

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

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[A Case Study In TATA Steel From Its Inception To 1990]

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## Introduction

The corporate philosophy governing labour relations in Tata Steel flows out of the ideals of the Founder, Jamsetji Tata, who, as a one-man Planning Commission (to quote Jawaharlal Nehru), started his pioneering experiments in labour welfare more than 100 years ago in his first large scale industrial venture - the textile mills at Nagpur. Tata Steel, which was conceived by the Founder as an essential ingredient of India's economic emancipation, the two others being Electric Power and Scientific Education, was born three years after his death. But in planning social services, including labour welfare, in an emerging steel city, Jamsetji's successors implicitly followed his enlightened guidelines, embodied in his numerous letters to his sons, associates and friends. In one letter, he said:

*"We do not claim to be more unselfish, more generous or more philanthropic than other people. But we think, we started on sound and generous business principles considering the interests of the shareholders as our*

*own and the health and welfare of the employees, the sure foundation of our prosperity".*

In 1902, five years before the site of the Steel Plant was finally located, he wrote from abroad to his son, Dorabji Tata, of what his dream city of steel should look like:

*"Be sure to lay wide streets planted with shady trees of a quick growing variety. Be sure that there is plenty of space for lawns and gardens. Reserve large areas for football, hockey and parks. Earmark areas for Hindu temples, Mohammedan mosques and Christian churches".*

Dorabji Tata, who brought his father's dreams to fruition, said in 1917:

*"The welfare of the labouring classes must be one of the first cares of every employer. Any betterment of their conditions must proceed more from employers downwards rather than be forced up by demands from below, since labour, contented, well-housed, well-fed, well brought up and generally well looked after, is not only an asset*

*and an advantage to the employer, but it also serves to raise the standard of industry and labour in the country. In looking after the labour of today, we are also securing a supply of healthy and intelligent labour for the future”.*

#### Ahead Of Time

Tata Steel has, thus, been a pioneer in introducing a number of ‘firsts’ in the field of labour welfare, as will be evident from the following:-

	Introduced by Tata Steel	Enforced by Law	Title of Law
Eight-hour working day	1912	1948	Factories Act
Free medical aid	1915	1948	Employees' State Insurance Act
Creation of welfare dept.	1917	1948	Factories Act
Schooling facilities for employees' children	1917	-	-
Formation of works committees for handling complaints and disputes concerning service conditions and grievances of employees	1919	1947	Industrial Act
Leave with pay	1920	1948	Factories Act
Workers' provident fund	1920	1952	Employees' Provident Fund Act
Workmens' accident compensation scheme	1920	1923	Workmens' Compensation Act
Technical institute for training of apprentices, craftsmen and engineering graduates	1921	1961	Apprentices' Act
Maternity benefit	1928	1946	Bihar Maternity Benefit Act & in 1961 by Govt. of India.
Profit sharing bonus	1934	1965	Bonus Act
Ex-gratia payment for road accident while coming to or returning from duty	1979	-	-

#### Birth Of A Welfare Department And Beginning Of Social Services

With a decade of the steel works coming into operation, Sydney and Beatrice Webb well known social scientists of England and foremost welfare consultants were invited with

a team from the London University to give their recommendations on the establishment of medical, social and cooperative services in Jamshedpur. Webb headed a committee of London University Professors to plan the welfare services.

In 1918, the management obtained services of Thakkar Bapa of the *Servants of India Society*, a dedicated social worker, for executing the recommendations of Webb. World War I had resulted in a spurt in prices. With a view to eliminate middlemen, Thakkar Bapa got the Company to purchase essential commodities in bulk and ensured that workers got them at a cheap rate. Next, he decided to tackle the problem of usurious money lenders who were charging the poor labourers interest ranging between 75 to 150 percent. Thakkar Bapa organised a dozen cooperative credit societies for different categories of workers in order to stop this exploitation. These societies paid off the money lenders and took upon themselves the entire money-lending business for the benefit of workers. Within a few months, there was an improvement in the economic condition of the workers. A number of primary schools, sports clubs, children's parks and canteens were established and plans were drawn up for airy living quarters for the labour force.

