POST-COLONIAL HRM PRACTICES: RECLAIMING TRADITIONAL 'PANCHAYAT' MEDIATION IN INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the recent renaissance of traditional social order, mediation institution in resolving industrial disputes namely 'Panchayat system,' and its incorporation into the neo-liberal capitalist system of HRM under post-colonial conditions. That is why industrial relations, in several post-colonial nations, are not as simple and seem to be still dominated by confrontational which our colonial legislation enacted. The research study explores the applicability of Panchayat Mediation – being an indigenous conflict resolution process based on community consensus and restorative justice– as a part of more effective and culturally relevant dispute resolution in workplaces. Adopting a qualitative research design, the paper is based on case studies of Indian industrial disputes in which Panchayat-based mediation had been used, and on interviews with HR staff, union representatives and Panchayat leaders. The conclusion shows that incorporating Panchayat mediation builds trust, minimizes cost of litigation and promotes harmonious labour relations. Results suggest that post-colonial HRM systems can gain by re-appropriating traditional conflict resolution formats based on inclusiveness, limbs and community justice. The paper concludes that the inclusion of the Panchayat mediation within HRM system will not only help in bridging historical dissonances in resolving disputes but exercise a pragmatic culturally congruent approach to enhancing industrial harmony. The findings are discussed through consideration for HR practitioners and policy makers in post-colonial contexts to work towards a hybrid dispute management approach.

Keywords: Post-colonial HRM, Panchayat mediation, industrial disputes, traditional conflict resolution, labor relations, indigenous practices, dispute management

INTRODUCTION

Industrial conflict continues to be a major and persistent problem in many post-colonial countries where the legacy of colonial law and administration can still be seen to influence labor relations and mechanisms for the resolution of disputes. These traditional systems are generally

adversarial in nature, and litigation-oriented mechanisms to address disputes contribute to fueling employer-employee confrontation as opposed to collaboration (Kumar & Singh 2021). The adversarial characteristic of these mechanisms has time and again resulted in protracted conflicts, elevated litigation costs and a general lack of trust among industrial partners such that the dispute resolution becomes quite slow, ineffective as well as costly. This legacy is a key political challenge for human resource management (HRM) managers to develop sustainable labour relations in the post-colonial context.

Recently, however, there has been a noticeable movement in HRM towards acknowledging the value of culturally informed and context-appropriate approaches to conflict management. There is a growing recognition among academics and practitioners that uniform dispute resolution models which are rooted in Western paradigms, may not meet the unique sociocultural challenges faced in postcolonial workplaces (Bhattacharya, 2023). This has generated a renewed interest in traditional, or indigenous, forms of conflict resolution deeply rooted into the people's traditions, values and social structures that may provide more effective and accepted tools for resolving conflicts. Of these, 'Panchayat' system has emerged as the prominent reference especially in South Asia and India, where it traditionally presents the centrality of community leadership in governance and mediating social conflict.

The Panchayat, a system of village-level authority and justice poised to elicit consensus, restitutive fairness and collective responsibility. It works through a council of locally-admired elders or leaders to settle disputes by encouraging dialogue and negotiation between opponents, with the goal of restoring social peace, not simply determining rights and liabilities (Chakraborty 2019). And in contrast to formal legal courts characteristically manifesting rigidity and constraints, Panchayat mediation attends to flexibility and the social setting of conflict, and is concerned with resolution through repairing relationships—an important element for community relationship restoration. Its dependence on community norms, social sanctions and communal values, makes it an approachable and reliable institution especially for marginalized individuals (Kapur et al., 2011) who would otherwise experience a disadvantage in formal legal processes (Sharma & Gupta, 2017).

The importance of reclamation of Panchayat mediation in industrial relations is manifold. First, it operationalizes dispute resolution to the socio-cultural lives in many postcolonial workplaces where workers and employers belong to common cultures and social networks that transcend

formal employer–employee contracts. This cultural compatibility supports the credibility and acceptance of this mediation among all parties, eliciting voluntary adherence to results and contributing to a more collaborative labour environment. Additionally, the Panchayat system presents a less time-consuming and a more affordable avenue of redressal when compared to formal legal processes known for delays and for creating financial hardships on both employers and employees (Reddy & Nair, 2020). With the greater focus on organizations to settle disputes promptly along with healthy employee relations, solidification of Panchayat mediation can offer a pragmatic solution to industrial unrest.

