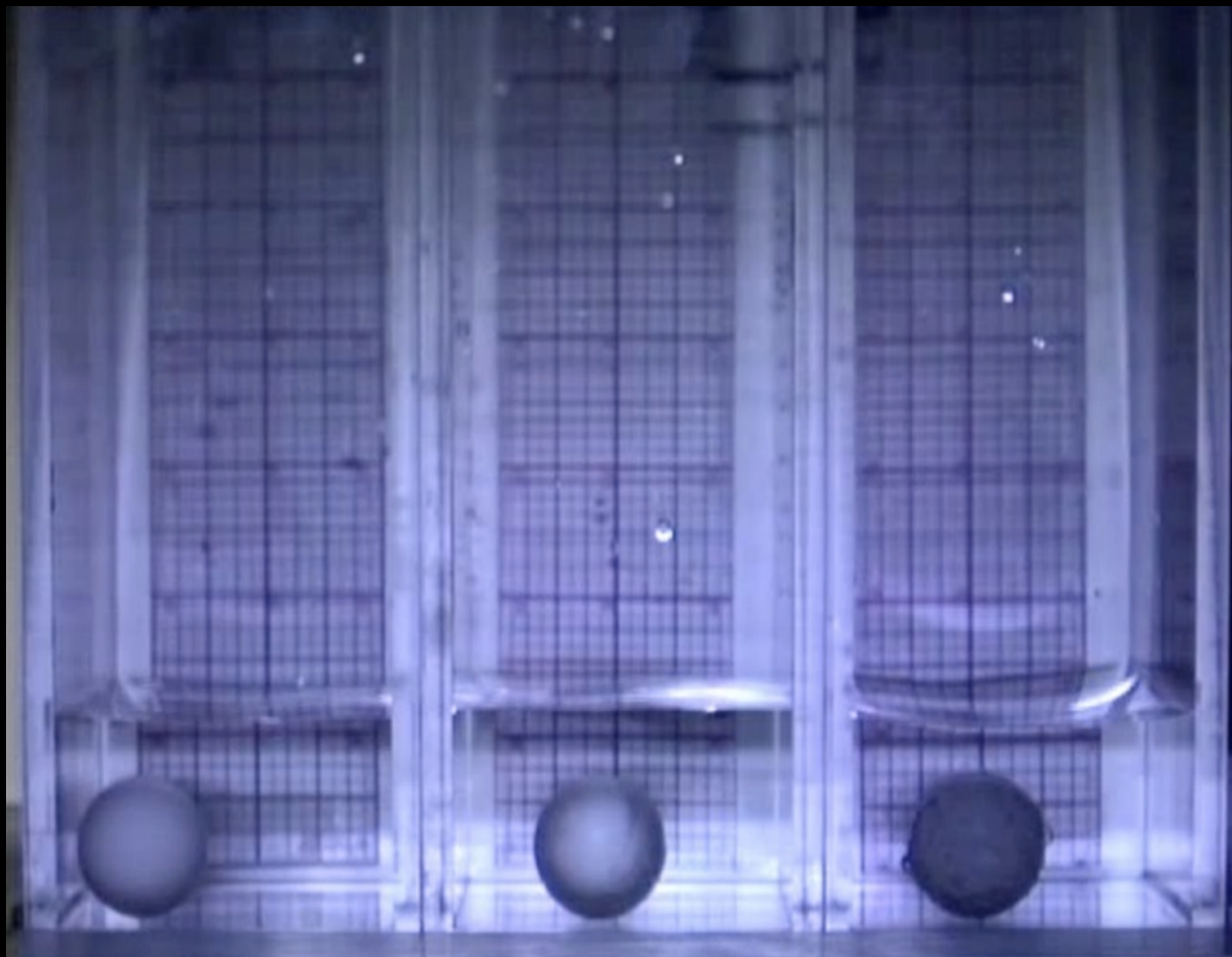




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## **The Historic Connotations of Culture in Human Resources Management in the Global and Indian Perspective**

