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Relevance of Ancient Indian Treatises in Contemporary Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

Ancient Indian Treatises played a major role in solving various issues. It is important to look into how ancient treatises have contributed lot for the advancement of Human Resources Management. To put in simple terms Human Resources Management can be seen as a functionary, which incorporates the organizational plans and makes sure that the goals are achieved with firm determination in a management alias an organization. The Human Resources Management is not new as in ancient India it was already incorporated through various ancient works originating from India. This paper analyses the relevance of ancient Indian treaties in Human Resource management.

Keywords: Finance, Human Resource Management, Karma, Management, and Treatises.

I. INTRODUCTION

If we look on the production systems going on all around the world, it is to be noted that the producer invests and finances a production. All the other departments including the Human Resources, Finance, Marketing, Sales and many others work as a team to achieve the goal and ensure the well – being of a company. Out of all these departments, the Human Resources Department can be rightly called as the “captain of the ship”. The Human Resources Department takes up the planning, then directing, then staffing, and then controlling the management. Thus, it is the Human Resources Department which implements the plan and take up follow up action to effectively implement the plan and controlling the plan in a way that the goal of success is achieved. Even though the management theories are always filled with various western experts starting from Henri Fayol to Taylor, we must understand that our country in Ancient past was also part of a large managerial system which one can clearly see from the ancient wisdom. This statement must be analysed from the perspective of evolving thoughts in a way to understand management as a comprehensive activity which has existed times immemorial since the society evolved rather than just thinking that it is modern and post industrial revolution based conceptual function. Even we can see a link between the goal behind setting up of the modern day “Workers Union” and dealing up by the HR Department. For effective

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understanding of this connection between the Ancient Indian treatises and contemporary human resource management, three samples has been chosen which are the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu Epic Mahabharata and Ancient work of Arthashastra. We dedicate this paper to the global community of Human Resources Management without whom the Industrial peace will be in jeopardy and the global economy will be in turn in a calamity.

II. OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCES

In order to analyse whom does the terminology “Human Resources Management” (HRM) member indicate we must look into first what is management. In simple words management is a goal oriented process which is all pervasive, multidimensional working in a mode of group activity in the manner of a continuous process with an element of dynamicity and working with an intangible force behind. Management can be defined as “Management is the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims”³. Thus, Human Resources can be defined as “Human resource management is a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques”⁴. Hence, we can understand with diligence that Human resource management is a function undertaken by the human resource department to plan, staff, direct and control the operations of an organization and institutions which is not only limited to a factory or company but also other institutions inclusive of being an educational institution or hospital or a shop or any such kind of institution.

A person who belongs to such a department is a manager. Eventhough the term manager is generally extended to various other departments also; it is that individual who is officially appointed as the General Manager is recognized to be the one who is actually regarded as the man behind the success. Generally, the Human Resources Management undertakes the following functions including discovering the potential human resource, influencing them to work, psychologically help them to work in order to achieve the goal that is to induce them in a way to make them work by motivating them, to understand the way how an individual worker may react to any order of the producer or the HRM and finding solutions on how to reduce the cost of labour and how to produce and reap benefits for the workers. In this particular function,

³ Heinz Wehrich, *Management: Science theory and Practice*, p.1.

⁴ Michael Armstrong, Chapter – I – The Practice of Human Resource Management, Part – 1 –Human Resource Management, Armstrong’s Handbook on Human Resource Management, p.5, 11th edition (2009), first published 1928.

HR personnel had to work in a way that suits the interests of both the producer and the worker, as the worker wants his rightful wages and the producer wants to reduce his cost of production by reducing the cost of labour and man power reduction. So, the HR works in a balanced way to suit both the interests.