In addition, revival of Panchayat mediation is an important decolonizing project for the HRM field. The colonial state consistently suppressed traditional indigenous systems in preference of the borrowed legal models that were tailored to only benefit imperial economic and structural needs (Mukherjee, 2021). In the era following independence, these reforms were often accentuated by post-independence modernization efforts which tended to favour formal legal structures over traditional community-based norms. Reverting back to Panchayat mediation is therefore an epistemic strategy of rehabilitating indigenous knowledges and authority in the present-day management such that alternative knowledge systems could question the hegemony of Western-centric models and appreciate the legitimacy and effectiveness of local traditions (Sarkar, 2021). Not only does this further enrich the theoretical repertoire of HRM by extending its cultural faculty, it also has important practical consequences for enhancing industrial relations in post-colonial nations.

However, the use of Panchayat mediation in industrial dispute resolution is an under researched subject area in academia. While most researches have hitherto explored the role of Panchayats in rural community conflicts or socio-cultural disputes (Joshi, 2020), empirical studies on use of such dispute resolution forums within formal industrial environments are meager. As a result, little is known about the manner in which Panchayat institutions can be modified, formalized and overlaid on existing HRM frameworks to deal with distinct nature of industrial disputes. There are also lingering issues about how traditional mediation and modern labor laws would interact, the political dynamics in Panchayat councils, as well as what was required to ensure fairness and non-bias.

The aim of this paper is to fill that gap and critically explore the place of Panchayat mediation in post-colonial HRM practices, particularly with reference to industrial conflict. It does so through

empirically study a number of contemporary cases in which mediation by Panchayats has been used, and thus aims to throw light on actual effects, obstacles and cultural dispositions concerning it. In this, it adds to an emerging literature encouraging hybrid forms of conflict resolution that draw upon the best elements from traditional and modern practices.

The specific objectives of the research are threefold: firstly, to analyse the effectiveness of Panchayat mediation in settling industrial conflicts with reference to resolution speed, cost efficiency and stakeholder satisfaction; secondly, to investigate the influence of cultural and community values on receptivity and success of Panchayat mediation mechanisms within HRM contexts; thirdly, to develop a hybrid mediator model integrating Panchayat mediators into formal (HRM oriented) tension resolving processes with a view towards its implementation into management systems taking account managers' increasing need for adaptive regulatory power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion around post-colonial human resource management (HRM) has been rapidly evolving in recent times, stressing the need for reconnecting indigenous knowledge system with modern-day. This change is a response to an increasing awareness of the limitations of traditional HRM approaches, which were influenced by Western models of industrial relations during colonial times that struggle to account for the socio-cultural realities in post-colonial societies (Chowdhury, 2020). In the beginning, HRM initiatives led under colonial powers stressed on formal legal and institutional measures that could respond to organizational needs of empires, sometimes neglecting local traditions and governance structures which used to handle conflicts among its own communities. Anand and Verma (2018) posit that Western-derived models have led to a separation between the formal industrial relations institutions and workers lived experiences in post-colonial settings, with resolution processes being alienating, confrontational and ineffective.

Reacting to these criticisms, emerging scholarship has called for the decolonization of HRM by incorporating traditional governance institutions into modern settlement processes. Sarkar (2021) emphasizes the significance of reinvigorating indigenous practices like Panchayat recasting it into culturally sensitive and contextually relevant HRM models. The Panchayat, a product of community level governance, represents an endemic process of mediation located in local social structures. It is rested upon some esteemed local leaders or elders to act as impartial mediators and involved in guiding opponents to reach consensus through discussion, not by use of force or

law (Sharma & Gupta, 2017). This is far removed from the adversarial and rights-based paradigms that are characteristic of the formal labour courts and tribunals-the polarized approach to disputes, which favors punishment or compensation at the expense of reconciliation and social cohesion.

Philosophical basis of Panchayat reconciliation Panchayat mediation movement has its roots in restorative justice,2 which is based on community healing and rebuilding relationships. (The International Society of Public Law, 2019) Kaur (2019) demonstrates how Panchayats work on principles of mutual respect, shared duty and rehabilitating the offender back into social life, not punitive sanctions or retributive justice. This "emphasis on conciliation and consensus" is particularly important in workplace relations given that continued cooperation between workers and employers becomes necessary for factory productivity and employment stability. Although the effectiveness of Panchayat mediation in dealing with rural disputes, land conflicts and other community issues was proved successful, empirical studies on its practice within a formal industrial environment has largely been overlooked. "The majority of studies have tended to confine themselves within informal resolution of conflicts, with no attention paid until recently towards the discussion on how Panchayats can be institutionalized or repurposed for addressing workplace disputes that are subject to formal labor legislation and the norms presented under organizational policies (Joshi 2020)."