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Abstract Human Resource management (HRM) seems to be as old as mankind's history. It can be argued that HRM existed right from the time of Adam and Eve. Although the history of HRM has mostly been studied as a present modern history, its annals are highlighted since eighteenth century. The historical perspective falls short to present the Central Asian perspective vis- a-vis Russian, Chinese and Islamic world's view. Management researchers have failed to analyze the religious beliefs' and cultural impact in the growth of HRM. For many years, there has been a misleading view that the HRM has been seen and interpreted as a Western concept, then re-introduced into other parts of the world. Class hierarchy is the major obstacle to the goal of social justice and it continues to be a major obstacle to social progress even today. Indian society is based on caste system in which Brahmins are at the top most position whereas Dalits are at the least position of the society. With the advent of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in India the HRM is revolutionized forever. It can be said that although many studies have been conducted in India on HRM issues, it is still in the transient stage. This study is descriptive and narrative, and depicts the HRM practices and evolution in China, Russia, U.K., America, and India, focusing on historic connotations of the HRM and its impact on the employees' psyche. This study also seeks to highlight the realities, myths and divide of Western and Eastern/Asian HRM styles. This paper suggests the need to focus on the potential for comparison in cross-cultural dialogue in HRM particularly in the age-old civilizations, where HRM had not been given its due importance, rather under-estimated.

**Keywords;** Human resources management, personnel, global workforce, culture, traditions, evolution

### **Introduction**

#### **Human Resource Management: Historic Perspective**

Human Resource Management (HRM) seems to be as old as mankind's history. It can be argued that HRM existed right from the time of Adam and Eve. Although the history of management of human resource (HR) is studied as a present modern history, its annals are highlighted since eighteenth century. The historical perspective fails to present the central Asian perspective vis- a-vis Russian, Chinese and Islamic world's view. The Greek, Roman and other European nations' developments have not been recorded in the HRM perspective. Even the era before Christ is ignored and the HRM aspect is chronicled since post A.D. era, when thousands of wars have been waged. The countries' boundaries have been re-drawn and the history has been re-written. And this has happened in Asia, Europe and all other continents. It can be substantiated that when wars were fought, nations were cowed or triumphant; it is not without a proper

HRM Strategy. Many questions need to be answered: How the armies were organized, motivated and were led in the battlefield? How the state administration was run? What could have been the workers' policy? Management researchers have failed to analyze the Religious beliefs' and cultural impact in the growth of HRM. The importance of history is not considered much in explaining the management practices of the various nations. The speedy increase in the globalization of business and the increasing significance of promising markets suggest that the success of managers in this new century will depend on the amount to which they develop an understanding about the dynamics of managing HR in different parts of the world. We have plenty of information regarding the management of HR in the developed countries as compared to developing countries. Global managers have now recognized that HRM strategies differ significantly from country to country and that the strategies used to manage HR in one country are sometimes futile or inappropriate in another

country. With the growing significance of India in the world (as supplier of cost-effective resources, buyers, competitors, and home for the majority of Multinational Corporations' (MNCs) foreign direct investment, both academics and practitioners need to know how HR is managed in India. This will contribute both to improve theory and carry out development. Therefore, it was felt to comprise HRM thoroughly in a paper that can chronicle the developments in HRM in relation to the economic, political, cultural and religious issues globally and in India. This study tries to chronicle the HRM practices and its evolution in the world and also in the Indian Sub-continent. The objective was to study the historic connotations of the HRM on global and Indian culture and its impact on the employees' psyche. An attempt was made to analyze the various dimensions of evolution of HRM in India with respect to socio-cultural, political and religious factors. Basically, it is a conceptual paper based on an exhaustive survey of literature, which depicts the HRM practices and evolution in China, Russia, U.K., America, and India.

### **Historical Perspective of HRM in the Global Scenario**

During pre-historic times, there existed consistent methods for selection of tribal leaders. The practice of safety and health while hunting was passed on from generation to generation. From 2000BC to 1500BC, the Chinese used employee screening techniques and while Greeks used an apprentice system. Power-driven equipment and improved production systems enabled products to be manufactured more cheaply than before. Governments of both the United Kingdom and the United States became involved in these issues and passed a series of laws to regulate the hours of work for women and children, to establish minimum wages for male labor and to protect workers from unhealthy or hazardous working conditions. During this period, management theorists in the United States and United Kingdom began to examine the nature of work and work systems, and to develop models based upon emerging psychological and sociological research. The ways in which these theories have developed, and have been applied by

both general management and HRM professionals, reflect changing attitudes to jobs, work processes and organizational structures. In order to truly understand another culture it is necessary to explore the sources of the values of that culture. This is especially true of Chinese culture. Confucius (551-479 BC), the great philosopher and teacher, established the cultural foundation of China. "People-Centered" thought was regarded as the core value of Confucianism. Confucian values require that an individual first honor one's duty to family and society. The individual is not seen as important as the group. Individual needs are sacrificed in order that group needs can be realized. Each person has a duty to family and society that supersedes responsibility to oneself.<sup>1</sup> These values helped to shape a managerial mindset that placed a greater emphasis on collectivism, teamwork, family staffed businesses, and harmony over conflict. Chinese culture differs greatly from American culture on a number of dimensions. China is a collectivist society, whereas Americans tend to be very individualistic.

