

Transition in Industrial Relations: Case of a Private Steel Maker in India

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Beginning from the 1990s Industrial Relations in India has been challenged to move out of relevance. This study deals with the case of the largest private steel maker in India. The company in its bid to maintain competitiveness in a new business environment altered the dynamics between worker-employer and worker-worker relations. We find that the changes have brought about a dent in the long-established Industrial Relations practices in the organization. However, the company has managed to subdue the wave of large-scale worker resentment by having built a pro worker image. The changes in the Industrial Relations scenario in the company calls for a relook at new forms of relationship that thrives amid the 'fractured' Industrial Relations dynamics.

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Introduction

Industrial Relations (IR) provide a basis for assessing and explaining the dynamism governing employment relations. With writings on the Industrial Relations dating back to the start of the industrial process itself, a series of scholars¹ in the early part of the 20th century have contributed to the development and description of Industrial Relations as it were observed in modern industrial societies. However, Kaufman (2004) points to the year 1920 when Industrial Relations established itself as a recognized field of study in the US. However, it is the pioneering work done by John T Dunlop in his Systems framework in the year 1958 that gave him the stature of the father of Industrial Relations. In the course of time various theoretical approaches and perspectives to understanding the relations governing workplace were attempted. When Dunlop found it congenial to define Industrial Relations system in terms of a nation state (Dunlop, 1993: 12), some studies

¹ S & B Webb (1897), J R Commons (1909), G E Barnett and J H. Hollander (1905) and S H. Slitcher (1941).

found it important in drawing contours to the smaller sections of an economy concerning at the level of an organization or an industry. Researches in behavioral sciences also gave an opportunity to analyze Industrial Relations through assessing its internal structures and processes. Further, the works on bureaucracy and hierarchy after Max Weber also provides for a different line of analysis for assessing Industrial Relations within a given framework (ibid: 9). In this regard it can be pointed out that Industrial Relations studies have not been static and unidirectional in their approaches.

In the context of India, it was only after the Second World War that Industrial Relations got prominence. Post-Independence, the government enacted several labor laws in order to protect the interests of the working class. This was synonymous with the government's move towards modernization through industrialization. The erstwhile unskilled worker has been replaced by a modern industrial, skilled worker that has an educational background and essential academic qualifications necessary to suit the job. At present Indian Industrial Relations scenario has been highly regulated by laws and enactments. In some cases, through government disposition emphasis has been put on bipartite negotiations at the plant level and in some cases, it has been a success also (Zechariah, 1991: 354–55).

The evolution of Industrial Relations in the country can be succinctly defined in terms of the labor movement of India. In describing the movement, trade unions

form the basic component encompassing a heterogeneous population, catering to the needs of those who come under the aegis of organized sector. But, labor movement in India also bears political hues with political parties and trade unions having developed close ties with each other. In a labor-intensive country like India, this definitely had its own advantages.

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In other countries when Industrial Relations (IR) has acquired a certain trajectory in terms of development and understanding of labor relations, for India the conceptual clarity of the framework had been more or less absent or, in less harsh terms, it was unclear. Also, a result of this IR had been integrated along with the teachings of other disciplines like Sociology, Economics, Psychology etc. but was never taken up as a separate subject of study. As a result, the prominence of a single orientation for IR never came into the foray (Sodhi, 1994: 20). Bhattacharjee (2001) also contends that in the late 1950s the failure of the then labor minister VV Giri to push for a Trade Unions and Labor Relations Bill in the parliament led to the abortion of a mature IR system.

In the current phase of liberalization policies where the State plays a minimalist role, the IR scenario is bound to change.

The challenges brought out by the economic liberalization might be plenty especially in terms of labor market restructuring. It might be interesting to note how have the once state sponsored nationalized IR system in India has given way to localized IR system specific to industry and the location. As put by Bhattacharjee (2000), regional differences in terms of economic development have become large and significant and this has clearly affected the behavior of employers, unions, individual workers, and most importantly, has altered the strategic decision-making of local and state governments. Each state/region now actively lobbies and hence competes for, both national and international capital investment. The erstwhile 'national' IR structure, whose ideal model was a curious mix of the competitive pluralism of the Anglo-Saxon IR system and a form of state-dominated corporatism, has given way to a myriad variety of 'local' and state-level IR models across the country that vary not just by region, but also by type of enterprise (public versus private, domestic versus foreign, small versus large, etc.). Hence there has been a visible shift in the traditional collective IR practices.