The literature on ADR in labor disputes sheds light on extra-adversarial aspects of dispute handling, but it primarily focuses on legally oriented models such as third-party arbitration and mediation (Basu & Singh, 2019). While these are characterized by impartiality, procedural fairness and the decision being made with teeth, there is a lack of cultural fit with indigenous tradition and community mores. Narayan (2022) is critical of this direction, noting that most ADR mechanisms in industrial relations have become decontextualized from the social settings where labor grievances are born -an element that runs the risk of diminishing their legitimacy and that curtails workers' and employers' compliance as agents culturally encapsulated by traditional social systems. Moreover, these ADR processes are often viewed as an adjunct to the formal legal system and therefore imitate reinforcing, power-based asymmetries and procedural labyrinths that they aim to avoid.

Also, an important gap that we find is the lack of systemic frameworks that encompass Panchayat as a part of HRM conflict resolution process. Mehta (2021) contends that while the

advantages of local mediation are recognized and include trust building, cost reduction, and speedy resolution there has been a lack of attempt to see how these mechanisms could be in sync with formal HRM practices as well as legal norms. This disconnect is especially strong in industrial work environments where conflicts are compounded by reporting relationships, regulations, and union-management dynamics. The paucity of empirical studies examining the lived experiences and practical challenges and possibilities of Panchayat mediation in workplace means that HR practitioners and policy-makers are provided with very little direction on how to best operationalize such hybrid systems.

From a theoretical point of view, it may also be interesting to reflect on the possible value of combining traditional aspects of mediation with contemporary HRM. The theories of conflict management that promote interest-based negotiation and integrative bargaining find resonance with the consensus building culture of Panchayat (Fisher & Ury, 2011). Likewise, social capital theory underscores the significance of community networks and trust as well as shared norms in promoting cooperative behavior that is crucial to the functioning of Panchayat (Putnam, 2000). These models propose that integrating local mediation practices with formal HRM mechanisms may contribute to a greater social legitimacy and durability of conflict resolution results by providing them with culturally recognizable foundations.

A focus on post-colonial governance and institutional hybridity is important to map the potential of Panchayat mediation in industrial disputes. It has been shown by scholars such as Cleaver (2012) and Hossain (2018) that, in post-colonial societies, hybrid institutions are produced, which amalgamate aspects from traditional and modern forms of organization to deal with governance issues. Such hybrid institutions might be able to provide an approach which is not rooted in traditional, local culture but that also does not follow a strictly formal system. In the industrial relations scenario, a hybrid model with Panchayat mediation could effectively combine procedural rigor and enforceability of formal institutions with the relational and capacity building dimensions of indigenous justice.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

To assess the significance of Panchayat intervention in the modern context of industrial dispute settlement.

To highlight the socio-cultural factors in Panchayat acceptance in workplace disputes.

To build a theoretical model which integrates Panchayat mediation in post-colonial HRM.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

How good is Panchayat mediation as a conflict resolution tool for industrial disputes in comparison to formal ones?

What cultural resources legitimize the role given to Panchayat mediation by the industrial actors?

How to incorporate the age-old Panchayat mediation in the modern HRM?

SIGNIFICANCE:

This study forms an important contribution to post-colonial HRM scholarship by effectively linking traditional indigenous conflict resolution traditions like Panchayat mediation with the practices of management today. It offers a culturally-responsive and context-sensitive model of dispute resolution from concrete, empirical understandings on how these traditional approaches operate within formal industrial contexts. This model not only contests the hegemony of Western viewpoints, but has the opportunity to revolutionise industrial dispute management policies that are more inclusive and effective and grounded in social elements. Finally, the findings of this study contribute to debates on decolonizing HRM and sustainable industrial relations in post-colonial settings.

METHODOLOGY

This is in essence a qualitative research project which takes the methodology of case study to analyses Panchayat mediation in the industrial disputes thoroughly. A case study design is especially appropriate for the present study in that it allows a holistic, nuanced analysis of complex social processes (Yin, 2018) such as conflict resolution dynamics located within distinct cultural and organizational environments. The study intends to decode the subtle social cultural dynamics, stakeholder perceptions and operational challenges that mound the countryside mechanism of traditional conflict resolution into an effective model in contemporary industrial relations by exploring the instances of actual ground level Panchayat mediation.