For many years, there has been a misleading view that the HRM has been seen and interpreted as a Western concept, then re-introduced into other parts of the world. In fact, Chinese Ancient Management Philosophies (CAMPs) were underestimated for its richness in HRM thoughts. HRM later emerged as a specific field in the early twentieth century, influenced by Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915). Taylor's "scientific management" referred to "Taylorism", striving to improve economic efficiency in manufacturing jobs. He eventually keyed in on one of the principal inputs into the manufacturing process—labor—sparking inquiry into workforce productivity. The Behavioral School (for example, Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies) focuses on workers themselves, and the satisfaction of their needs, to achieve greater organizational productivity.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent management theories (e.g. systems theory, contingency approaches) attempt to build on earlier ideas to benefit both employees and their organizations. The relevance of these theories to HRM is twofold. First, personnel management has historically developed into human resource management by incorporating management

theories (notably strategic management); second, a sound knowledge of these theories can assist HR managers to more effectively adapt their practices to organizational requirements and realities.<sup>3</sup>

### **Recent History of the HRM – as a Discipline**

The Humanitarian, Cooperative and Marxist theories of the early 1900s highlighted the potential conflicts between employee and employer interests in modern industry – situations that laid the foundations for the growth of trade unionism and industrial relations systems which are important elements of contemporary HRM.<sup>4</sup> In the late 20th century, advances in transportation and communications greatly facilitated workforce mobility and collaboration. Corporations began viewing employees as assets rather than as cogs in a machine. "Human resources management" consequently, became the dominant term for the function.

Today's global economy has created a more composite and vibrant environment in which most firms must learn to compete effectively to achieve sustainable growth. Workforces around the world have become larger, increasingly diverse, more educated, and more mobile.<sup>5</sup> This global environment has not only changed the way business is conducted, it has also created the need for organizations to manage their workforces in a global context. As a consequence, the notion of a "global workforce" has received extensive discussion recently.<sup>6</sup>

### **HRM is More about Leadership**

The concept of leadership can be approached through various points of views; including administrative, army, community and spiritual or from a business perspective. Leadership is the ability to persuade others to seek defined objectives enthusiastically. It is the human factor which binds a group together and motivates it toward goals. Management activities such as planning, organizing, decision making are latent cushions until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guide them towards their goals. Describing leadership as an extra-ordinary feature of humans - Dr. Ferid Murad, the Nobel laureate in

medicine in 1994, said "Leadership is the ability to see beyond assumed boundaries, and to come up with solutions or paths that few can visualize". The

leader must then project this vision for everyone to see and pursue".<sup>7</sup> Islam declares leadership as a trust (Amanah), and gives a detailed description about it. According to the Islamic view, leadership is a sacred position that can solve the problems of humanity and guide them to the eternal betterment of life here and life after death. Giving preference on human welfare Islam describes leadership as a psychological contract between a leader and his followers that he will try his best to guide them, to protect them and to treat them fairly and with justice. Hence, the focus of leadership in Islam is on doing good.<sup>8</sup>

### **Evolution of HR in India**

The history of HRM development in India is comparatively of recent origin. Kautilya had dealt with some of the important aspects of Human Resources Management in his "Arthashastra" 400 B.C. Government in those days adopted the techniques of HRM as suggested by Kautilya. Caste hierarchy is the major obstacle to the goal of social justice and it continues to be a major obstacle to social progress even today. Indian society is based on caste system in which Brahmins are at the top most position where Dalits are at the least position of the society. Untouchability became the supplement of the caste system sometime around the first century A.D. The Manusmriti, written in the second–third centuries A. D., codifies the existing practices which show with utmost clarity the type of despicable social practices that the oppressor castes were imposing upon the oppressed castes. The first major incursions of Muslim invaders into India began around the eleventh century A.D., and the European conquests of India began in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries.

