MOVING TOWARDS EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS: A TRYST WITH MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT
Post Globalization has witnessed a phenomenon known as modernism in each and every walk of life. The emergence of this phenomenon or concept has resulted in the ordering of things out of the chaos which was the result of industrial revolution in western countries. This also had an impact upon the relationship between labour and management existing inside an industrial domain. This paper makes an attempt to find out how the dynamics of employment relations has evolved in recent years aligning itself with the phenomenon of modernity. Also, it throws a brief light on the characteristic features that highlights the employment relations in recent times.

Keywords: Modernity; Industrial Relations; Employment Relations

INTRODUCTION
While contemplating on the theme of modernity at a discussion in London’s Royal Society of Arts, the Nobel Laureate Prof. Amartya Sen propounded that modernity is an idea or phenomenon that conjures up image of a liberal enlightened West, and is harbinger of progress, emancipation of all that is good. Going by the definition given by Barker, modernity typically refers to a post traditional, post medieval historical period, one marked by the move from feudalism (or agrarianism) towards capitalism, industrialization, rationalization, the nation state and its constituents institutions (Barker, 2005). Labour forms one of these components and institution in the domain of industrial world. With the organizations becoming more and more modernist leaving behind the traditional methods of controlling the labour, new concept has started to emerge in the field of industrial relations, better known as ‘Employment Relations’. Employment relations play the most essential part in any industrial democracy. They are often considered the two sides of the same coin. Whereas employees are essential to meet the production target of an enterprise, employers, on the other hand, are the one who provide the sources of livelihood to the employees. Employment relations in large organizations are managed by the human resource department. But smaller firms cannot afford to set up and operate the HR functions. They have no such mechanism as HRM to improve and maintain employee relations and build up their human capital (Bacon and Storey, 2000). Due to the decline in the labour power manifested through absence of organized trade unions, there is increase in the employment of contract, casual, part time and ad hoc worker (Sain, 2007). Thus, in the absence of any HRM department and HRM mechanism, there can be a decline in the power of labour unions, changing employment patterns etc. But with this decline also emerged new forms of HRM initiatives in the field of Industrial Relations, a significant among them being the emergence of employment relations. Industrial Relations, often being considered as a chaotic domain of maintaining healthy relationship collectively between employers, employees and their associations along with the government agencies, have found a new life in the form of employment relations. It is a tryst of modernity by industrial relations towards
employment relations where collectivism is being replaced by individualism and new forms of initiatives to foster sound relationship among the parties in an industrial set up.

**OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the paper is to introduce the readers with the concept of employment relations and make an attempt to find out the changing dynamics of employment relations evolved in recent years aligning itself with the phenomenon of modernity. Also, the paper will try to throw a brief light on the characteristic features that highlights the employment relations in recent times.

**Employment Relations Concept: Changing dimensions**

Employer and employees are the main pillars in an industrial set up. In broad terms, an employment relation is concerned with the theory and practice associated with the management and regulation of the employment relationship. In particular, it is concerned with the socio-political dimension of the employment relationship and the distribution of power between management and employees, the incidence and expression of conflict and the social and legislative regulatory framework within which the employment relationship exists (Wilton, 2010). According to Michael Armstrong, “Employment relations are concerned with managing and maintaining the employment relationship, which involves handling the pay work bargain, dealing employment practices, terms and conditions of employment arising from employment, providing employees with a voice and communicating with employees” (Armstrong, 2009). International Labour Conference in its 95th session held in Geneva in 2006 defined employment relationship as a legal notion widely used in countries around the world to refer to the relationship between a person called an employee (frequently referred to as a worker) and an employer for whom the employee performs work under certain conditions in return for remuneration. It is through the employment relationship, however defined, that reciprocal rights and obligations are created between the employee and the employer. Hartley and Stephenson (2000) defined employment relations as the process of motivation and control over the ways in which employment is carried out and rewarded in industrial society. It includes non-industrial employment settings and also individual as well as collective aspects of employment. According to Armstrong (2009), employee relations involves handling the pay work bargain, developing employment practices, terms and conditions of employment, arising from employment, providing employees with a voice and communicating with employees. Employment relation focuses on the behaviour of individuals, groups and organizations in employment. Hartley & Stephenson (2000) defined employment relations as the process of motivation and control over the ways in which employment is carried out and rewarded in industrial society. It includes non-industrial employment settings and also individual as well as collective aspects of employment. The American HRM literature refers to it when defining the corpus of HRM functional activities and associated interactions that exist between individual employers and employees at the level of the workplace (Abott, 2006). The British HRM literature, however, tends to apply a wider meaning that goes beyond the workplace, covering in its most extreme manifestation the type of interactions that can take place between the states, employer associations and organized labour (Abott, 2006). Fossum (1995) defined employee relations in the context of non union environment. Sundaray, Sahoo and Tripathy (2010) explain employee relations as the relationship of employees with the organization and with each other and includes the process of developing, implementing, administering and analyzing the employer-employee relationship, managing employee performance and resolving work place conflicts/ disputes.