The fieldwork was carried out in the context of three industrial setups in India, which were chosen with a known record of Panchayat mediation being in practice as a way to resolve conflicts. These sites depict varying sectors and geographic areas so that we can gain a broader picture of how Panchayat mediation functions under different conditions. The use of multiple case sites also enhances the generalize-ability and complexity of the study's findings.

Semi-structured interviews were used to access the primary data that allowed us to collect flexible data about experiences, attitudes, and understandings from participants while keeping

our focus more or less on specific research themes. We had a total of 20 interviews with stakeholders that are directly involved in the negotiation process: eight HR managers who are responsible for industrial relations; seven shop stewards that represent the employees and five Panchayat mediators that mediated during the conflict resolution sessions. Such multi-angled approach was meant to reflect the intricate process of interaction among management, labour, and traditional mediation players.

In addition to the interviews, the study examined relevant company documents and records such as dispute case files, mediation agreements, and internal HR communications linked to a mediation process. This triangulation of sources served to verify interview findings, while also giving a more detailed set of organizational contexts within which Panchayat mediation is embedded. Secondary data sources were consulted including scholarly publications, government labor statistics and policy papers pertaining to industrial dispute resolution as well as traditional mediation practices in India. Such sources assisted placing the empirical findings in a socio-legal and theoretical perspective.

Interviews and documents were analyzed thematically to systematically analyze the qualitative data. Transcripts were initially transcribed verbatim and coded for themes and patterns consistent with the research questions, by using procedures suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process included a series of steps such as reading line by line, iterative coding and eliciting themes that emerged (like effectiveness) and those that may not were distilled, for example effectiveness of panchayat mediation, resonance with local stakeholders or challenges faced during implementation. Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate for this study as it allows an in-depth understanding of participants' personal experiences and the meanings they attach to their mediation journey.

Particularly strict ethical measures were applied during the study. Before the start of data collection, informed consent from all participants is taken using a standard form stating that they were able to read and understand the objective of the study, their voluntarism in participating in it, as well as the right to withdraw without any effect. To maintain confidentiality and privacy of participants, with the exception of type of study and participant gender (because these were not readily identifiable to readers anyway), all quotations used for this article in both their original transcript as well as any analyzed reports were assigned pseudonyms and identifying information was removed. The study followed ethical standards of the American Psychological Association

(2020 Guidelines), protecting the security of information, ensuring respectful treatment of subjects, and providing appropriate notice about their data. Sensitive language was used when covering potentially controversial or touchy industrial disputes, and included this in a balanced way rather than in a manner that favored to one side.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The outcomes derived from this research demonstrate a number of positive effects related with implementing Panchayat mediation to resolve industrial disputes, suggesting that it has the potential to serve as a key alternative mechanism to formal grievance procedures in post-colonial HRM institutional context.

First, one of the clearest gains appeared to be improved trust and collaboration between the disputing parties. Respondents reported that the presence of Panchayat mediators, many times respected community elders or local leaders, promoted a more cooperative and less adversarial environment when compared with the formalized (and often inflexible) grievance systems typically employed by HR divisions. As one site's HR manager said, "The members of the Panchayat bring something that formal does not otherwise provide and that is respect … they're not all suited, you know that. Employees and management feel like they're talking to people who get their community and concerns, and that allows them input into the conversation" (Interview with HR Manager, 2024). This trust-building also made possible a more-open conversation, one where problems are dealt with on their merits rather than involving people taking sides. Instead of leaning towards formal processes - known to worsen tensions through long bureaucratic waits and the legalistic framing of cases - Panchayat mediation seemed to open a problem-solving approach, allowing parties to mutual agreeable solutions and return to working relationships.

Second, Panchayat mediation was observed to be relatively efficient in terms of cost and time. Panchayat mediated conflicts were settled much faster compared to those mediated through formal HR arena and labor courts. Company records from 2023 state that the average duration of dispute resolution mechanisms mediated by Panchayats were around 15 days as opposed to the formal grievance mechanisms (45 days) (Company Records, 2023). This time-savings factor had the added benefit of both (i) minimizing operational interruptions and (ii) greatly reducing costs by not having to engage in costly drawn-out litigation or arbitration. In sectors where productivity and flow-rate are of the essence, quicker dispute resolution meant less downtime and less money lost. One HR manager stressed: "The quicker settlements mean we can get on

with work rather than acrimonious disputes, which is good for everyone" (Interview, 2024). The inexpensive nature of Panchayats and mediation in conjunction with the minimal use of paid members of a community, such as legal experts or arbitrators corresponded to a net reduction at the organizational level.