HRM) & the 'Individualization' of Employment Relations

The understanding of IR cannot be complete, however, without incorporating the shifts in the firm's behavior that has taken place on account of the market realities brought out by increased integration of the world economy. With the boost of industrial production in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century due to

the Industrial Revolution, 'personnel management' as a practice was started off in the US and the UK where the personnel manager's task was to maintain records and act as a liaison officer between the administration and the employees. The growing concern that employees as human beings were the primary assets of a firm, the term Personnel Management was replaced by Human Resource Management (HRM). HRM is relatively a newer discipline but has gained significant attention. As Saini and Khan (2000) observe, "the term HRM signifies a drastic shift in the balance of power between employer and trade unions in favor of the former." The policies have now shifted from pluralistic to unitarian.

The formation of a new category of employees known as 'knowledge workers' has served to further the divide between IR and HRM.

Ray (2004) has also noted the changes IR has undergone and has termed the alteration as the 'individualization' of IR wherein "the negotiation of contracts by the management [is] with their employees and not the trade unions" The management takes the position of dealing with workers individually rather than with their unions. This becomes relevant in today's context when HRM lays emphasis on human capital formation. The formation of a new category of employees known as 'knowledge workers' has served to further the divide between IR and HRM. The emergence of 'knowledge workers' in industrialized countries

are now playing a crucial role in the firms. As De Silva (1997) makes the point that these professionals own the organizational knowledge which is quite different from its counterparts and that they are strategically aligned in the firm's direction. They are assets to the firm and the firm should retain and enhance their knowledge building capacity.

Janardhan (2003) on the other hand gives the view that emergence of HRM since the mid -1980s has proven to be detrimental to the IR and has since been on a noticeable decline. The clash between the two 'paradigms' has often led to the shifting of attention more towards HRM. The adversarial employer-employee relationship is sought to be attended through within the confines of the firm. The collective representation of employees on a national/industrial level is unwanted. The introduction of HRM has placed a greater stress on handling issues at hand rather than seeking relief on a collective front at a wider level. This is well attuned with the diminishing role of the State in the IR scenario and the employers have gained significant bargaining strengths in disputes arising at the shop floor level. While the target is to promote industrial peace and democracy, it more often comes in the shape of employees losing out on the basic rights of union formation, collective bargaining, wage issues and social security.

Indian Manufacturing: A Cyclical Growth

The impetus for the growth of organized manufacturing had been laid down

soon after India got its Independence in 1947. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister took the path of a planned development process. The development was on the pattern of a state-sponsored socialist path of industrialization. On the one hand where investments on developing economic and productive enterprises were deemed essential, the sensitivity to providing social justice and equal opportunity to all was also something which could not be neglected (Dayal, 1980: 1). The socialist policy makers also laid emphasis on labor-intensive small scale industries (SSIs) which ultimately proliferated. Therefore, on one hand when the basic objective was protection from foreign competition, many a times on the other hand these policies gave rise to internal competition (Ahluwalia, 1991; Trivedi et al., 2011). At the heart of the matter lay views on export pessimism, self-reliance and the need for protecting domestic enterprises from outside competition². The private sector was almost until the eighties controlled by a number of measures including, licensing agreements, tariff restrictions on imports, monopoly regulation, foreign exchange regulation, nationalization of banks etc. During those times when the private sector assumed a rather supplementary role, the State implied a central role acting as a regulator, provider as well as a producer of goods and services (Dutt, 2003: 2).

After independence though in its initial periods, the industrial growth reached promising levels, but since the period of

² See also Ahluwalia 1991.

the late seventies, the index of industrial production (IIP)³ recorded low growth rates particularly due to low productivity, product obsolescence etc. Not only were the growth rates low as compared to the targets set by the Planning Commission, it also lagged behind when compared to the other East Asian economies such as Korea, Thailand and Indonesia (Dutt, 2003: 3). The protectionist policies and the regulatory framework pre-1980s were held responsible for the low growth rate and productivity of Indian manufac-

turing (Ahluwalia, 1991; Trivedi et al, 2011). The growth rate post-1980s, in the manufacturing sector is as shown in Fig. 1. Post 1980s⁴, the growth in manufacturing had been characterized with ups and downs with a somewhat steady growth from the mid-1980s till 1990–1991. Following the financial crisis of the early 1990s the growth showed negative value but reached an all-time high of 13.6% by middle of nineties. After this again the growth rates witnessed a decreasing trend.