A welfare department was set up in Tata Steel, in 1917, when few organizations in the country had not even thought of it. This department not only provided recreational facilities, but also attended to the worker's grievances and took great interest in protecting them from the tyrannies of the money-lenders. A Works Committee came into operation as far back as 1919.

1920 was a historic year in so far as the Company extended three important benefits to the workers. First, two weeks' leave with pay every year was allowed to

daily-rated staff. This was ahead of even Europe and the U.S.A. Secondly, a Provident Fund Scheme was also introduced in the same year. This benefit was not prevalent even in the U.K. then. In India, it was legislated in 1952. Thirdly, accident compensation was introduced in 1920 on a scale more liberal than what the Act provided three years later in India. Labour officers, welfare officers and safety inspectors were appointed. As early as 1926, a Tariff Board found that the Company had provided very good housing, medical and educational facilities for all the employees. Free medical facilities to the employees and their family members were made available in 1915. About the same time, educational facilities were provided for the employees' children. The Company runs schools in which education up to plus 2 classes is free for employees' children. Housing facilities for the employees were made available right from the time of the setting up of the plant. Nearly 66% of the employees are housed, out of which 20% own their own houses on the land made available to them by the Company free of cost and constructed from the funds advanced to them as loans at nominal interest rate. The company introduced Maternity Benefit in 1928 which was legislated much later.

#### **A Milestone In Labour Relations**

Provision of amenities, recreational facilities and good working conditions were all right as far as they went, but more important, it was felt, was to ensure that workers' grievances, real or imaginary, were not merely looked into and redressed, but that sustained efforts were also made to prevent them from arising. With this end in view, K.A.D. Naoroji was appointed Labour Welfare Officer in 1923 to look after labour matters in the various departments of the Steel Works. This was the first such appointment in any major industrial unit in

India at that time. The same year, a Labour Bureau was set up with a view to centralize all appointments in different departments of the Steel Company. Always vigilant and responsive, the management realized the need for further improvements in labour relations and in 1937, a Labour Office, the first of its kind, was established and put under the charge of E.P.Hillier. He had under him an Assistant Labour Officer and a few Labour Assistants and Labour Investigators. The primary duty of the Labour Officer was to keep in touch with the employees to look into their difficulties and to advise and help them, wherever possible. It was with the help of this officer, along with welfare, employment and enquiry officers and the trade union that management proposed to keep itself aware of the needs, hopes and aspirations of its employees.

#### Birth Of Personnel Department

Result of these experiments were so encouraging that it was soon considered necessary to widen the ambit of personnel management through a centralized organization of specialists in this new discipline. In July 1943, J.R.D. Tata issued a memorandum which said:

*"Of the three main concerns of industrial management, viz, machines, materials and men, the last one is certainly the most complex and difficult. Yet, while we have spent enormous amounts of money, energy and thought in coping the first two problems, we have done particularly nothing to equip ourselves properly for the highly complex, and equally important task of dealing with 30,000 to 40,000 men.*

*"If our operations required the employment of say, 30,000 machine tools, we would undoubtedly have special staff or department to look after them, to keep them in repair, replace them when necessary, maintain their efficiency, protect them from*

*damage, etc. But when employing 30,000 human beings, each with a mind and soul of his own, we seem to have assumed that they would look after themselves and that, there was no need for a separate organization to deal with human problems involved".*

Thus, it was the initiative and with the blessing of J.R.D.Tata, the Chairman, that a full-fledged Personnel Department with a Director of Personnel came into existence in 1947.

The department, however, ran into difficulties from an inadequate appreciation of its powers and functions which remained undefined in the early stages. Subsequently, it was realized by all concerned that the personnel function is predominantly advisory and the line managers' responsibility for final executive control, even in the field of human relations is not to be impaired by the availability of the Personnel Officer whose expert and professional advice should always get due consideration. It is a matter of great satisfaction for those who work in the personnel department to see that it has been possible to evolve a sound working relationship between the line executives and the officers of the personnel department to meet all the challenges jointly as a management team.

