

A Study into the measures of improving Industrial Relations in new era with special reference to the West Bengal Collieries

Dr Parimalendu Bandyopadhyay

Assistant Professor, Deptt. of Commerce, Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol, 713340, Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 12 June 2019

Keywords

Industrialisation, Industrial Relations, Participative Management, Collective Bargaining, Quality of life of work, Quality Circle, Human Resource Development.

*Corresponding Author

Email: email2pari[at]gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Harmonious Industrial Relations (IRs) within an organisation are essential for its efficient running. No organisation can function efficiently and produce the goods and services if there are constant strikes, work stoppage and turmoil between the management and the labour. Therefore, healthy Industrial Relations between workers and management are essential for the growth and development of the organisation and the country as well. It is impossible to introduce any innovation on productivity improvement exclusively through the various industrial engineering techniques, if the sound Industrial Relations do not exist in the organisation. One of the major problems of a developing country is to increase the per capita income of the population through rapid industrialisation as well as through improvement in agricultural field. Industrialisation will create more employment opportunities and help in achieving a better standard of living. For rapid industrialisation, healthy climate has to be created which will encourage investments and attract entrepreneurs. One of the major factors which attract investment is the state of industrial peace. No nation can take up a programme of industrialisation unless the proper climate prevails. Strikes, unrests and lockouts only lead to loss of man-days in industries and consequent monetary loss to the nation in terms of lost production. Promoting harmonious human relations and maintaining cordial relations with the workers, trade union officials and management are the important business objectives of the public sector coal industry. A clear idea about the actual industrial relations situation in the West Bengal collieries could be made with the help of careful studies on the available primary data and through personnel contacts and also from official records. Here we have already observed that the industrial relations of West Bengal collieries are very complex in nature. To study such complex industrial relations situation of West Bengal collieries we have chosen some useful parameters in that way which the other behavioural scientists follow. Here it may be noted that there are many other parameters that may be suggested but we have given weightage on the parameters that we have chosen because according to us these are the most effective and also important to draw a clear picture on the actual industrial relations situation in the West Bengal collieries.

1. Introduction

Industrial Relation (IR) is dynamic in nature. The nature and climate of IR can be seen as an outcome of the complex set of transactions among the major players such as state, the employers, the employees and the trade unions in a given socio-economic context. The performance of an organization is largely regulated by the pattern of IRs maintained in the organisation. IR should be taken as part and parcel of human relationship at large and not as something extraneous to it. They must be regarded as natural concomitant of the industrial life of a society.

Among the various important factors which determine and regulate this relationship are the IR policy and practices of the organisation, attitudes of both the management and the labour, strength of the labour unions, multiplicity of unions, joint consultation, labour legislation and methods for settlement of disputes. Industrial relations however, are primarily a matter of attitudes, i.e. how does the management feel about the labour and vice versa. Good relationship can not, however, be grown overnight, but has to be developed and nurtured by both the parties over a period. It is only through an attitude of mutual trust and respect that harmonious and cordial IR can develop in an organization or industry. Harmonious IRs within an

organisation are essential for its efficient running. No organisation can function efficiently and produce the goods and services if there are constant strikes, work stoppage and turmoil between the management and the labour. Therefore, healthy IRs between workers and management are essential for the growth and development of the organisation and the country as well. It is impossible to introduce any innovation on productivity improvement exclusively through the various industrial engineering techniques, if the sound IRs do not exist in the organisation. One of the major problems of a developing country is to increase the per capita income of the population through rapid industrialisation as well as through improvement in agricultural field. Industrialisation will create more employment opportunities and help in achieving a better standard of living. For rapid industrialisation, healthy climate has to be created which will encourage investments and attract entrepreneurs. One of the major factors which attract investment is the state of industrial peace. No nation can take up a programme of industrialisation unless the proper climate prevails. Strikes, unrests and lockouts only lead to loss of man-days in industries and consequent monetary loss to the nation in terms of lost production.

2. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to explain the prevailing state of IRs practised in West Bengal collieries given below:

1. To ascertain the factors that affects the IRs in the Coal Mining Industry.
2. To ascertain the causes of industrial disputes in the Coal Mining Industry.
3. To assess social security and welfare benefits provided by the management of West Bengal collieries.
4. To find out relationship between Welfare / Social Security and IRs.
5. To study and find out the machineries used to settle industrial disputes in collieries and also the preventive aspects of industrial disputes.
6. To analyse working of disputes settlement and preventive machineries.
7. To suggest measures for improving industrial relation in Coal Mining Industry in future.

3. Methodology of the Study

Information and data were collected personally by the authors from each of the concerned department from files and documentary sources. After collection, information and data were compiled and duly represented. A few office bearers of the trade unions as well as company employees have been interrogated through stratified random sampling method to know their views regarding the industrial relations in the industry. The investigators also interviewed management personnel to have their views regarding actions taken to improve the industrial relations in West Bengal Collieries.