Also, included in this function are planning, coordination, organising, directing, and controlling all these components. A HR personnel from Human Resources Management works to put up a plan, and organise in such a way to implement, direct and control the plan in such a way to obtain the goal. Thus, physically, mentally and psychologically a HR personnel does his work with lots of sacrifices, sacrificing his own personal time and personal goals and substituting it with the goal of the organisation. Thus, in an organisation it is the Human Resources Management who is the captain of the organisation who with lots of sacrifices achieves the goal to bring about success in the organisation.

III. RELEVANCE THROUGH BHAGAVAD GITA AND THE MAHABHARATA REGARDING HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Human Resource (HR) is the one who is responsible for everything for an individual employee or a worker. We must understand that in order to do the task of a HR, one must have high amounts of self – motivation to ensure a dedicated work followed by success in undertakings in order to motivate other employees and workers to make them work. This self – motivation is provided by Bhagavad Gita. The exhaustive work of Mahabharatha authored by Vyasa is a collection various other works. The Bhagavad Gita is one among these works. The Bhagavad Gita verse 3 of Chapter II states “O son of Pārthā, do not yield to this degrading impotence. It does not become you. Give up such petty weakness of heart and arise, O chastiser of the enemy”⁵. This verse motivates an individual by destroying his impotence or inability to action by giving up weakness. This verse exponentially asks one to focus on his work and take action without any fear.

Further verse 47 of the same chapter says “You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty”⁶. This is the most apt verse from the Bhagavad Gita to illustrate the work of a HR as a HR sacrifices all his personal life for the corporate goal. This verse asks one to do his own work (Karma) without expecting any

⁵ A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Chapter II, The Bhagavad Gita As it is, p.95, electronically re – published in 2003.

⁶ A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Chapter II, The Bhagavad Gita As it is, p.164, electronically re – published in 2003.

benefit in return. The Gita in this verse states it is the Duty that you have to do without any sort of return expectation. If one expects results of a duty then the person could never do his duty. Instead one must think that all that's caused is predetermined and the individual or Atman is just an actor. Everything should be done in Krsna consciousness, for the satisfaction of Krsna. Misers do not know how to utilize the assets of riches which they acquire by good fortune or by hard labor. One should spend all energies working in Krsna consciousness, and that will make one's life successful⁷. Thus, the Gita motivates one to do his duty. The theme of Gita itself was that when Prince Arjuna refused to fight the great war of Mahabharata as it will lead to the killing of his near and dear ones, Krishna motivates him to take up arms and do his duty without any weakness. Even though the crux behind Krishna's advice to Arjuna on non expectation from one's duty, it presents a contradictory view to the theory of Karma where one gets whatever one reaps. Maybe, it is such that Krishna asks us to get motivated in such a way not to get feared of Karma to do one's duty. Thus, Gita and its theme motivates HR to do his work and in the same way also motivates other workers to do their work.

Mahabharata the work in which Bhagavad Gita itself was embedded in one of the chapters is an exhaustive work covering life and corporate values. The Mahabharata brings into the front the concept of "Dharma" or righteousness. Bhishma the great grandfather of the Pandavas and Kauravas, the protagonists and antagonists of the epic respectively, on his death bed mentors the eldest of Pandavas, Yudhishtira. He on defining Dharma says that "The question thou hast asked me is a difficult one, since it is difficult to say what righteousness is. It is not easy to indicate it. No one in discoursing upon righteousness can indicate it accurately. Righteousness was declared by the right minded people who followed the culture of India in letter and spirit for the advancement and growth of all creatures. Therefore, that which leads to advancement and growth is righteousness. Righteousness was declared for restraining creatures from injuring one another. Therefore, that is Righteousness which prevents injury to creatures. Righteousness (Dharma) is so called because it upholds all creatures. In fact, all creatures are upheld by Righteousness"⁸. Bhishma in this discourse explains Dharma as something that prevents injury to creature and on the basis of protection of others. This is the reality in HR as one of HR's prime duties is to protect other workers from any kind of injury. HR is responsible for each and every worker in an institution as he is the one who has staffed and employed an individual on orders of the producer or as per necessity. Dharma for a HR is to protect his workers or other

⁷ A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Chapter II, The Bhagavad Gita As it is, p.167, electronically re – published in 2003.