Fig. 1 Manufacturing Growth Over Corresponding Period of the Previous Year (Base 1980–81=100)



Source: Generated by the Author using Central Statistics Office (CSO), Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India. (http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/iip/iip_table5.htm)

3 Index of industrial production (IIP) is a composite indicator that measures the short-term changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products during a given period with respect to that

in a chosen base period (Govt. of India, Central Statistics Office).

4 The period of 1980–1981 is taken as the base year.

In the hunt for capital investment, labor was viewed as a liability and capital as an asset.

The policy reforms initiated in the early nineties not only heralded the beginning of a new economy with increase in productivity and output but on the other hand it also meant suppression of the working class. As noted by Roy (1996), “. . . the hostility to the working class is real and fierce, as manifested in their denial to yield any new benefit. . . .”. Also, in the hunt for capital investment, labor was viewed as a liability and capital as an asset. Nagaraj (2004) found that 15% of the workforce lost their jobs in the organized manufacturing sector between 1996 and 2001. “Admittedly, some of the job sheds are likely to have reappeared in the unorganized or informal sector with growing subcontracting of production and shedding of auxiliary services like transport, security, cleaning, and provision of food at workplace.” (ibid: 3388).

The Firm: An Introduction

The firm has clocked more than 100 years of existence now. In dealing with various challenges and obstacles that has come as part of its journey, the company has managed to maintain itself as a reputed name in the steel business. From its founder the underlying objective of the firm was not so much in making profits but it lay in his foresight to align India in the world map through spurring of industrialization seeds. Aligned with the vision of its founder, the company is associated

with the culture of philanthropy and instigating a social conscience in Industrial India. It has taken a number of initiatives in livelihood, health and medical care, education, sustainability and relief programs at the community level in its region of operation. The firm has regularly maintained returning to the society what it draws from it. The firm is also credited with the introduction of a number of worker benefits. As a result, the company has witnessed peaceful and cordial industrial relations through most of the years of its existence.

Methodology

This is a case study of a single firm owing to the uniqueness of its attributes. The study has been both descriptive as well as exploratory in its nature. Data collection from the firm took place by using tools like questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study wanted to grasp the perceptions of the workers towards the changing policies of the management. Upon getting a flavor of the field through questionnaire, interviews were taken from select employees belonging to different departments and positions. This helped in getting a nuanced perspective of the field. Additionally, tracing the historical trajectory of the firm the study also employed secondary sources like monographs, newspaper clippings and organizational reports.

Industrial Relations

The IR situation in the firm has experienced a few hiccups all along its journey. Motivated by the waves of class

struggle and recognition in other regions of the globe, worker voices started to take shape which ultimately resulted in the formation of a trade union. A joint advisory committee ushering workers' participation in management, increase in wages and fringe benefits like provident fund were also introduced during this period. The union with its dynamic leadership consistently fought for wage revisions and incentive bonus scheme. Through its struggle the union did achieve higher wages and enhanced working conditions. Joint committees were also initiated to ensure negotiations and settlement of industrial disputes.

The agreement brought about collective bargaining as a means of industrial dispute resolution.

Some years later an agreement was reached between the management and the union which attempted to clearly specify the rights and the obligations of the workers along with security of job. The agreement brought about collective bargaining as a means of industrial dispute resolution. The agreement also followed the establishment of a joint consultation system between the management and the union which would regularly meet to discuss issues related to the workers and productivity. A well-defined grievance procedure was also installed in place.

Post this, a violent strike had rocked the firm. It started when a rival union backed by the Communist Party went on a one-day token strike. Numerous workers participated peacefully in the strike

although this strike was deemed illegal by the state government and also opposed by the main recognized union. Among those involved in the strike around fifty persons were immediately suspended or charge-sheeted by the management. In response the rival union held an illegal stay-in strike. Following this five days later, workers went into a general strike which initiated violent clashes claiming lives and injuries to some workers. It was some months later that the situation improved and the steel works returned to its normal functioning.