4. Findings of the Study

It is now at the end of our quest for the exploration of industrial relations in coal mining industry. We get a glimpse of the emerging pattern of industrial relations system in the industry in the context of West Bengal situation, because our empirical study in this study has been mainly based on the case study of West Bengal collieries. Within the parameter of some limitations, the findings of our West Bengal study may be projected on all-India pattern.

Promoting harmonious human relations and maintaining cordial relations with the workers, trade union officials and management are the important business objectives of the public sector coal industry. A clear idea about the actual industrial relations situation in the West Bengal collieries could be made with the help of careful studies on the available primary data and through personnel contacts and also from official records. Here we have already observed that the industrial relations of West Bengal collieries are very complex in nature. To study such complex industrial relations situation of West Bengal collieries we have chosen some useful parameters in that way which the other behavioural scientists follow. Here it may be noted that there are many other parameters that may be suggested but we have given weightage on the parameters that we have chosen because according to us these are the most effective and also important to draw a clear picture on the actual industrial relations situation in the West Bengal collieries.

After thorough analysis of the studies on all the parameters, we have observed that industrial relations in the West Bengal collieries during the period under study remained more or less harmonious. But it is clear after analysis that the industrial relations situation is not good in all fields. Because in our case study we have seen that less than 50% of the workers are satisfied and the rest percentage of worker are either not so satisfied or dissatisfied and they have so many grievances. For achieving success on this front an active grievance machinery procedure has been set-up. Bipartite meetings with the representatives of the trade unions, consultation with and participation of Central Trade Unions at the different level are made on regular intervals to resolve the various issues relating to employees and improvement in the productivity drive. Statutory obligations are being fulfilled to maintain industrial peace. The Joint Bipartite Committee for Coal Industry (JBCCI) has been functioning effectively to deliberately decide and interpret various terms and conditions, wages, welfare and social security and employment of non executives. The industrial relations in West Bengal collieries continued to be cordial except for stray incidents resorted to by individual unions, regional political parties, land oustees and unemployed youths resulting in interruption in mine operation, project construction and transport of coal.

Forums for securing, maintaining and promoting harmonious industrial relations in coal belt as observed during the course of personal survey are:

- Grievance machinery and procedure
- Periodical bilateral meetings with the operating trade unions at different levels
- Joint consultation with the central trade unions at regular intervals.
- Joint bipartite committee for coal industry
- Standardisation committee
- Committee on production /productivity linked Bonus Scheme

Apart from the above, various sound industrial laws are enforced in coal industry for promoting industrial relations.

It becomes thus obvious that for promoting healthy industrial relations in West Bengal collieries a lot of measures have been taken to dispose of grievances expeditiously and also through joint participation and dyadic involvement of employees. All the parties (viz. management, workers and trade union officials) desired for disposal of issues through collective bargaining machinery. It indicates that a congenial atmosphere prevails in West Bengal collieries that facilitate promoting sound industrial relations in coal belt. So, industrial climate during the period under study has not shown a constant positive or negative trend of industrial relations. It is the relevance of mixed industrial relations situation. Though during last two years under study there has not been manifestation of work stoppage (may be due to fear psychosis generated from likelihood of closing down of mines.) it does not necessarily mean a climate of healthy industrial relations existed in West Bengal collieries under the study period. So looking to overall perspectives of industrial relations, it can be said that industrial relations situation has not been much alarming and it is under control.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions of the Study

From the analysis and findings of data / information (both primary and secondary) it is revealed that coal mining industry in India specially in West Bengal runs under a moderate industrial relations climate during period under study. So for promoting healthy industrial relations as also to develop industrial peace and harmony in West Bengal collieries the following measures may be taken:-