The status and position given to the personnel function by the top management has been one of the important factors to make this function effective. It is a matter of legitimate pride for the personnel department to find that Russi Mody, Chairman & Managing Director and R.S. Pandey, Managing Director had in the past held the post of Director of Personnel in the Steel Company. It is a matter of great inspiration to get continuous, effective and dynamic support and guidance from the top management.

Since the establishment of the personnel department in 1947, its organization and functions have been continuously under review by top management. The basic functions of the personnel department may be divided under three broad categories:

- 1) First, the personnel department is entrusted with the task of administering certain programmes. Under this head will come canteen services, technical training, welfare activities like games and recreation, community development programmes in and around Jamshedpur and various types of employee services like industrial indebtedness, processing the supply of ration cards to the employees, etc.
- 2) Another group of activities under the personnel department relate to such functions as are in the nature of centralised and co-ordinated services to be rendered to the entire organization. This includes employment, induction, manpower planning, safety, day to day consultations with the union, wages and salary administration, long service awards, farewell gifts, etc.
- 3) Last, but not the least, is the function of rendering functional advice to the line executive on all matters pertaining to man-management and industrial relations. This includes matters like promotion, transfer, disciplinary action, grievance handling, union negotiations, etc.

#### **The Effectiveness Of Personnel Department**

The effectiveness of the personnel department, i.e., the extent of the effective implementation of personnel policies and the programmes of an organization depends, to a large extent, on the relation between the line management and the staff

executives of the personnel department.

This in turn is influenced by three factors :

- a) The soundness and practicability of the advice and the quality of the services rendered by the personnel department.
- b) The attitude and the extent of the acceptance by the line officers of the company's personnel policies and procedures
- c) The extent of the line manager's ability to adjust to the Company's need of the situation

It is a matter of great satisfaction that the Personnel department has not only succeeded in discharging the ever-increasing responsibilities which have been entrusted to it by the management, but also has performed this difficult task in close co-operation and collaboration with the line executives, supervisors, worker's and union.

About a decade after the formation of the personnel department, Mr. J.R.D. Tata again said:

*"To create good working conditions, to pay the best wages in the industry, to promote welfare and provide decent housing, is not enough. The ultimate aim of good personnel and industrial relations programme should be to find a solution of better relations between the management and labour or between labour and capital, which will be potentially the greatest reward we can have in the long run. Such a happy relation can be obtained only by creating a sense of confidence on the part of the ranks of the labour that (a) they have a stake in the industry; and (b) they are something more than mere cogs in the machine or mere tools of management and that their dreams, their feelings and their human problems are part of the Company's*

*problems and management's problems - a feeling that they have some voice, if not in policy, in some of the processes of management."*

#### The Statement Of Objectives Of Tata Steel

The personnel and industrial relations policy of Tata Steel is the product of the basic philosophy of its Founder, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, - a man so far-sighted that "his anticipation of modern thinking has been a continuing source of surprise and admiration to future generations. His emphasis on the application of science and modern techniques and methods in industrial management; his generous and yet realistic understanding and acceptance of the needs and rights of the workers at a time when they were frequently exploited in the west as well as in India; his sense of trusteeship and his realization that to survive and prosper, free enterprise must serve the needs of the society, are all in tune with modern thinking and with the ethical, social standards of the most advanced societies of today".

The statement of objectives of the Steel Company which is in line with the founder's philosophy spells out management's thinking and it clearly affirms the Company's aim of discharging its obligations towards its employees:

- ❑ By a realistic and generous understanding and acceptance of their needs and rights and an enlightened awareness of the social problems of industry.
- ❑ By providing adequate wages, good working conditions, job security, an effective machinery for speedy redressal of grievances, and suitable opportunities for promotion and self-development through in-company and external training programmes.
- ❑ By treating them as individuals, giving

them a sense of self-respect and better understanding of their role in the organization, and satisfying their urge for self-expression through closer association with management.

- ❑ By creating a sense of belonging through humane and purposeful activities as an integral part of human relations, ensuring their willing co-operation and loyalty.

This statement is not merely an exposition of a philosophy or attitude, but finds expression in the personnel practices in Tata Steel, which have evolved through decades in response to the changing needs.

