing dialogues between the *Lord Shree Krishna* and the *Warrior Arjuna*. (Bhattathiri, Unknown). Understandably the ancient Vedic concept of ‘Varnashrama’ also refers to division of work based on natural classification inherent in a society, based on one’s personal capabilities and aptitude. ‘Varna’ means ‘root’ and its understanding differs in interpretation of Rig Veda and Bhagwad Gita. The ‘Purusha

Sukta' in the Rig-Veda 10:90, refers to the classification of four varna by way of comparison to the 'primordial man' (Purusha). It defines the Brahmana as the mouth, his arms as the Ramayana (used for Kshatriyas), his belly and thighs as Vaishya and his feet as Sudra. The Bhagvad Gita differs in this viewpoint with Lord Krishna classifying individuals not based on his birth or heredity but on his interests and capabilities in doing work. The fact that Hindu societies had already understood this concept can be aptly visible from segregation in terms of skill based work like Brahmins (the mouth) undertaking teaching and spiritual work, Kshatriyas (the arms) undertaking protection of the state as warriors, Sonars (belly and thighs -the providers) – goldsmiths, Lohars – blacksmiths, Baniyas – traders (part of the *Vaishyas* clan) and Shudras – people undertaking menial jobs. This ancient management knowledge was quite relevant to the functioning of a society, being relevant in this century also; wherein we refer to career development-based one's interest and aptitude towards work. This concept of management from ancient India was however lost due to successive invasions upon the country and confluence of different cultures from across the world, fragmenting the country into numerous small states governed by sovereign rulers lacking at times both competence and people (*Praja*) management skills. Gradually the natural classification of the society evolved due to subsequent inter-marriages and subdivisions, giving rise to more than 3000 plus castes, as can be accounted for in modern India. These sub-castes or 'jatis' resulted in more rigidity in a societal system that had been governed by principles of work interest, creating stringent laws for each sub-group by way of establishing supremacy of their own affiliated groups (jatis Varna or Caste system in India

Varna or Caste system in India**The advent of modern management in India:**

The initial years of modern management evolution in India, started with the eighteenth century (termed the Colonial period till the year 1950) when the Britishers or the colonial rulers set foot in the country, an era that has been marked with a sole focus on utilization of labour as a commodity which can be bought and sold at a price. So great was the impact of this thought process during the colonial rule, that the then formulated Plantation Act 1863 treated labour with imprisonment and severe punishment on failure to do work as ordered. The mechanism was biased with hardly any intervention to protect the interests of workers except in issues related to wage settlement. The slow progress towards recognizing labour as human beings and not machines began with the Factories Act 1881, which allowed some liberal

policies like weekly offs, fixed wages and fixed hours of work. Personnel management being the main concern of employers during the early twentieth century, there was more concentration on industrial relations and labour management paving way for the enactment of various acts namely the Trade Union Act (1926), Workmen Compensation Act (1926), Trade Disputes Act (1929), Bombay Industrial Relations Act (1938); recommendations of Royal Commission on Labour 1931 led to the Payment of Wages Act (1936) and further amendments to Factory Legislations Act (see report by First National commission of Labour, NLC, 1969). Post independence focus slowly started shifting towards industrialization of the new country and evolution of a uniform Labour policy. However, the veil of colonialism still hung greatly over India with major leaders still being under the influence of Western philosophies and policies. Evidence of this fact is visible during the post-colonial phase of management evolution in India, from 1959-1976. The Indian government was keen on aping all that was Western and incorporating the same in the Indian context. It began looking at industrial investment through a 'mixed economy' policy wherein technology would be imported from Western nations but there would be a protection regime for domestic industries by way of policies relating to regulations on price levels, import levels, joint ventures, and investment levels to name a few (Rothermund, 1992). Their ambitious industrial and labour policies were backed by rising Indian business houses and leaders who were prominent socialists and authorities in themselves. Being family-controlled business that worked on the 'managing agency system', investment and staffing decision were centralized with no major merit towards empowerment of human resources (Tandon, 1980). The resultant effect of which became aptly visibly not only in the formulated Labour policies but also on management of workforce across the industries, being more legislative and reactive than being proactive and voluntary. However, this hope of quick fix policy by the Indian government did not work very well, with the country witnessing turbulent times from the year 1977 (when emergency was declared in India) till 1990 the year before liberalization process began in India. The subsequent series of wars that India faced from 1962-1972, bred a culture of protection across the Indian industry per say the industrial sector (being the most dominant sector). The crisis was compounded