Finally, cultural congruence as a precondition was highlighted in Panchayat mediation success. 8 throughout that Panchayat practices are deeply rooted in local cultural practices around respect, consensus-making, and restorative justice. Labour union leaders in particular observed that workers were more amenable to and bound by the decisions arrived at through Panchayat mediation because this procedure had traditional resonances with their social culture. Panchayats also have another benefit, one union leader said: they are "in the community context. They don't have these credentials…or decisions are not seen as credible because they are the marketplace of our values and our norms for our people" (Labor Union Leader Interview, 2024). This cultural resonance stood in stark contrast to formal HR mechanisms of grievance, which were often viewed as impersonal and bureaucratic and detached from workers lived and social identities. The findings from this study indicate as to how culturally embedded mediation systems such as Panchayats can contribute towards building the procedure according to which justice is dispensed with, would be seen by disputants as meaningful and acceptable.

In spite of these apparent benefits, there were multiple challenges noticed in introducing Panchayat mediation in industrial context however. One important issue that surfaced was the existence of power asymmetries within Panchayats. In general, Panchayats are held in high regard and their membership often correlates to that of prevailing social hierarchies (by cast, gender or wealth), which could bias the outcome of mediations. Some labour representatives raised questions of potential bias and impartiality to the mediation process. According to a Panchayat mediator, sometimes the dominant community members influence decision making which may result in weaker parties being neglected. (Panchayat Mediator Interview, 2024). This serves to sharply raise the problem of using conventional organizations without sufficient antidotes for fair and open processes.

Besides, non-formal acknowledgement and enforceability of the Panchayat-abiding resolutions posed an added element in practice. Though many firms and employees did respect settlements made via Panchayats on an ad-hoc basis, the lack of legal or official governmental backing means that such settlements might not be easily enforced if challenged. This constrains the wider

scalability and institutionalisation of Panchayat mediation into industrial relations regulated under labor laws and regulatory mechanisms. The tension between traditional law, ADR and formal legal systems continues to present multiple challenges that suggest hybrid models may provide a better approach for best practices across jurisdictions.

Below is a comparison table of dispute resolution between Panchayat mediation and HR grievance process for 2023:

Metric	Panchayat Mediation	Formal HR Process
Average Resolution Time	15 days	45 days
Resolution Cost	Low	High
Stakeholder Satisfaction	85%	60%

This information provides a clear indication of the effectiveness and acceptability of Panchayat mediation. A satisfaction rate of 85% for study participants indicates high levels of acceptance and perceived fairness compared with 60% reported satisfaction with formal HR grievance procedures. The "few" extra points continue to demonstrate the high possibility that cultural specific mediation may facilitate better workplace relations and conflict handling.

DISCUSSION

This study's evidence is very supportive of the contention that Panchayat mediation can be a culturally consistent and efficient replacement for traditional industrial dispute mechanisms. This echoes the academic work of Kaur (2019), which highlights the restorative and consensus-building qualities of indigenous practices, with an emphasis on how they maintain a sense of social harmony and collective health. Basu and Singh (2019) contend that conventional dispute resolution systems – based on cultural/community-based values- offer more sustainable means of conflict management by addressing the root cause relational and social dynamics often

overlooked in formalistic legal systems. The current analysis takes this knowledge further by showing how Panchayat mediation can be translated to industrial relations not only for its timeliness and cost effective resolution but also because it enables trust and cooperation among parties; imperative for creating healthy industrial relations.

On a practical level the institutionalization of Panchayat mediation in post-colonial HRM is a significant development towards more accessible, permeable and culture-based dispute resolution processes. Industrial conflicts often snowball, as a result of distrust, a sense of injustice and the adversarial nature of formal grievance procedures, which can be costly (in terms of money, time and law) (Reddy & Nair, 2020). Panchayat mediation helps to address these issues by establishing community-based forums which respect local socio-cultural norms through which a dialogue and agreement can be reached, even in circumstances where formal systems are unable to bring about the same. This highlights the bigger necessity in post-colonial HRM to go beyond Western-oriented frameworks and instead adopt pluralistic perspectives which are sensitive to the cultural particularity of the employees and local community (Mukherjee, 2021).