Commentators have argued of the importance of this strike because it brought to the fore labor problems in its bid to secure growth and development. Developing economies have faced similar circumstances when caught between the web of economic growth and progress through modernization on one side and the labor problem on the other. Further, labor protests wearing the garb of unions becomes a complex issue and needs appropriate IR practices to come to communal agreements between the several interests involved in the firm.

Grade Structures

Dunlop in his systems framework identified three crucial actors for studying an IR system i.e. the management organizations, worker unions and the government. IR in the firm has traditionally been bipartite in nature.

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The firm is characterized by three grade structures namely Conventional, Associate and Associate-like. During its initial years of establishment, conventional grade structure was adopted and it was in tandem with the grades of the public sector units. With the government lifting controls in the steel sector post liberalization and the setting up of newer departments, the firm has revised the grade structure to Associate and to the more recent Associate-like. The differences between Associate and Associate-like grade structure are in terms of allowances merged with the basic pay in Associate and not in Associate-like. Associate structure also has the concept of increment every four years while this is absent in the latter. Also, in Associate the filling of vacancies by way of promotions is linked to the PMS (performance management system) while PMS is absent in Associate-like structure. A little over a decade back, the firm came out with its own grade structure and Cold Rolling Mill (CRM) happened to be the first department where this grade structure was introduced. As a result, Associate structure is also used interchangeably as the CRM structure, as all workers in CRM belong to the Associate structure. The more recent departments have Associate and Associate-like structures while the older ones have traditionally been Conventional in structure. Although in the analysis, Associate and Associate-like grade structures are clubbed together as one under the heading Associate Structure. The departments with Associate (and Associate-like) structure being relatively new, also had high levels of automation and hence lesser number of per-

sons were employed here. The various departments with their respective grade structures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Grade Structures in the Firm

Conventional Structure	Associate Structure
A-F Blast furnace	H Blast furnace
G Blast furnace	Pellet plant
Coke plant	New Bar mill
Sinter plant 1 & 2	Cold rolling mill
LD1	Sinter plant 3 & 4
Merchant Mill	
Wire rod mill	
Lime plant	
LD2	
Hot strip mill	

Source: Field Survey

The Conventional structure has grades R1 to R17 for workers and N1 to N20 for supervisors, with R1 and N1 being the lowest. The educational qualifications of workers range from none till diploma holders. The diploma holders have degrees in the fields of, mechanical, electrical and instrumentation and metallurgical. The diploma holders hired are provided with one year training which is divided into nine months of training in a technical institute and three months training in the shop floor. The Associate structures have workmen in the designations of Junior Associates, Associates and Senior Associates. Junior Associates are persons having minimum eligibility of having done matriculation, Associates have trade apprenticeship while Senior

They are given ornamental designations which are consistent with what Guy Standing (2011) refers to as ‘uptitling’.

Associates are the diploma holders. Although these Associates are doing more or less the same kind of work as conventional grade workers, they are given ornamental designations which are consistent with what Guy Standing (2011) refers to as 'uptitling'.

Around a decade back, it was realized by the management that the employee costs by way of benefits, bonus, salaries and wages were too high. So in an attempt to reduce the wage cost a new NS (new series) grade has been introduced. The NS grade wage hence introduced is higher than market wages but less than the steel wages. This NS grade has been introduced across all the three grade structures. Workers from all grade structures were interviewed, keeping in mind the differences between NS grade and the older grades.

Management Style

On a comparative analysis of organizations Likert (1961) has developed four systems of management based on research and general observations. These patterns of management thus developed also capture the historical trends along with the cultural dimensions. The four styles are illustrative of the general pattern of management styles. The specified different management systems involving moderate degrees of control or influences, become ordered in a continuum based on the kinds of control and force of motivation and the consequent kinds of attitudes and responses generated. With the systems of organizations representing above involve at least a

moderate amount of control, the concept of laissez faire is not absent here.