#### Employment And Regional Aspirations

Man is, no doubt, the core of industry or enterprise. The success and prosperity of any industry depends on how well satisfied, contented and motivated are the men behind it. Just as quality raw materials produce quality end-products, "quality men" can be depended upon to yield quality results. Unlike the developed countries where merit alone is the criterion for recruitment, in India, which is struggling hard to secure social justice for its teeming millions who have been neglected for centuries, other considerations claim equal attention. With the problem of unemployment assuming menacing proportions, there are definite signs of regional aspirations degenerating into acrimony and bitterness between different states for a due share of employment of the local people and the sons of the soil in the industries located within their areas. The definition of the "local people", or the "sons of the soil" is nowhere clear, whether it comprises the people of the State or the division or the district or the tehsil. The Bihar Unemployment Committee, in its report submitted in the early sixties, chose to keep out of what it called the "unseemly controversy" and left it to the employers "to

distinguish between those who are indigenous residents of the state, sharing in its prosperity or misery or who are mere birds of passage". Be that as it may, the fact remains that even the special committee, constituted by the National Integration Council, stressed the importance of the removal of regional economic imbalances and the provision of greater employment opportunities to the local population. Large industries like steel serve as focal points for national integration where men and women from all parts of the country work together for a common purpose. When all these factors are viewed together, there cannot possibly be any difference of opinion on the necessity of reorienting our thinking on the employment policy and technique which will synthesise the needs of the industry, and the sentiments of the local people while, at the same time, serving the cause of national integration. It is not enough to say that since the desired skills are not available among the local people, they could not be employed in an industrial organization. Exigencies of the situation demand that intensive training programmes should be undertaken to enable the local people to acquire the necessary skills for possible selection to various positions in an industrial organization located within their state. This would, no doubt, mean additional expenditure which, in turn, would add to the total manufacturing cost. Should it not be treated as an inevitable social cost of an industry?

#### **Induction And Training**

The second stage in man management is induction and training. Proper induction could not ignore the psychological impact of the sudden transplantation of the worker from the rural to the industrial soil. However great the value of the monthly pay-packet and the lure of the urban life, most of the workers are unable to adjust fully to the

impersonal character of their new habitat. The inevitable result is a duality of root, the evidence of which is found in the high percentage of absenteeism in agricultural or marriage seasons when they must collect their share of crops or hear the wedding bell of their relatives in their village homes. As stated by Prof. Michael M. Ames, a Canadian professor who studied the social structure of Jamshepur decades ago, people here "belong to both the modernized world of industry and the traditional world." "They," he added, "maintain a pluralistic or relativistic ethical system: class for the city and caste for the village." The induction of an industrial worker should take into account this problem which crosses the four walls of the factory and extends to the worker's quarters, to the surrounding he has left and to the new soil on which his personality is sought to be transplanted.

Then comes the question of the training of workers to meet the requirements of industry. The present generation of workers consists of young men and women - born free, non-conformists in their outlook, rebellious in their nature and angry and discontented - yet endowed with an alert and receptive mind and bubbling over with energy to try out original ideas and new concepts. And, they come from the academic campus where the old principle of command-and-obey has been banished and where freedom of speech and action is enjoyed by students with little curb or restraint. Accepting the situation as it is, for better or for worse, one has to think seriously as to how to reorient pre-employment training programmes so as to harness the creative urges and rebellious nature of these young trainees to further the cause of industrial democracy which neither permits unrestrained use (or abuse !) of freedom, nor tolerates a total authoritarian attitude. How to imbue these young recruits with the essentials of industrial democracy so that when they enter their new campus

in the industrial world, they can develop into useful agents of freedom, peace and progress, and not into harbingers of hatred, discontent and hostility ?