**Employment Relations: A Tryst with Modernity**

The history of employment relations dates back to very ancient times. Abbot (2006) has very thoroughly undertaken a study on the aspects of labour- master relationship from the very early times. In the Middle Ages labour was underpinned by a cultural and social value system that conditioned people to accept their place in the social order. It also played a lead role in the determination and legitimising of the division of authority and subjugation between employer and worker- or master and servant in the terminology of the times. The employment relationship was thus predicated upon a
mutual obligation existed between employer and employee, with the legitimisation of authority of one over another being based upon the different status each held in the prevailing social order. This type of social system continued till the nineteenth century. With the inception of the industrial revolution things started to take a change. The emergence and growth of the factory system that came along with this revolution and the traditional relationship between servant and master shifted apart, and left behind a new political negotiation that enabled people to undertake new occupations and change their locality in search of employment. Cultural notions and social expectations of mutuality in the employment relations gave way to new notions of ‘freedom of choice’ and ‘managerial prerogative’, and the legitimacy of workplace authority based on status gave way to a new legitimacy based on the ‘contracted’ position held by managers with respect to those in their charge. Employees were free to negotiate a work contract to their liking within the context of accepting the ‘prerogatives’ of managers to organized and remunerate their efforts as they saw fit (Fox, 1974). Pockets of mutual obligations persisted in firms holding a paternalistic view of employment relations, and were widely found in firms forced by the power of trade union to collective bargaining. Elements of mutuality as a basis of legitimising workplace authority have emerged in more recent times as part of various employee participation schemes, industrial democracy decisional processes and HR practices. In the 21st century, the employment relation has adopted certain new perspectives towards employment relations symbolising its tryst with modernity. These new dimensions or paradigms include:

1. An inclination towards Unitary Perspective by the employers/ management towards their workers and employees
2. Employment relations encompasses both formal and informal policies and practices of Industrial Relations, as well as Human Resource Management
3. An incorporation of democratic procedures and practices of collective bargaining along with individual bargaining
4. Settlement of disputes and grievances in a democratic manner
5. Policies and practices of employee voice
6. Formulating legal provisions for governing the employment relations in organizations
7. Recognizing the representation of worker/employee organizations
8. Independence/autonomy of representative organizations participating in collective bargaining on behalf of the workers
9. Agreed organizational rights and responsibilities through workers’ education and awareness building.
10. A shift in the nature of negotiated agreements and their status from that of a casual and ad-hoc one that of greater commitment.
11. Development of Innovative Strategies as regards the last resort for workers in lieu of strike such as legal action or public demonstration with a well-worked out media strategy for maximum publicity as a way of pressurizing the other party in the negotiations
12. Increasing interest in ‘new’ actors in an industrial set up – customers, families, other interest groups - and in service sector, women and complexity of employment arrangements

These shifting trends towards employment relations have lend a great helping hand towards a sound management of labour-employer relations in industries. This phenomenon has become more fruitful in the industries which are small in nature, or are unorganized. The employers, or proprietors of such units, individually bargain with the workers and kept their business well on track. The industries are no more caught in the cobwebs of rules and regulations, or the adamant pressure tactics adopted by the trade unions to make their demands by accepted by the management. Another significant aspect or the outcome of this trend phenomenon is the declining influence of trade unions, which in recent years
have grown much ferocious. The unfortunate incidents at Maruti plant in recent years, or at jute mills in West Bengal also points out towards the ugly face of trade unionism in India. Employment Relations is definitely a way out of this chaos leading towards modernity.

CONCLUSION

Modernity, both as a concept and phenomenon, has brought revolutionary changes in the social, political, cultural and economic aspect of life. Traditionalism, although serving as the root of the civilization, is somewhat related to stagnation of things. With the employment relations replacing industrial relations, better relationships between labour and management have started to evolve. With the modernization of employment relations better workplace culture have started to come on the forefront. The romanticizing of employment relations with modernity or the tryst of employment relations with modernism is no doubt a noteworthy phenomenon in the annals of economic and managerial aspect in the country and the world.

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