### **Role of Manusmriti: Manusmriti the Laws of Manu**

The laws that were proposed by Manu to govern human conduct and society reflect the conditions, needs and values of the times in which they were formulated.<sup>9</sup> Most of them do not fit into the present

day value system. They acknowledge prevailing social and gender inequalities as natural conditions of human existence, and propose laws to govern the behavior of individuals without providing scope for any changes that time may bring in the conditions of society or the lives of people. The British who ruled India used Manusmriti as the standard to settle disputes among Hindus with regard to matters of inheritance, family disputes, marriage, and royal succession. Post independent era India has seen a surge in corporate India. The public sector and private sector both blossomed but not without the influence of Manusmriti.

The caste system has a definite impact on the corporate culture as well. Particularly on the family run Business Houses. The caste power seems to take in for questioning in the Corporate India only post 1991 – in the new Economic era. With the advent of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in India, the country has observed unprecedented opportunities for the underprivileged.<sup>10</sup> Also the global Companies acted as catalyst to reduce the cultural parities in the Indian working society. The new generations were exposed to the international culture and the environment where the performance of the individual matters for elevation in the organization rather than origin of birth. In the process Human Resources Management started getting its due worth, resultantly gained more prominence.<sup>11</sup>

### **HRM Studies in India: HRM Function in India**

Indian researchers in the area of HRM have generally written articles, reports or case studies. Little research is published which can truly be called empirical. Whatever little is done by way of data-based research is not disseminated because of the shortage of academic journals. In its true sense it had developed only since independence. Though the importance of labor officers was recognized as early as 1929, the appointment of officers to solve labor and welfare problems gained momentum only after the enactment of the factories act of 1948. Personnel functions have been common in Indian organizations for decades. The origins of the personnel function can be traced back to the 1920s with the concern for labor welfare in factories.<sup>12,13</sup>

The Trade Union Act of 1926 gave formal recognition to workers' unions. Factories Act of 1948 laid down the duties and qualifications of labor welfare officers. These developments all formed the foundations for the personnel function in India. The status of the personnel function in India has therefore changed over the years.<sup>14,15</sup> Conversely, at this time it is changing at a much more rapid pace than ever, mainly due to the pressures created by the liberalization of economic policies. In fact, HRD is the term more often used to denote personnel function than HRM in India. There has been a significant increase in the level of training and development of employees.

Constitutional pressures are forcing organizations to employ people from backward and reserved categories.<sup>13</sup> There are also indications of a movement towards performance related pay and promotions. However, these are more evident in the private sector. Similarly, in comparison to the public sector, the internal work culture of private enterprises now places greater emphasis on internal locus of control, future orientation in planning, participation in decision-making, effective motivation techniques and obligation towards others in the work context.<sup>16</sup> The above discussion presents a broad over-view of the HRM function in India. However, to develop an in-depth understanding it is important to examine the main factors which form the very bases of HRM in India. The most important factor in job satisfaction of Indian workers is money. Twelve out of 16 studies found workers reporting earnings as the most significant variable contributing to their satisfaction.

### **Economic crisis and liberalization of Indian economy**

The Indian economy reached its nadir in 1991. It witnessed a double digit rate of inflation, decelerated industrial production, fiscal indiscipline, a very high ratio of borrowing to the GNP (both internal and external). The World Bank and the IMF bailed out India that changed India to a 'free market economy' from a regulated regime. To meet the challenges, the government announced a series of economic policies beginning with the devaluation of the rupee, followed by a new industrial, fiscal

and trade policies. A number of reforms were undertaken in the public sector, in trade and exchange policy, in the banking sector, and foreign investment was liberalized. Indian firms were under great pressure to change from indigenous, costly and perhaps less effective technology to a high, more effective and costly technology. There was a need to change the infrastructure, the bureaucracy at operating levels and the existing culture (organizational). The fascinating element of the new model was that it changed the power of Company management from 'regulation driven' to 'market driven' and from 'Protection' to 'competition'. It has created opportunities for technology upgradation, resource mobilization from new sources, growth, diversification, turnaround and internationalization.<sup>17</sup>

### **Influence of national culture on Indian HRM**

Several studies have found a strong association between cultural assumptions and the employees' perceptions - as common Indian values - norms of behavior and customs influence the workers and managers alike.<sup>18</sup> Indian managers' beliefs:

- An indifferent society in the face of poverty, Indian managers are more inclined to believe events are predetermined by a '**hidden hand**' that shapes their destiny.
- Indian managers feel that pressure groups (such as unions) act as saviors of employees belonging to the reserved categories, dictate the terms and conditions of certain agreements and most of the time are felt to cause trouble for management.
- Indians are socialized in an environment that values strong family ties and extended family relationships.
- Factors such as the long British rule, a strong caste system, religion and an agrarian-based society, the extended family system, a high rate of illiteracy and poverty and weak unimportant ties between state and individual have created a management system based on social and family relationships.