- Evolving a participative culture in the management in the industry at all levels; a change in management style and approach to run the collieries is needed to introduce a participation system in all spheres of activities.
- Colliers be given proper training to make them aware of accidents, its reasons consequences. Adequate and proper safety appliances / devices be provided. Management should ensure that the safety devices are being utilised properly.
- Working conditions need to be improved. Management should see that committees constituted for such purposes work effectively.
- Workers' absenteeism disturbs the effective functioning of coal mines. To reduce such absenteeism management should investigate the cases individually, discretely and take drastic action proportionate to misdeeds. Management should generate a culture of discipline in the collieries so that indiscipline activities resorted to by erring employees are dealt with vigorously.
- Analysis of canteen figures does not depict a healthy sign in respect of facilities provided through canteen to the colliers. The management should take measures to provide canteen facilities to all the workers as non-provision of such facility may tend toward deterioration of labour-management relations. Further, quality food should be supplied through canteen.
- The situation is same in case of crèche. It should also be increased considering number of women workers working in collieries in West Bengal.
- Medical facilities provided by the West Bengal collieries are required to be enhanced. The organisation should take necessary steps to improve health and sanitary service in the entire West Bengal collieries. No of beds in the hospitals should be increased to some extent because in the peak time patients are provided beds on the floor.
- One of the serious problems of entire coal belt is money lending. Employees take money on loan from money lenders on exorbitant rate of interest and it so happens once they take loan it becomes difficult for them to return back the whole principal amount in their service life to the money lenders. Money lenders exploit the workers. To check this practice management should increase the number of co-operative credit societies and management should ensure that colliers get loan from such societies as and when their need arises. However mechanism should be introduced to deduct loan instalment from wages on a regular basis.
- Possibility of opening more bank branches in coal field areas are to be explored to avoid lending from private lenders.
- It is very much urgently needed that the workers at the grass root level should be aware of the company policies on the various aspects particularly the areas that directly affect their interests (namely promotion policy, wage policy, training policy, bonus policy etc.). Workers expressed their views during the time of interaction we had with them that their understanding on company policies would help to enrich their knowledge that would mitigate industrial conflicts / disputes. .
- It is revealed from survey work in different collieries of West Bengal that some trade union leaders are outsiders who for obvious reasons may not have necessary acquaintance / understanding with organisation milieu, management philosophy, approach, and vision. So they may not have proper observation in respect of Human resource (HR) policies / Industrial Relation (IR) policies in collieries. At this backdrop trade union leaders selected from working community may be very much effective in solving labour issues as also in promoting dyadic relationship, inter personnel relationship vis-a-vis industrial relations.
- It should be understood that in prospect the spirit of bipartism is the essence of collective bargaining as industrial relations system. And for its success, mutual trust and self-reliant attitude of both management and unions are the very basic needs in future days to come in collieries particularly in West Bengal collieries. To make the collective bargaining as a machinery to settle disputes, the trade union leaders need to be educated through training, participation in different seminars workshops, conference.
- To monitor the effective implementation of jointly agreed objectives a management-worker group needs to be constituted at the Apex and subsidiary level. This group will examine targets in respect of all the objectives including the choice of technology and review the performance every six months.
- Colliery management may introduce productivity linked incentive scheme at the production units based on industrial engineering studies.
- It is gathered from responses of worker in sampled collieries that the degree of quality of life of work (QWL) needs to be improved. So necessary measures are to be taken to promote sound dyadic relationship between boss and subordinate and to create a congenial and conducive working climate in the collieries. Supervisors should be educated through training, participation in seminars and various interactive forums so that they can play the role of nurturant supervisor, change agent, guide and facilitator.
- Relatives suffer a lot for getting their payment of provident fund, gratuity, pension /family pension. It takes a lot of time to get such payment. Management should take necessary measures to make such payment on the day of retirement / superannuation.

