

for the study and practice of management. The basic arguments of the author are then stated and followed up with brief condensations of the various sections. A final section in each chapter lists the chapters of the book being discussed along with a brief note on their contents. The important chapters of the book are also highlighted.

The author himself warns that his work is not a substitute for reading the original texts. These volumes are meant to "give the reader a taste of what each of the books has to offer and encourage a fuller reading of those that capture the imagination". The author has succeeded in his attempt to provide his readers with succinct summaries of these books, and their main arguments and conclusions. The two volumes would be especially useful for students and working managers who would have heard or read about many of these books, but have not yet had the time to read them.

While the two volumes succeed in giving the reader an idea of what each of these books contain, there is the danger that the reader might decide that it is no longer necessary to read the original work. That would be a pity. No attempt at summarizing can succeed in bringing out the wealth of data and complexity of the arguments that support the conclusions and recommendations of many of these books. The two volumes are useful as an introductory review to these books that would enable readers to chose those that they would like to peruse in greater detail later.

Biju Paul Abraham
IIM Calcutta

Industrial and Human Resource Management in Transition by J. S. Sodhi, Published by Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resource, New Delhi, 1999.

In the preface, the author mentions that the book is based on case studies of eight Indian companies, to find out how these companies were responding to the growing competition in the wake of liberalisation of the Indian economy; particularly in relation to their policies and practices in the areas of industrial relations and human resource management.

The book is divided into eleven chapters of which eight (Chapters 3 to 10) are devoted to the case studies – one each for eight firms studied. The firms selected are two each

from four industries, namely, automobiles, banking, electronics and garments. Out of the three remaining chapters, Chapter 1 discussed in a general way the implications of the process of globalisation of the national economies and technological changes on IR and HRM policies and practices at the firm level. Chapter 2 enumerates the specific objectives of the study and the research methodology followed. According to the author, the research is based upon firm level data collected during 1996 and 1997, through "guided conversations", as part of a qualitative research methodology. The four industries selected are on the basis of their importance "from the point of view of Export-Oriented Industrialisation Strategy". The firms within an industry have been selected based upon "their exposure to competition (internal and preferably external) and positive performance during the last five years". Chapter 11 which is the last chapter, incorporates the 'conclusions' of the study. Therefore, the eight case studies reported constitute the entire basis of the book. Out of the eight firms selected, three are in public sector (including Maruti Udyog set up with Japanese collaboration) and out of the remaining five firms which are in private sector, there is one foreign bank and one firm (Modi Xerox) with foreign equity participation.

Given the fact that the study was a part of a larger international project coordinated by eminent scholars, the least one could expect was systematic presentation of data and their critical analysis in explaining the situations or events in each company. All the eight case studies are marked by singular lack of this rudimentary academic rigour. At the end of each case reporting, one wonders whether what one read were unedited excerpts from the field notes of the interviewer, or, whether they were picked up straight from the company newsletters or annual reports. The sentences were often written either in incomplete telegraphic form, or, were punctuated by the words "our company". On the whole, the treatment of the cases is very sketchy and the assertions by way of analysis of situations or events, quite often, simplistic and platitudinal.

In Maruti Udyog Ltd. case in Chapter 1, the author eulogises the company's HR policies which, according to him, led to company's profits and growth through employee commitment and development. But he presents no analysis of the dynamics of union-management relations which is admittedly adverse, at least covertly. Similarly, while discussing the situations in Modi Xerox (Chapter 8) he reports upon company's attempts to resist formation of trade unions before implanting an internal union of its choice. Then he goes on to record in conclusion how the company "enjoyed a cordial relationship with the internal trade union" while implementing "holistic" HR policies with "a missionary zeal". In both the cases, the author failed to highlight in the most important contextual

factor, namely, the power balance in favour of the employer, which enables employers to purchase such unitarist 'HRM' policies. Interesting accounts of how the management of both these enterprises could achieve their objectives are already reported by Mathur (1991). Readers would have benefitted if the author could build his arguments further upon the reported work and provided new insights. One misses similar opportunity to gain from the case study of ECIL (Chapter 7) as the author provides no clue whatsoever how and why the trust, initially created between the management and the union, broke down after three years. Similar lack of attempt to explain the evolving situations is manifest in almost all the other cases. In the absence of such explanations, duly supported by credible data, the whole exercise degenerated into bland narration of facts, as they appear on the surface. As a result, the study fails to provide any learning points to the policy makers for their future guidance.

In the eight cases the facts have been presented without following any uniform pattern. IR and HR issues, which the author wanted to distinguish between, were often mixed up. Sometimes, it was even unclear whether the author was talking about existing company policies or the intended ones (for example, ABC Bank Case – IR Issues). In many cases absence of clear mention of dates made it difficult to judge whether, or which, policy changes were strategic response to competitive threats and which were part of normal on going changes as happen in every organisation. In most of the cases, there were too much of mundane details, particularly of training programmes (for example, Modi Xerox Case) which did not serve any purpose other than increasing the bulk of the book.

In summary, the book has failed to provide any meaningful empirical evidence or basis which could guide IR and HR policies at the firm level, in the face of globalisation of Indian economy – contrary to what has been claimed in its two forewords. As a coverage of the Indian scene, being part of a multi-country project with similar objective, it disappoints the reader.

Reference

Mathur, Ajeet N. (1991), *Industrial Restructuring and Union Power*, New Delhi, ILO – ARTEP.

P. K. Sett
IIM Calcutta