### Industrial Relations - Challenges Of Change

The changing pattern of industrial relations basically centres round the attitude and conduct of various groups within our industrial framework - namely, workers, management, union and the state, all of which, in turn, are influenced by external factors - social, political and economic. The highlights of the changing industrial relations scene are:

- (i) The political affiliations of trade unions and the frequent use of labour force for political purposes;
- (ii) The multiplicity of trade unions and the projection of the politics of coalition on the trade union front;
- (iii) The political overtones of Government decisions in labour matters and the unnecessary interference weakening the forces of collective bargaining.
- (iv) The rising expectations and growing consciousness of the industrial workers of their rights and privileges coupled with better striking power;
- (v) The denial of these rights by some unscrupulous employers; and
- (vi) The gradual erosion of the sense of responsibility and integrity leading to the use of extra-legal and illegal means, both by some self-seeking employers and a number of irresponsible trade unions. In other words, the present state of industrial relations in the country is the sum total of faulty approach and narrow outlook for which all the groups must take equal blame. The prevailing dark clouds, however, are as purely transitory, somewhat

typical of the overall process of change, and that if all the groups take up the challenge in right earnest, they can, through their collective effort, ensure a brighter tomorrow in which all of them will have an equal share.

### Trade Union Scenario

The challenges of the changing pattern of industrial relations have to be faced by an objective assessment of the situation, by a practical attitude towards the bewildering multiplicity of problems and, last but not the least, by a graceful acceptance of the inevitable process of change. While the political influence on trade unions or on industrial workers cannot be completely ruled out in a democracy, it should be possible to evolve a convention which would prevent the industrial sector from being a pawn on the political chess-board. As regards trade unions, multiplicity of trade unions in an establishment and occasional coalitions among them to disturb industrial peace must be discouraged. A trade union is an essential institution in any industry to safeguard the interests of the workers and to voice their demands. But an arbitrary choice of a particular trade union, or an attempt to talk to so many of them with different ideologies at one time, is fraught with dangerous consequences. It seems amazing as to how the antiquated Trade Union Act of 1926, which was formulated by an alien government permitting indiscriminate registration of trade unions in tune with its divide-and-rule policy, is still on the statute books of an independent democratic country.

The choice of a particular union to represent the workers of a particular enterprise should be left to the workers themselves, and managements should scrupulously avoid dabbling in their affairs. If a number of trade unions can come together on a common platform to sort out the problems of the steel industry by talking

across the table - a happy augury, indeed, for the future - there is no reason why they cannot get together and decide as to who should represent a particular enterprise. If they cannot, for some reason, settle the issue between themselves, they can go to the Government for a decision. And, if they have no faith in the Government decision, they can have their own election officer, through mutual agreement, and abide by the verdict of the majority of the workers who are members of one or the other union. Once this verdict has been given by the workers, it should be accepted by all the contesting trade unions and the right to represent all the workers of an enterprise before management should go to the trade union that enjoys the support of the majority. Other trade unions also have their role to play, but it should be similar to that of the democratic opposition which can criticize the policies and programmes of the ruling party if it differs with them, but which cannot claim the right to participate in the meetings of the cabinet.

In order to impart added vitality to the democratic framework of a trade union, it is necessary that the election of its office-bearers is held regularly as provided in its constitution. While there have been instances where a company has been put on the mat for not holding its annual general meeting on time, there is not a single instance where a union has been taken to task by the Registrar of Trade Unions for not holding its elections on time. Much of the trouble on this front will be over, if this single provision in the constitution of a trade union is rigorously enforced.

Industrial democracy demands that the forces of bipartite settlement should get the maximum possible opportunity to play their role on the Indian Industrial scene. Individual grievances will always be there, but there should be ample scope for solving them through bipartite talks, instead of

making provisions for taking them to the labour courts at the slightest provocation. The government cannot be an idle spectator at the loss of production caused by industrial disputes, but as so succinctly put by former President V.V. Giri, "the state, as supreme guardian of vital services and of law and order, can always have recourse to emergency legislation or ordinances, can always appoint tribunals and, if necessary, prohibit a strike or lock-out ... but no amount of state paternalism, however liberal and benevolent it may be, can create that atmosphere of industrial peace and co-operation which flourishes in mutual agreement."