- i) **Exploitive Authoritative:** Motivation is used in the manner of use of fear, punishment, threats and occasional rewards which develops hostile attitude towards management and contrary to what is expected by the organization. The communication is very less and the direction of information flow is downwards. There is little interaction and a feeling of fear and distrust always exists in the organization. Decision making is done at the top level and information dissemination is seldom done. The productivity of the organization is also mediocre here.
- ii) **Benevolent Authoritative:** Motivation is used in the manner of use of rewards or some actual or potential punishments which sometimes develops hostile attitude towards management and contrary to what is expected by the organization. The communication is less and the direction of information flow is mostly downwards. There is little interaction and usually subordinates face some feeling of fear and caution in the organization. Policy making is done at the top level and many decisions within prescribed levels are done at the lower levels and some information is shared down the line. The productivity of the organization is also fair to good.
- iii) **Consultative:** Motivation is used in the manner of use of rewards, occasional punishments and some involvement also. Attitude towards organization

might be hostile but are more often favorable and is proactive towards organizational goals. The communication is quite a bit and the direction of information flow is both upwards and downwards. There is moderate interaction and often with some trust and confidence. The broad policies and general decisions are made at the top level with some specific decisions made at the lower levels. Reasonably adequate and correct information is available. The productivity of the organization is good.

- iv) Participative Group: Motivation is rewarded economically with appropriate compensation system in place. There is group participation and involvement in various activities in the organization. Attitudes towards organization and its goals are usually strongly favourable and the behaviour is tuned towards implementation of organizational goals. The communication is both with individuals and groups. The direction of information flow is both upwards and downwards and also along with the peers. There are friendly extensive interactions with high levels of mutual trust in the organization. Decision making is done throughout the organization and its productivity on is excellent.

These four basic management styles are not discrete but contain intermediate linkages with each other. 'Thus, for any organization which falls along the suggested continuum, it is possible, with minor deviations, to derive the probable patterns of leadership, organizational characteristics, and behavior which are typi-

cal of that system of organization when it is functioning at an optimum level' [*sic*]⁵. The firm has on three occasions bagged the SA8000⁶ certification for complying with the best practices of management.

When asked about the management style adopted in the firm, 50.8% workers said the management style was participative in nature meaning the worker is usually paid well and consulted before any decision concerning his job is taken. As much as 34.7% workers also expressed the management style in the firm being consultative i.e. the worker being paid well, fully takes part in decision making that affects him, his job and the organization as a whole.

More than 90% of the responses regarded the firm to be the best place to work.

More than 90% of the responses regarded the firm to be the best place to work. Only 3% have disagreed to the statement.

As one employee belonging to the Conventional structure explains, 'The company has given many benefits to its workers and takes care of them, which

⁵ See also Likert (1967).

⁶ 'SA8000 . . . provide[s] a standard based on international human rights norms and national labor laws that will protect and empower all personnel within a company's scope of control and influence, who produce products or provide services for that company, including personnel employed by the company itself, as well as by its suppliers/subcontractors, sub-suppliers, and home workers.'

Table 2 Management Style

Management style in the firm		
Responses	Frequency (N=303)	Percentage (%)
Exploitive Authoritative	5	1.7
Benevolent Authoritative	15	5.0
Consultative	105	34.7
Participative Group	154	50.8
Missing	24	7.9

N represents the total number of respondents.

Source: Field Survey

Table 3 Ideal Place to Work

In my opinion, the company is the best place to work as compared to other public and private industries in the region		
Responses	Frequency (N=303)	Percentage (%)
Disagree	9	3.0
Can't say	17	5.6
Agree	275	90.8
Missing	2	0.7

N represents the total number of respondents.

Source: Field Survey

is why the worker does not ask for more. The other companies are not so pro worker.' In contrast, an NS grade employee reckons, 'I jumped job from one steel plant to this one having the opinion that this would be much better for me. After coming here, I realized that there is not much difference between the two. In fact, I think previous employer was much better. I have made a mistake.'