⁸ Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa (translated by Pratap Chandra Roy), Page 253, Chapter CIX, Bhishma Parva, Part – I, Mahabharata, first published 1884.

employees from any possible danger if possible. For example, as per Times of India, in a recent incident in Noida on August 22, 2023 two workers died when a pipe burst in a factory. The owner and the executive officer consisting of HR department were arrested under Section 304 of Indian Penal Code, 1860. Here it was the duty and Dharma of the HR, to make sure that the workers are working safe without any possible task which may lead to injury. This is what Bhishma defines as Dharma upholding the prime duty of a HR through his own way of Righteousness.

IV. RELEVANCE THROUGH ARTHASHASTRA OF CHANAKYA

Arthashastra written approximately between 2nd century BCE and 3rd century BCE, authored by Kautilya also known as Chanakya provides as a clear insider view of duties of a king and government servants. In a way his writings on political state also influence modern day contemporary Human Resources Management. In modern day every factories has a separate Workers Union to demand for their welfare and rightful claim in profits and wages. As we saw earlier a HR official acts as a bridge between both these workers and the owner of production. Marxism advocates for establishment of workers union in order to prevent the workers from the exploitation of the production owners as the owners never gave workers their own share of profit. According to Marxists, none of the viewpoints on markets understood the link of the trade union struggle with the struggle for the emancipation of the working class and society from capitalist bondage and with the struggle for the capture of political power by the working class⁹. Thus, according to the Marxists, this was the reason for setting up the unions.

Arthashastra gave a different interpretation to protect the weaker classes which we can substitute in place of the workers. Arthashastra says that “when the law of punishment is kept in abeyance, it gives rise to such disorder as is implied in the proverb of fishes (*matsyanyayamudbhavayati*); for in the absence of a magistrate (*dandadharabhave*), the strong will swallow the weak; but under his protection, the weak resist the strong”¹⁰. The case of *matsyanyayasamudbhavayanti* is the same thing that is happening in modern factories. The big fishes are the corporate owners and the small fishes the owners. So, in order to protect the small fishes they need a magistrate or *dandarabharve* or magistrate which is a combined form of the Worker’s Union and a HR. Here, in this case if the king is going to be the producer as per Kautilya then the magistrate or the HR actually helps to reach out to producers on the weaker section which is the workers. Thus, another duty in Human Resources Management that is

⁹ January – March, 1984, Volume 2, No. 01, The Marxist.

¹⁰ Kautilya, (translated by R. Shamasastri), Page 13, Chapter – IV, Book – I, Arthashastra, first published 1915.

maintaining peace between the small fishes workers) and the producers (large fishes), through co – ordination is explained in a clear way by Kautilya.

Further next Kautilya speaks about an important duty of a king that is to maintain justice, peace and happiness all over the territory. He says “In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good”¹¹. This verse speaks on how welfare of a labour must be taken care of by a HR officer. For a HR, the welfare and good of workers must be prior to any of his own personal commitments. Only then he can achieve his corporate goal. This because in order to achieve such a goal one must give maximum good and welfare to a worker in order to induce or influence or motivate him to work. As per the recent memorandum of settlement between workers and Tata Steels, the company has promised to pay Rs. 314.70 crores as bonus to employees.

As per another report, the Union Cabinet approved a Productivity Linked Bonus (PLB), for the gazette officers of Indian Railways equivalent to 78 days of pay. These are only some instances to show how various organisations are working to provide benefits to workers in a same way as Kautilya says as an organisation and HRM provides all the benefits keeping in mind that only through employees benefit the producer or the higher level manager could get their benefit. That is only through workers benefit, the worker will be motivated to work by which he will be producing more leading to higher profits and benefits for the whole organisation, the HRM, and the producer which is a substitute for “King”.