### Workers' Participation

Worker's participation has been widely accepted as an essential feature of industrial democracy and an important means of achieving peace and harmony, and workers have been described as partners of an industrial venture. As an active partner, unlike a sleeping partner, the worker has positive contributions to make and he can legitimately claim a share in the gains of collective endeavour, along with the two other partners, namely shareholders who have invested their money and, what is generally forgotten, the industry itself which must have its share for its very survival and sustenance. There have been conflicting views on the exact share of each partner, and discussion on them should always be rewarding for industrial managers, particularly those in the personnel field. This status of the worker as a partner entails his closer association or his active involvement with the organization of which he is an integral part, beginning with the shop floor and going up to the top level.

Tata Steel has been working with a three-tier scheme of closer employee association with management and it has brought encouraging results. It has instilled

a sense of self-respect among the workers, created a better understanding of their role in the organization, satisfied their urge for self-expression and helped in the cause of production and productivity. A very large number of suggestions from employees in Tata Steel show their interest in matters affecting their own well-being and that of the industry, such as economy, elimination of waste, cost reduction, elimination of defective work, improvement of quality, methods, process and procedures, better upkeep of machinery, tools and instruments, improvement of working conditions, safety, welfare, etc., etc. The acceptance and implementation of over 70% of these suggestions show the seriousness and the sense of urgency that management attaches to them.

#### Role Of Tata Worker's Union

Tata worker's union has played a great role in maintaining and promoting healthy industrial relations and collective bargaining practices in Tata Steel. True to the tradition set by eminent personalities like C.F. Andrews, Deshbandhu C.R. Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Professor Abdul Bari, Michael John and V.G. Gopal, who were actively associated with Tata worker's union in the past and the present leadership under the Presidentship of S.K. Benjamin has maintained the balance between the dual role of a trade union, namely, union as a protest organization which zealously guards the interests of the workers which it represents, and union as an organisation which is conscious of its broader social responsibilities. That is why, although there had been occasions when there were differences between the management and the union, it had been the combined endeavour of management and the union not to allow an industrial dispute to take the shape of an industrial disorder.

#### Jamshedpur: An Oasis Of Industrial Peace And Cooperation

Jamshedpur has earned the reputation of "an oasis of industrial peace and co-operation". While millions of man days are lost all over the country every year as a result of industrial unrest, Tata Steel, can take justifiable pride in the fact that it has continued to make its contribution to the national productive effort in a vital area without any interruption for a single day. It is, however, not with a holier-than-thou attitude, or with a sense of superiority, that they talk about the pioneering steps for promoting and strengthening sound human relations, about genuine understanding of the needs and rights of the workers, about awareness of the social problems of industry or about active involvement with the life of the industrial community. Some of the schemes, such as closer employee association with management, have made a deep impact on man-management relations.

Tata Steel believes that material benefits should not be the '*summum bonum*' of an industry and that the human factor forms its hard core. Thus :

- i) It has always placed workers above every thing else in the industrial set-up. Their health, happiness and safety, and also their dignity and self-respect, are areas of prime importance.
- ii) Whenever it has introduced a new facility for the benefit of the workers, it has ensured that such benefit is given gracefully and on management's initiative rather than wrested from it or forced by legislation.
- iii) It has stood by its convictions in the matters of industrial relations and in inculcating a spirit of togetherness, notwithstanding pulls and pressures from different directions.

### The Result:

- I. The Company has been able to achieve 100% efficiency in its operations in spite of the plant being more than 95 years old and the constraints of power shortage and transport bottlenecks plaguing it.
- II. The Company has achieved a unique record of industrial harmony, unsurpassed so far anywhere in the democratic world.
- III. The high employee morale not only takes production to its peak, but also comes in handy in times of crisis.
- IV. The old tradition of setting problems across the table, through bipartite negotiations in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding has created a stage where, to quote Russi Mody - "*Men are*

*so much with Tata Steel that on the most important issue of nationalization, when it arose in 1979, they were the ones who strongly opposed it, along with the management. Can any company ask for a greater reward?"*

### Conclusion

There was a corporate advertisement campaign some years ago by Tata Steel which was built around the concept: "WE ALSO MAKE STEEL". Tata Steel is known for its exemplary standards of business ethics, corporate transparency and philanthropy as well as its investor and customer relationships. Its contributions to society go well beyond those expected by a corporate entity especially its contributions to creating an entire city a model of civic services and of caring for its citizens.

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