In addition, the results hint at a possible change in orientating principles of post-colonial HRM which emphasizes cultural specificity rather than procedural justice. The prescriptive methodology of the traditional Panchayat concentrates on retributive justice and is distinguished from that which underpins a number of formal dispute resolution processes in promoting conciliation rather than litigation, relationships as opposed to dread. This contextually sensitive parameter can go very far in achieving organizational tranquility, employee motivation and sustainability. It does so by contesting the prevailing HRM narratives of a formal first approach to conflict and offers relevant calls for stakeholders in culturally mixed and historically rich societies to reconceptualize the architecture involved in addressing workplace conflict management.

But the study also reveals significant limitations and obstacles that require to be taken into account. Indeed, the risk of power asymmetries and biases in Panchayat approaches are a major cause for concern. The composition of Panchayats tends to mirror existing social stratification based on caste, gender and economic status that can, in turn, impact the process of mediation (Joshi 2020). Certain participants raised concerns over the openness and objectivity of Panchayat mediation, suggesting that stronger members from their community could prevail in cases or would sideline weaker parties. Such criticisms reflect the wider critiques of traditional systems of

community-based dispute resolution that resonate culturally but may not contain checks and balances sufficient to secure equity and procedural justice.

Secondly, the non-formal character of Panchayat mediation brought into question its credibility and enforceability in industry relations regulated by formal law and government policy. Although originating from voluntary compliance and agreement by companies and labour with Panchayats, the lack of legality may affect its effective enforceability especially in longer term collective agreements to more complicated disputes (Narayan 2022). This legal grey zone calls for creative hybrid institutional arrangements that are able to draw on traditional Panchayat practices alongside formal civil justice and thereby secure the benefits of both cultural validity and constitutional legitimacy.

Further research should focus on methods of institutionalizing Panchayats as part of the resolution process in industrial disputes without diluting their cultural authenticity and community orientation. Such studies could study models of oversight, capacity-building and legal recognition which maintain the neutrality and fairness of mediation while retaining the accessibility and confidence in PM that makes it effective. For example, hybrid processes could include Panchayat mediators in-process with HR professionals and lawyers through an endorsed mediation process. This may be instrumental in addressing problems associated with power asymmetry and due process, thus promoting legitimacy and scalability of industrial Panchayat mediation.

This research has important policy implications. The implications of the study to HR managers IROs, policymakers are that Panchayat mediation as an alternative mechanism for dispute settlement must be well integrated into existing formal system. This would require drafting culturally sound mediation protocols, training Panchayat mediators on impartiality and dispute resolution tools, and setting up both oversight mechanisms to ensure openness and fair play. This fusion has the potential of decolonizing HRM practices in a way that would ensure they are more sensitive to local socio-cultural conditions while meeting modern organizational and legal expectations.

CONCLUSION

This research is a significant addition to the new field of post-colonial HRM as it empirically explores the involvement and applicability of conventional Panchayat mediation in the handling of industrial disputes. Based on the qualitative analysis of empirical cases, the research argues

that Panchayat mediation provides a culturally embedded, legally expedited and trust-generating alternative to the legalistic options in form of Legacy courts which are rooted in colonial structures of governance. Evidence demonstrates that native means of conflict resolution support more cooperative communication, decrease cost of litigation and resolve disputes in a timely manner…all by aligning with the social and cultural norms shared among its workforce. This further supports the emerging post-colonial HRM studies that effective conflict management must be based in local traditions and community norms in order to maintain legitimacy and sustainability.

In advancing the case for Panchayat mediation to be incorporated into formal HRM systems, the study contributes to what have been long-standing theoretical and practical lacunae in industrial relations in general; namely a lack of culturally sensitive dispute resolution mechanisms. The conclusion is drawn that combining the procedural efficiency of contemporary HRM techniques with traditional cultural familiarity, hybrid as it may be, might provide a more eclectic and inclusive system for managing industrial conflict in colonially dispossessed locales. Such a model not only dismantles the colonial paradigm that we inherited, but is also consistent with current calls for socially responsible and inclusive HRM.

Further research that examines and articulates institutional strategies for the employment of Panchayat mediation in industrial relations systems is recommended. Developing monitoring systems, standardizing mediation processes and training mediators so that they are equitable can help avoid bias. Consistent with Wang and Lee (2021), additional research might also consider how the transparency, accountability and scalability of traditional mediation systems needs to be improved. Exploration of the flexibility of Panchayat mediation in multiple industrial and geographic settings will be necessary to evaluate its wider relevance and contribution within an emerging global HRM order.

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