Several researchers have compared Indian management practices with those of other regions such as the USA, the UK and Japan. For example,

in cultural terms compared to an English person, An Indian person is: more fearful of people in power, obedient to superiors, dependent on others, compliant, submissive, disciplined, friendly, unreserved, collectivist, caste-conscious, clan oriented and law-abiding. An English person, on the other hand, is: less self-controlled, tenacious and less willing to take account of other people's views. Some other studies have characterized the management style in India as:

- US management is high efficiency and achievement-oriented style contrasted with a more despondent style in India.
- Indians demonstrate strong resilience in the face of hazards.
- India has a low to moderate uncertainty avoidance culture.
- Indian Managers demonstrate an unwillingness to accept organizational change or take risks, a reluctance to make important decisions.<sup>19</sup>

### **Hierarchy and Status Cognizance: Impediments in HR M functioning**

Hierarchy and inequality are deeply rooted in India's tradition and are also found in practice in the form of unequally placed caste and class groups. Indian organizational structures and social relations are therefore hierarchical and people are status conscious. They find it comfortable to work in a superior-subordinate relationship which is personalized. Age also matters greatly in India, and seniority can be expected to play a significant role in decisions about promotion and pay. Also one's caste, religion and social contacts also matter significantly. Inter-group relationships are characterized by suspicion of other groups, a search for small group identity and a strong inclination to affiliate with people in power; India is also a low masculinity culture in Hofstede's terms.<sup>20</sup>

Dependence and need for personalized relationships to tamper the firm and structured task direction expected in situations of high power distance. In such conditions the motivational tools have to have a social, inter-personal and even spiritual orientation. Low individualism (as per Hofstede's results for India) implies that family and group attainments take precedence over work outcomes.

The primary purpose of work is not to express or fulfill one's self, but as a means to fulfill one's family and social obligations. Undeniably, family and social networking is an important method of obtaining work, securing promotion and advancing pay.

A self-reinforcing circle exists, whereby culture dictates that political connections and ascribed status, not achievement status, underpin selection, promotion and transfer systems, such that loyalty of appointees is more towards the appointing authorities than the goals of the organization, and job related decisions are influenced more by interpersonal relations than by task demands.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, low social and intellectual mobility forces owners to recruit managers from their own families, castes and communities, reinforcing old customs, values and beliefs. The top Indian industries (such as Tata and Birla) are good examples of this. The high prevalence of owner-managers within the business structure fits well with this cultural tendency. Based on a detailed analysis of Indian national culture and its impact on Indian Management,<sup>14</sup> it can be summarized that:

It presents a plausible picture of the average Indian's resistance to change;

- Willingness to delegate but unwillingness to accept authority
- Fear of taking an independent decision
- Possessive attitude towards inferiors and his abject surrender to his superiors
- Strict observance of rituals and his disregard of them in practice
- Preaching of high morals against personal immorality and
- Near-desperate efforts at maintaining the status quo while talking of change.

### Conclusion

Human resource management in India has an inclusive history, but still it has to go a long way. With the given diversities in the Indian cultural, social, political set-up, income disparities, Religious issues and various other factors add to the impediments of HRM. As mentioned in the study,

with the advent of MNCs in India the HRM is revolutionized forever.

### Challenges of Management

The challenges of management of HRs in developing countries are complex and demanding. Academics can play a significant role in this regard by providing relevant information to policy-makers and researchers. It is also important for business students - as future business leaders, to gain an understanding of the different issues relating to the management of HR in developing countries. The reader need to better understand the 'context-specific' nature of HRM in India. The employees are in the midst of an inescapable and dramatic transformation. In the coming years, organizations will confront challenges related to demographic trends, global mobility, diversity, work/life issues, technology changes and a virtual workforce. These changes will influence how work is performed, where it is performed and what skills/competencies are required. The most important resource of all – talent – will be more in demand. In the light of this characterization of Indian HRM, it would be intriguing to conduct a study to explore the change occurred if at all among the Indian Managers post-liberalization in India ,with new economic policies' prevalence.

### Conflicts of Interest

None.

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