by the lack of managerial talent in India since Indian managers belonging to a totally different cultural background just could not adjust to the managerial theories and models of the West. Theorist started questioning the root of Western philosophies with scathing remarks on Indian policy makers and so-called management gurus about the sanity of blindly aping the West in all domains of industrialization and management. They emphasized the need to understand concepts from India's own ancient roots, culture and values, even spirituality (Hinduism) and incorporate the same into Indian managers for better sensitivity to one's own people alternatively for better people management. (Chakraborty, 1991, 1995). India during this era of crisis, dipped from being one of the major industrialized countries to the bottom of the rung in the list of 10 industrialized nations. The 1992 UNDP Report of Human Development ranked India at 134, in a list of 160 countries on the human resource index.

The country's journey of progress began with the New Economic Policy, 1991 initiated by the then Prime Minister – Shri Rajiv Gandhi and his stalwart Dr. Manmohan Singh, opening the doors of Liberalization and ushering in the concept of competing in a globalized environment for the Indian industry. Banga (2005) presented a view on liberalization and its impact on wages and employment. She went on to conclude that needed to be increased in export-oriented sectors coupled with liberal labour laws that can go a long way towards improving employment levels and add on to the skills of workmen enabling strategic utilization of manpower for economic growth of the nation. This phase beginning 1992 has progressed greatly over the last two decades, accepting Human Resource Management as a holistic concept incorporating the essence of human spirit and recognition of its potential for business success approaches and models India National visionaries and model companies.

India has ever been a land of paradigm and fascination. People from the West had previously envisioned the country as a land of spiritual gurus and snake charmers a concept that has taken a long time to erode even with globalization and economic liberalization. Today India stands tall with its diverse culture, considerably huge population, and economic disparity as one of the fastest growing developing nations. It is a nation with

the largest English-speaking population and the world's largest base of middle class that has led the spurt of growth. A recent report by IMF has pegged India's GDP growth at 7.9% for the year 2025.

The country has ever been heavily influenced by Western management philosophies and schools of thought, particularly those of the United States and UK. Management education based on Western philosophy of 'materialism' gained prominence in India around the early sixties with the establishment of the Indian Institutes of Management (the most prestigious and reputed institutions of India), funded by the Ford foundation based on the thoughts and systems of its able western counterparts the Harvard School of Management and MIT's Sloan School of Business Management emphasizing the need to incorporate Western or more specifically US management theories and models as a medium of achieving collaborative management education. (Hill et al.1973, Srinivas N., 2009). Conversely the country has still clung to its roots, ethos and cultural values in terms of people management leading to a misunderstanding that generalized HRM principles do not work for India. The country has its own philosophies deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, traditions and habits that dominate its human resource management principles and functions (Sparrow, Budhwar, 1997). The best part about HRM evolution in the country has been its ability to incorporate principles, approaches and models from across the world that was beneficial to the functioning of the organizations. While labour and personnel management principles were heavily borrowed from United Kingdom, approaches and models of HRM came from the United States, quality consciousness and norms were adapted from the Japanese, thus creating a powerful productive concoction sprinkled with indigenous Indian values and ethos a sure shot Indian recipe for success even during the times of recent economic recession. Indian companies during post liberalization have faced many challenges in terms of re-orienting its workforce towards a more competitive and volatile business scenario by ways of either re-skilling or multi-skilling its manpower across various functional domains; making themselves capable of surviving amidst the onslaught of multi-nationals. This phenomenon has further necessitated Indian organizations to look beyond their narrow

