

## Book Review : The Changing Face of People Management in India

By its very nature, Human Resource Management (HRM) is a highly complex, contextual and evolutionary management function. It is therefore, very difficult and often dangerous to generalise the issues, challenges and strategies in HRM at a macro level. It is more so for a country, such as India which is extremely diverse and multi-faceted in its history, culture and institutional frameworks. The Indian economy remained almost stagnant until recently but since post-liberalisation in the early 1990s, its growth has been very rapid and uneven. Contemporary India is a country of contrasts in education levels, economic progress, social attitudes and its integration with the global economy.

In this backdrop, a book on HRM in India is indeed a challenging task. However, the editors are highly qualified to undertake the challenge. Budhwar has been researching HRM in India for more than a decade and provides an authoritative perspective to Western audiences from national, industry and international frameworks. Similarly, Bhatnagar has been conducting grounded research on organisational behaviour and talent management issues in India. Both contribute regularly to international journals on the subject. Some of the chapter contributors (Venkata Ratnam and Debi Saini) are also well known employment relations experts on India. The book therefore draws from the rich and varied experience of its authors. However, the claim that only Indian authors can provide an authentic and realistic picture of HRM in India is highly debatable as sometimes an "outsider" can provide a fresh and international perspective.

The book is divided into five parts: developments in Indian HRM; determinants of Indian HRM; sector-specific HRM; emerging themes; and future challenges; At the outset, the editors set an ambitious target of answering the "what, why, how and when" of HRM in India. However, considering that the majority of the chapters were contributed by the two editors, such a wide canvas is difficult to cover unless it is a reference handbook written by a broad range of academics and practitioners drawn from different settings and paradigms exploring every key aspect of HRM in India. Therefore, readers are advised to set their expectations right at the beginning!

The first chapter provides a good introduction to Indian socio-cultural context which is an important and integral component of HRM in India. It also traces the evolution of HRM discipline in India which mirrors that of Western nations. The following chapters provide an excellent overview of the industrial relations regime in India and help the readers appreciate how much HRM in India has evolved over the decades in line with the changing regulatory system, particularly labour laws. What is missing though is the commentary on contrasting labour law regimes and trade union representation between manufacturing and service sectors. For example, employee voice in the service sector is expressed by individual employees through voluntary turnover which has been steadily increasing in the information technology/business process outsourcing (IT/BPO) sector. This aspect is highlighted later when the book focuses on sectoral variables.

The book includes empirical research on the influence of national culture, institutions and business environment on managing people in India, though purely from a managerial perspective. With increasing flow of foreign direct investment to India, it is important to examine the way in which foreign firms operate in India and many chapters address this issue. The empirical studies presented here are noteworthy in terms of their breadth but not necessarily depth.

The book also attempts to address many of the organisational behaviour and strategic HRM (SHRM) issues, such as employee engagement, organisational commitment, talent management in a high performance work context, use of technology in HR service delivery and HR metrics. These concepts and practices are however mostly limited to the sunrise service sectors in India with the vast majority of Indian labour still employed in the so-called "unorganised sector" and majority of Indian firms, particularly in the manufacturing sector, still practicing HRM that belonged to the industrial economy era of the twentieth century in its outlook and orientation. The chapters on employment relations clearly indicate the massive chasm in management practice that exists between various sectors of the Indian economy.

Considering the complex and contrasting landscape of the Indian economy in general and its labour market in particular, any book on HRM in India can only aim to provide a "fleeting glimpse" of the fast changing and evolving scenario. The book does a good job of providing an historical perspective of Indian regulatory regime and shines light on some of the progressive and often world-class HRM practices in certain sectors of the economy. As is the case with similar books, such as Sharma and Khandekar (2006), this book

provides a limited yet useful introduction to the nature of HRM in India. What is sorely needed is an ongoing and comprehensive reference handbook written by a wide variety of HRM researchers and practitioners, both from national and comparative perspectives.

#### **References:**

Sharma, A. and Khandekar, A. (2006), Strategic Human Resource Management: An Indian Perspective, Response Books, New Delhi.