- Management should emphasis on value consideration. Worker should be treated as vital partners in coal mine not as commodity. So change in management philosophy is very much needed. Some workers expressed concern about the behaviour of some executives that demoralised them. To develop and promote the competence level of human skills of such executives, management should design a systematic mechanism and arrange for tailor made management development programme.
- Management needs to pay more attention on setting work load standard through job analysis.
- Grievance procedure mechanism for settlement of disputes is not working in West Bengal collieries effectively. Some collieries even have not introduced such mechanism for quick disposal of individual grievances. Colliery should have well defined effective grievance procedure and management should ensure that such grievance settlement machinery works smoothly.
- Management should reinforce / strengthen training colleges / departments to ensure that need based training, retraining are given to employees. Effective machinery needs to be introduced for evaluating training programmes. A committee on training may be setup to examine, supervise, and monitor the training activities and also to ensure that post training evaluation is made. It is suggested that feasibility may be explored to impart training on the areas like motivation, morale, changing mindset, upliftment, discipline etc.
- A lot of changes are taking place in industrial settings. New technology is being invented. Colliery management should use latest technology replacing obsolete ones keeping in view the mining conditions in West Bengal. This produces quality goods and services and delights the customers. In this eventuality multi-skilling of workers is needed for effective utilisation / redeployment through developing / restructuring HR department.
- Human resource information system be introduced / reinforce to create a data base orientation to ensure that quality management decision is taken.
- For providing housing accommodation to the employees and for maintaining standard and quality of housing arrangement, housing accommodation committee be restructured and activated. Suggestion from the dwellers / occupant employees may be taken with regard to amenities facilities to be extended. Suggestion may also be taken from union representatives in respect of sanitary condition, quarter facilities etc to be improved / upgraded.
- Management may introduce 'suggestions scheme' inviting creative ideas from the employees for introducing any motivational technique, disputes, disposal mechanism, production enhancement methods / techniques etc. Such creative ideas / suggestions with excellent ratings may be selected for special award to employees concerned. This may generate the sense of accomplishment and a feeling of belongingness among the employees.
- Quality Circle (QC) in West Bengal collieries are not effectively working. Some collieries have not introduced such concept. Management should put in efforts to design a suitable QC structure and should ensure that effective working is made in the collieries. Top management needs to take initiative for introduction of QC and its proper implementation. Company should frame a policy on quality enhancement. And also a scheme may be designed to award prizes, incentives to those departmental QCs that will have highest number of suggestions approved by the steering committee / top executives in a particular period.
- Management should put in all out efforts to accelerate growth of underground / opencast production and productivity. For such purpose production committee may be constituted with the representatives of union to monitor the production related activities and to ensure that production process does not suffer due to lack of materials, equipments etc. The committee should also explore the feasibility for the use of different mechanisms for increasing production, productivity and to implement the same for the coal mines.
- A congenial and comfortable climate needs to be created so that both the workers and management feel a sense of "we-feeling", "togetherness", and accomplishment. So a state of environment generating OTUC climate ('O' stands for openness, 'T' stands for trust, 'U' stands for understanding and 'C' stands for collaboration) will create work-friendly atmosphere. This sort of climate will help to promote sound dyadic relationship (between boss and subordinate) and also industrial relations in collieries. This sort of environment may be created if both the management and union feel the necessity of environment and both the parties come close, give up their militance, stubborn attitude to interfere to each other activities and develop co-operative and constructive feeling for sustenance, growth and development of the organisation.
- If a feeling among colliers in West Bengal collieries is generated like 'this is our colliery', 'if it grows we will grow', 'if it loses we will lose', and 'colliery development means our development' etc. there lies the possibility of promoting sound industrial relations in the collieries.
- Human Resource Development Department in the collieries needs to be reinforced. Constant research to explore / identify the mechanisms to be used for developing human resource should be carried out. It is felt that Workers Satisfaction Survey (WSS), Employees Attitude Survey (EAS), Morale Level Ascertainment Survey (MLAS) are to be made on regular basis.
- Discipline management in the West Bengal collieries needs to be strengthened. Object of disciplinary action should be not to punish the people but to correct the behaviour of erring employees for their growth and development. There should be transparency in disciplinary action. Rules of double standard, biasness

should not be there where decision of punishing erring employees is taken.

- Top management should put in efforts to ensure that disputes are settled through internal mechanism and in some cases through conciliation and voluntary arbitration. Both parties (Trade Union and management) should refrain from referring disputes for settlement through compulsory adjudication. An effective cell should be constituted to ensure that agreed issues, court verdicts, awards are implemented.
- Local people / villagers sometime create problems for smooth running of mining activities. Top management in consultation with local MLA'S, MP'S, Government officials, trade union officials should constitute committee to keep vigil on villagers' activities on some issues relating to coal mines and prompt and expeditious arrangement should be made so that local villagers can not interfere in mining activities.
- For changing mindset (paradigm shift), preparing reservoir of committed, loyal and dynamic work force colliery management should take the following steps that may help promote a healthy IRs particularly in

West Bengal collieries:

- Payment of fair adequate wages, allowances etc.
- Ensuring the implementation of agreed issues under wage board recommendation.
- Introducing a system of employee involvement in various organisational activities.
- Empowerment of employees
- Security in job
- Positive stroking when an employee's performance is excellent and negative stroking when an employee performs poorly.
- Empathic, nurturant supervisors
- Transparent management activities
- High degree of Quality of Work Life(QWL)
- Mental support of top management
- Easy accessibility to management
- Creating a scope of interaction in ritual performance / ceremony
- Existence of homely environment in work place
- Developing mutual understanding between union and management.

References

1. Dr. Ghosh, A.K, Human Resources Management Text & Cases, Manas Publication, New Delhi.
2. Mamoria, Mamoria & Gankar, Dynamics of Industrial Relations, Himalaya Publication House, New Delhi.
3. Annual Reports of Coal India Limited.
4. Annual Reports of Eastern Coalfield Limited.
5. Agrawal.D, Industrial Relations and Collective Bargaining, Deep and Deep Publications, New Belhi, 1982.
6. Tandon.B.K, Collective Bargaining and the Indian scene, Sultan Chand & Sons, New Delhi, 1972.
7. Beestey.M, Industrial Relations in a Changing World, Croom Helm, London,1975
8. Agrawal.S.L, Labour Relations Law in India, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1980.
9. Dessler. Crary, Human Resource Management, Printice-Hall, New Delhi, 1998.
10. Monappa. Arun, Industrial Relations, Tata Mcgraw-Hill, New Delhi, 2004