domains of family oriented/ family centric management to wider perspectives of strategic management according to due importance to strategic human resource management as one of the critical factors of success in a competitive business domain. Although HRM in this country is at an evolutionary stage most suitably at its youth, there have been some progressive leaders and their related organizations who have laid the foundation for better people management pre-liberalization also; prominent amongst them being Jamsetji N Tata and his establishment the TATA group of companies (initially established as Tata Sons limited). Jamsetji, and the son Ratan the founder of Tata group was a strong believer of the welfare of all major stakeholders; primarily the employee stakeholders whom he understood as the heart of any organization reflecting the image and growth of any firm (Sivakumar, 2007). A visionary leader during his times (pre-independence era), Jamsetji stressed employee welfare by way of hygienic work and accommodation facilities for labour, recreational and education facilities for the employee family members, awards for performance and even investment in training and career development of employees; something unheard of then. Such was his understanding of labour psychology, that he was forever committed to the culture of participation in organizational growth. In times when management studies were at a nascent stage and industrial rules were not so formidable; Jamsetji pioneered retirement benefit systems for mill workers by way of voluntary provident fund and gratuity schemes. This dedication of the founder was carried on by his subsequent successor JRD Tata who had his own passion of philanthropy and tolerance, resulting in this esteemed group being recognized as a respectable and ethical organization of India. The impact of ethical image of this group of companies was such that employees held a degree of prestige in working for this organization and the name TATA became a synonym for 'Trust' in the country. JRD never believed in the philosophy of monitoring employees. His understanding was based on grooming the best of employees by way of participative and free-rein leadership, an ideology clearly reflected in numerous innovative people centric policies developed and adopted by the Tata group companies (Wakins, 2007). Tata Steel, one of the first companies of the group was a pioneer in progressive industrial relation policies introducing joint- consultative system of

management for better co-operation between labour and firm (Sen, 2009).

The legacy of Tata carried on with Ratan Tata at the helm, steering the organization towards a more strategic path albeit a little more autocratically than JRD crafting a new identity of post-liberalization period. the group in terms of retaining its core values and ethics but coming across as a more dynamic group with not only national but global business interests at its forefront.

Scientifically in the context of the Indian industrial sector:

Research related to job perception by Indians, has linked 'Undertaking a job' to not only extrinsic factors like authority and compensation but also to intrinsic factors like 'Self-esteem', 'Achievement' and 'Self-development'. Given this cultural and historical background, researches conducted on work organizations have displayed a strong hierarchical structure, high power concentration, centralized authority and decision making on part of the employers or supervisors simultaneously exhibiting the contrast effect of these dominating values on the employees across industrial sector by way of lacking sense of direction, affection towards co-operation, accountability and responsibility (Tripathi, 1990; Sinha, 1980, 1988, 1990). Kakar (1971) details Indian work organizational culture based on an understanding of the history of authority patterns from the British era. The study outlines shifting of authority patterns after Independence, from the hands of British supervisors to Indian managers who believed that maintaining high power distance between the superior and the subordinate and a display of assertive behavior can entail (induce)? work-related productivity from the employees. The show of emotions (by way of sympathizing) and lack of discipline by the supervisors while dealing with subordinates was not traditionally acceptable in the industrial sector, where being paternalistic or acting as a father figure commanded respect and power. The supervisors were supposed to maintain the power distance from subordinates and only interact with them when some problem arose, to give guidance or advice.

Sinha (1980), Sinha and Kanungo (1997) discuss the emergence of two different facets of relationship between the superior and subordinates across Indian organizations based on nurturing-style and participative style that progresses based on the maturity of the subordinates in terms of gaining more experience, expecting autonomy, responsibility and participation. An interesting fact to note in this study is the reference to *sneh* (affection) and *shraddha* (respect) in this relationship that values the paternal image of the supervisor ensuring workers.

Performance Management and Compensation Systems:

India has traditionally been a country with high power distance in working relationships, implying reverence and high authority for the superiors. Mendonca and Kanungo (1990) pointed out the typical aspects of the Indian way of management wherein decision process was centralized, allowing less scope for employees to be updated about different aspects of management. Similar views about leadership and supervisory styles of management across Indian organizations have been detailed by Kakar (1971), Singh (1990), Virmani and Guptan (1991). These studies through understanding of Indian work cultures and values emphasize a different perspective towards management of employees by Indian supervisors. Indian managers following a **paternalistic way of management** find it difficult to adhere to the process of stringent and objective performance appraisal systems. They generally tend to follow an ad-hoc system of appraising performance which is more subjective, and relationship oriented than objective and statistically measurable. Their conflict in catering to their professional role while maintaining balance with their social role is reflected in a superficial commitment to the process of performance appraisal and true value determination of the subordinates. Amba Rao et al. (2000) tried to understand performance appraisal systems in India by way of a comparative study across 116 firms in India, comprising both public sector, private sector and multinational/joint venture firms. The study revealed the impact of culture and values on the functioning of Indian managers and their perception towards the process of performance appraisal. Most firms conduct the routine annual performance appraisal process, but the objectivity and

evaluation parameter varies. For public sector organizations, the process is more of a formality given its rules and adherence to legislations, the focus is more on understanding venues for developmental perspectives than evaluation for assessing value and worth of an individual. The discussion process initiated for evaluating an employee's performance is structured and formal, with less scope for the employee to assess his current performance or any future avenue for improvement. This data is backed by seniority and service-based pay cum progression systems across Indian public sectors, reducing the credibility of performance appraisal process as a comprehensive evaluation tool.