Further he says “The king shall forgive an offence when it is trifling, have satisfaction even when the revenue is scanty, and honour with rewards (*pragraha*) such of his superintendents as are of immense benefit to him”¹². This means that even if a small wrong is been done by an individual worker or any other person who is close to the organisation must be forgiven by the HRM and the top management as each and every human resource is a potential resource which cannot be loosen. If the wrong is too much to be forgiven, then he must be removed. But, for petty trivial wrongs one cannot be removed from his job. This inference is arrived by substituting the king with the organizational top management, HRM and the producer and the superintends with employees and workers. Also, through this we can infer that the duty of an official from HR is not only to remove people who are not fit and who are poisonous to the organisation, but also to make sure that justice must be upheld by not making adverse decisions

¹¹ Kautilya, (translated by R. Shamasastri), Page 52, Chapter – XIX, Book – I, Arthashastra, first published 1915.

¹² Kautilya, (translated by R. Shamasastri), Page 86, Chapter – VII, Book – II, Arthashastra, first published 1915.

in case of trivial or small petty incidents. A HR must be equipped with correct decision-making skills and analogical application as applying analogy leads to taking up better decisions as each an every decision taken by a HR leads to larger change on part of a Employee. Thus, the work Arthashastra by Kautilya provides various close links with the Human Resources Management and their day to day prime duties from managing the workers to taking correct decisions.

V. A CLOSE ANALYSIS WITH HAWTHORNE EXPERIMENT AND ANCIENT INDIA

Hawthorne Analysis was experimentation on workers done by Elton Mayo, an Australian psychologist. Hawthorne experiment states that an individual will tend to change his behaviour when a close observation of him is done. Simply the observation stated that an employee can be motivated or induced to work by making him aware that how they are being judged on their productivity level. For example if a HR makes public of the organization's basis on which work will be appreciated. This will lead to increased effort of workers and productivity to achieve the goal. If the opposite happens when the level is made completely silent then productivity will be low. Elton himself says that "It was indeed this study that first enabled us to assert that the third major preoccupation of management must be that of organizing teamwork, that is to say, of developing and sustaining cooperation"¹³.

So, in a way making public the working scale of appreciation and continuous observation makes one work. Also, the spreading of this information through an informal chain of communication among workers, leads to increased productivity. This has a close connection with Ancient India as for every work and for every achievement hard work was a pre requisite. In order to make one do such hard work, ancient Indian kings used to declare open rewards to those undertake the challenge. For example Manu says that even a menial worker should be given a wage according to his family maintenances. This implies that an employee or worker's family condition must be taken into consideration for fixing the wages by the king which in modern case is the HR of an organization. If HR is going to observe such things and the person is made aware of the intent of the HR to help him in a way to help his family financially or career wise, then it motivates him to work towards his goal. Thus, modern HR theories and analysis are also closely related to what has been followed in ancient Indian as a practice.

VI. CONCLUSION

As discussed above, it can be said that Human Resources Management was not new to Ancient Indian Civilization as even though formally Human Resources Management was not

¹³ Elton Mayo, Page, 84, Chapter IV, Part II, The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilizations, published by Harvard University, 1945.

incorporated into day to day life, it is to be understood that the essence of Human Resources Management was applied in every case of Karma (duty), Dharma (righteousness), Danda (Punishment) and Saamarasya (Equality). The Hindu Scripture Bhagavad Gita, great Indian epic Mahabharata and one of the finest ancient works of Ancient India, Arthashastra authored by Kautilya are one of the most visited works by various management institutes all over the world for reference in managerial studies and in day to day application of these values in real day life. “Karma” or Duty along with “Dharma” or righteousness are not only upheld in ancient times, but even revered in contemporary days in Business environment by the Human Resources Management to ensure smooth working of the industrial climate with harmony and peace between the producer and the workers. Truly, the Human Resources department is the captain of the ship called an “organisation” and acknowledges every human resource official who sacrifices his personal life to build up an organisation thereby contributing to the National and Global Economy.

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