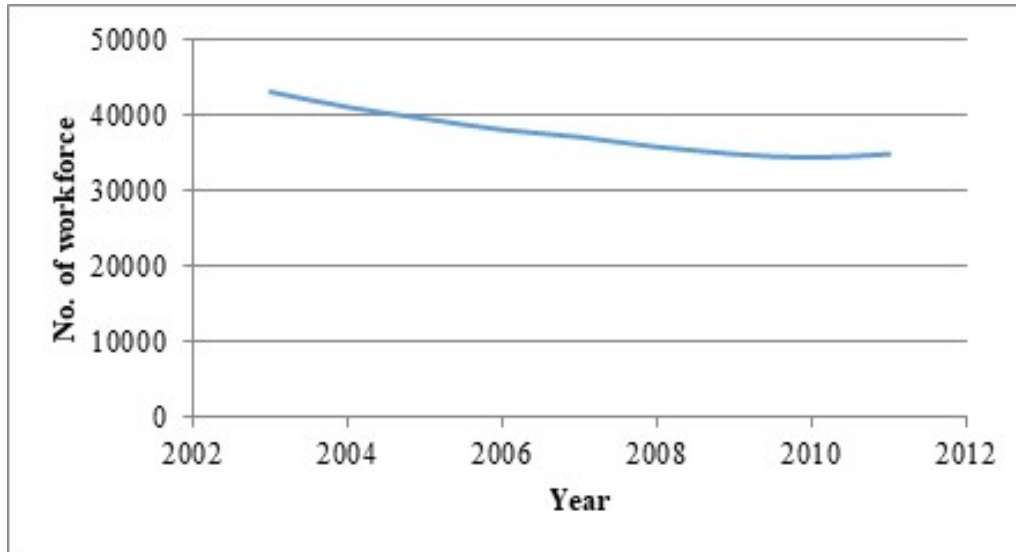
Human Resource Policies

The firm is credited with maintaining humane labor practices in the firm, extending its welfare measures to communities even outside the plant. With minimal strikes and disputes occurring, the firm was more or less successful in establishing peaceful IR over time.

The decade of the 1980s however brought tough times for the steel plant, like for most other firms due to the policy reforms. Years of government control had made the firm move in a slow pace with little revenue generation for its shareholders. Previous attempts of modernization of the plant had not worked. With further devaluation of the rupee, the firm stood approaching a crisis. But with its dynamic leadership the firm underwent a complete modernization in four phases. The fifth phase of the process meant skill enhancement of the employees. Further in July 1991 when the Indian economy was liberalized, in the wake of an economic crisis, the firm stood with a labor force of 78,000 that produced two million tons of steel. It was practically running in losses and the leadership took measures in cost

control, variety of improvement initiatives and more so in cutting down the labor force. To stay competitive, since then the firm has been continuously downsizing its labor force from over 43,000 in 2003 to nearly 35,000 in 2011 (fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Decreasing Workforce trend



Source: Generated by the Author using Capitaline corporate databases, Capital Market Publishers India Pvt. Ltd. (<http://www.capitalmarket.com>)

Early separation schemes (ESS) and voluntary retirement schemes (VRS) were synonymous with the reduction in work force. The firm had introduced its own early separation scheme (ESS) for employees above fifty years of age. Around 70% of the workers agree that the compensation schemes provided in terms of ESS along with pension benefits is good. Around 15% regarded it as poor. According to one employee, “Those who have taken ESS early on are regretting now because the rising expenses and costs have put them in a situation of loss”.

Table 4 Early Separation Scheme & Pension Benefits

The compensation schemes in terms of ESS along with pension benefits for its employees (above 50 years of age) are

Responses	Frequency (N=303)	Percentage (%)
Poor	44	14.5
Barely acceptable	41	13.5
Good	212	70.0
Missing	6	2.0

N represents the total number of respondents.

Source: Field Survey

More than 90% of the workers felt a sense of belonging and took pride in being associated with the firm. Less than 5% have disagreed or have remained undecided on the subject (Table 5). As one NS grade structure worker explains, “The company is not like what it used to be. The current set of managing team are only fighting for competition, there is no worker benefits”. Upon probing about the various benefits that provided by the company, the worker responds, “Yes, there are hospitals there in place but the quality of healthcare is bad. We do not prefer to be hospitalized in the company hospital. The allowances which we should rightfully receive are denied to us. The training facilities were much more elaborate in the past. They used to send people to Japan for training but now its limited only to people who are close to the unions.”