Sadananda P. (2009) details a study of **NALCO's (National Aluminum Company Limited)- A Navaratnam PSU Performance Management System (PMS)** through a book chapter. The study highlights aspects of PMS which is based on Management by Objectives and is an annual exercise for both executives and non-executives of the organization. The survey depicts lacuna in communication of goals, review of performance and use of key PA techniques like Assessment Centers for objective analysis of multiple evaluation parameters. Although NALCO follows the mode of Coaching and mentoring for employee development, the system has not been implemented very successfully, and surveyed employees still feel that it is more of a formality than an intended developmental effort.

Conclusion:

The Human resource practices existing in the Indian industrial sector. Limitation of empirical research-based literature for this sector, ensured focus on a wider spectrum of published literature pertaining to the Indian industrial sector. A major source of the industrial sector has been quite an amount of empirical research by Badhwar et al; covering around 192 manufacturing units across India; albeit the focus of these studies has been more on work and cross-cultural comparisons. Which remains a lack of empirical research from Indian authors related to understanding issues like work culture across Indian manufacturing organizations pertaining to interplay of Indian values, its effect on employee relations, leadership and teamwork. Limited research done in this area indicates major

influence of Indian values on work relationships coupled with a mixed acceptance of western philosophies of management.

The studies conducted across varying time spans have demonstrated the typical behavioral aspects of Indian managers/leaders. While earlier studies conducted pre-liberalization have identified, Indian managers as having high power distance, being controlled and fond of rigid hierarchical structures, later studies conducted post-liberalization, have portrayed the changing face of leadership as more nurturing, transformational and employee-centric, given the highly competitive and volatile business scenario. Indian managers/leaders having grown in times of adversity, understand that there is no 'One way' of management; hence their focus has been to utilize western management principles while experimenting with their unique cultural flavors and finding the best possible 'Indian' way of empowering and developing its people for higher gains. During the study, it was also observed that there are no specific gender related studies that have been initiated for this sector; to help understand issues with women leaders or impact of gender on group member work relationship, performance and productivity. Furthermore, there exists lacuna on empirical research pertaining to the employee recruitment and selection practices in India. Though some studies have broadly detailed recruitment practices as part of a larger study comparing private and public sector HRM practices (Budhwar, 2003, Budhwar and Boyne, 2004); the end results are more generic failing to differentiate recruitment process for white and blue-collar workers. Studies in the domain of performance management is also limited, with focus only on understanding existence of performance management practices in the industrial sector, with less stress on understanding its effectiveness particularly to Indian organizations and Indian employees who may be under influence of country related values. This specific synergy between performance management measures and its effectiveness with Indian employees has not been largely explored, also their remains a lack of focus on linkage between compensation and motivational

factors related to effective performance in this sector. The lacuna pertains to empirical research on understanding management process for blue-collar workers, like their recruitment, selection, analysis of training needs, performance management or work relationships. Studies related to understanding use of labour and status of unions in the Indian industrial sector concentrates on detailing effective and optimum utilization of labour and a basic understanding of the limited status of registered unions, without detailing current industrial relations scenario and impact of globalization on union bargaining power. India today is on a high growth trajectory, and the Indian manufacturing industry is struggling to keep pace. The sector is plagued with high shortage of skilled and unskilled manpower both at supervisory and worker levels. The report (2006-2016) identifies procurement of manpower, its development and specialized training as key focus areas for sustained productivity and growth of this sector. Researchers need to work towards understanding specific challenges of this sector like Skills shortage, Talent development & nurturance, Employee engagement, Career transitions, Attrition and Unionism. Thus, the author feels that there is a need for concentrated efforts towards undertaking empirical research in specific aspects of the broad-based Indian manufacturing domain, given its complexities and exploring the impact of HRM practices on the continued growth and progress of the corresponding industries accordingly.

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