Table 5 Association with the Firm

I feel a part of the firm and am proud to be associated with it		
Responses	Frequency (N=303)	Percentage (%)
Disagree	11	3.6
Undecided	10	3.3
Agree	282	93.1

N represents the total number of respondents.

Source: Field Survey

With the liberalization since the early 1990s, steel sector has been one of the first sectors from which the government of India has lifted controls. Firms hence have seen a shift in erstwhile policies and have somewhat cut down on welfare and security measures in order to remain competitive in the liberalized market. Nearly 80% of the workers have agreed to the shift in the management attitude post the liberalization. Only 4.6% have disagreed to it (Table 6).

Table 6 Attitude of the Management Post Liberalization

There is a visible shift in the attitude of the management post the liberalization process of the 1990s		
Responses	Frequency (N=303)	Percentage (%)
Disagree	14	4.6
Undecided	43	14.2
Agree	242	79.9
Missing	4	1.3

N represents the total number of respondents.

Source: Field Survey

One worker on the verge of retirement narrates his journey in the company: “We felt very proud to be associated with the company. It was like a government job to me. The 1990s and the struggle for maintaining the jobs changed everything. Many left post 1990s. Even those who were good in their work left the job

thinking of no chances of their survival. I somehow stuck to the job, particularly because it was not wise to leave a job of the company. But, nowadays with so much competition in this business, the company has eroded its name. I do not blame the management for it. They did whatever they could to survive the company". Another worker who joined the company only in 2006 and belonged to the NS grade, mentions that, "I have stayed in the same position since the time I joined. I don't know how long I have to keep doing the same job. Chances for

training also depends on the line manager. I am looking for other opportunities".

With the increased competition and stringent labor regulations introduced in terms of ESS schemes and through continuous downsizing workforce, the company has however maintained its image of being pro-labor. It is evident from the fact that nearly 50% of the respondents have disagreed that with increased competition the labor policies have been strict towards labor. However, 29% have shown agreement to the matter (Table7).

Table 7 Post Liberalization Labor Policies

With increased competition, the HR policies have been stringent towards labor		
Responses	Frequency (N=303)	Percentage (%)
Disagree	147	48.5
Undecided	62	20.5
Agree	88	29.0
Missing	6	2.0

N represents the total number of respondents.
Source: Field Survey

One of the worker leaders in the union mentions, "We have been constantly trying to negotiate with the management for better separation policies, ward policies. The management looks at this favorably. They also do not want to finish it off. But the negotiation does not come easy. The workers at large should also understand this".

This period also marked changes in the industrial relations scenario where primacy of the 'individual' was given more weightage than the 'group'.

Summary & Discussion

The paper presents a case of transition in a long-standing IR scenario in the firm. Ever since its inception, the company has largely maintained a pro-labor image of itself. Although the compelling

IR in the company has had its fair share of uncertainties, none came as persuasive as the neo liberal policy reforms in the 1990s. This period also marked changes in the industrial relations scenario where primacy of the 'individual' was given more weightage than the 'group'. The discipline of human resources management has transplanted a false narrative of human capital that tran-

scends the need for any kind of organizing.

In the context of the firm the HR policies have been altered to accommodate for a greater competitiveness of the firm. Changes in the HR policies have involved significant reduction of work force in the firm, introduction of new grade structures and cut down in welfare measures for employees. Despite these changes it was observed that it had little effect on the attitude of the workers towards the firm. By and large, a significant number of workers have high opinion about the management of the company. They are particularly pleased with the kind of employee friendly policies that the company has persisted with. They also take pride in being associated with the name of the company. It was also found that some of the workers have a generational attachment with the company where their fathers and/or relatives also worked. However, this was seen to be absent with the workers belonging to the new NS grade. They have expressed their resentment in being treated with lower pay as compared to other Conventional grade workers. This also has to be understood in terms of these NS grade workers having higher investments in education and skills. Needless to say, this also translates into higher expectations from work. For the new NS workers, life-long employment with a single company remains a myth. The issue of the new grade would get more acute since the management has abolished recruitment in the old grade structure and henceforth recruits only in the NS grade. These undercurrents among the burgeoning NS

grade structure has the capacity to completely alter the carefully woven IR practices in the organization.

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