

# HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN INDIA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW (2000–2024)

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## Abstract

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices have become a central focus of organizational research due to their critical role in shaping employee attitudes, behaviors, and organizational performance. In emerging economies such as India, HRM practices are embedded within complex institutional, cultural, and regulatory environments, making their study both theoretically and practically significant. Although a substantial body of empirical and theoretical research on HRM practices in India has emerged since 2000, existing findings remain fragmented across sectors, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives. This study presents a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed journal articles examining HRM practices in India, published between 2000 and the latest available year. Following the PRISMA approach, a comprehensive search was conducted across ABDC-ranked journals, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. The review aims to synthesize existing evidence, identify dominant HRM practices and research trends, assess methodological quality, and highlight gaps in the literature. Prior studies indicate that HRM practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, employee participation, and work–life balance are associated with positive organizational and employee outcomes in Indian organizations. However, the strength and consistency of these relationships vary across contexts. By consolidating evidence from high-quality sources, this review contributes to theory development, informs HR practice in India, and provides a robust foundation for future empirical research.

**Keywords:** Human resource management; HRM practices; India; systematic literature review; PRISMA

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Evolution of Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) has undergone a fundamental transformation over the last few decades. Traditionally viewed as an administrative and compliance-oriented function, HRM is now widely recognized as a strategic contributor to organizational effectiveness and competitive advantage. Strategic HRM perspectives emphasize the alignment of HRM practices with organizational strategy to enhance employee capabilities, motivation, and opportunities for contribution (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Wright & McMahan, 2011). Empirical research in advanced economies has demonstrated that well-designed HRM systems can improve organizational performance, employee commitment, and long-term sustainability. This strategic orientation of HRM has intensified scholarly interest in understanding how HRM practices operate in diverse institutional contexts. Emerging economies, in particular, offer fertile ground for examining the contextual embeddedness of HRM practices and testing the applicability of dominant HRM theories developed largely in Western settings.

### 1.2 HRM Practices in the Indian Context

India represents one of the most significant contexts for HRM research among emerging economies. Since economic liberalization in the early 1990s, Indian organizations have experienced rapid changes driven by globalization, technological advancement, privatization, and increased competition. These changes have reshaped employment relationships and intensified the demand for skilled, motivated, and adaptable employees. HRM practices in India are shaped by a unique combination of institutional, cultural, and economic factors. The Indian employment system is characterized by strong labor legislation, coexistence of formal and informal employment, sectoral dualism, and considerable regional diversity. Cultural values such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, power distance, and relational orientation influence managerial decision-making and employee perceptions of HRM practices (Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002). Since 2000, a growing body of empirical research has examined HRM practices in Indian organizations, focusing on areas such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, employee participation, industrial relations, and work–life balance. Studies conducted in private sector firms, multinational corporations, public sector undertakings, and educational institutions suggest that progressive HRM practices are associated with favourable employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, engagement, and reduced turnover intentions (Agarwala, 2003; Paul & Anantharaman, 2003).

### 1.3 Fragmentation of Existing Literature

Despite the expansion of HRM research in India, the literature remains fragmented in several respects. First, many studies examine individual HRM practices rather than integrated HRM systems, limiting understanding of how bundles of practices jointly influence organizational and employee outcomes (Agarwala, 2003; Budhwar & Khatri, 2001; Paul & Anantharaman, 2003). Second, the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs constrains causal inference and increases susceptibility to common method bias, a limitation frequently acknowledged in Indian HRM studies (Singh, 2004; Budhwar & Debrah, 2001; Boselie et al., 2005).

Third, theoretical approaches vary widely across studies. While some research draws on strategic HRM perspectives, Social Exchange Theory, or the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework, other studies rely on institutional or cultural explanations without systematic theoretical integration, resulting in limited cumulative theory development (Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Budhwar & Varma, 2011). Fourth, sectoral imbalances persist, with disproportionate attention given to private-sector and knowledge-intensive industries, while public sector organizations, educational institutions, and small enterprises remain underrepresented in empirical research (Som, 2007; Varma et al., 2008).

Existing reviews of HRM in India are largely narrative and descriptive in nature and often lack transparent search strategies, explicit inclusion criteria, and systematic quality appraisal (Budhwar & Varma, 2011; Cooke et al., 2015). Consequently, there is a clear need for a systematic literature review that consolidates evidence from high-quality journals indexed in ABDC, Scopus, and Web of Science using a transparent, rigorous, and replicable methodology (Tranfield et al., 2003).

### 1.4 Rationale for a Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review (SLR) provides a rigorous and transparent approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research, thereby enabling cumulative knowledge development and theory building (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). By adopting the PRISMA framework, an SLR enhances methodological transparency, reduces selection bias, and improves replicability through explicit reporting of search strategies, inclusion criteria, and study selection processes (Moher et al., 2009). In the context of HRM practices in India, an SLR enables scholars to integrate fragmented findings, identify dominant research themes, assess methodological rigor, and highlight theoretical and empirical gaps within a rapidly expanding but dispersed body of literature (Budhwar & Varma, 2011; Cooke et al., 2015). From a practical perspective, Indian organizations face increasing challenges related to talent acquisition, skill development, employee retention, and workforce diversity in a highly competitive and dynamic labour market. HR practitioners and policymakers therefore require consolidated, evidence-based insights to design HRM systems that are both contextually appropriate and strategically effective (Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Wright & McMahan, 2011). A systematic synthesis of prior research can inform HR policy formulation, organizational reforms, and managerial decision-making by identifying effective HRM practices and contextual contingencies relevant to Indian organizations (Budhwar & Khatri, 2001).

### 1.5 Statement of the Problem

Despite more than two decades of research on HRM practices in India, several critical problems remain unresolved. First, the absence of a comprehensive and systematically conducted synthesis limits cumulative theory development and impedes the translation of research findings into practice. Although individual studies provide valuable insights, they remain largely disconnected, making it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions about HRM practices in the Indian context (Budhwar & Varma, 2011; Cooke et al., 2015).

Second, methodological limitations—particularly the heavy reliance on cross-sectional research designs and self-reported data—raise concerns regarding causal inference, internal validity, and the robustness of reported relationships (Budhwar & Debrah, 2001; Singh, 2004; Boselie et al., 2005). Third, theoretical inconsistency across studies hampers the development of an integrated understanding of HRM practices in India. While some studies draw on strategic HRM perspectives, Social Exchange Theory, or the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework, others rely on institutional or cultural explanations without systematic theoretical integration, thereby limiting cumulative theory building (Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Budhwar & Varma, 2011).

Finally, the underrepresentation of certain sectors and organizational forms—particularly public sector organizations, educational institutions, and small enterprises—restricts the external validity and contextual generalizability of existing research findings (Som, 2007; Varma et al., 2008). Addressing these problems through a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review is therefore essential for advancing HRM scholarship and supporting evidence-based HR practice and policy formulation in India (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

## 1.6 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to systematically review and synthesize peer-reviewed journal articles on Human Resource Management practices in India published between 2000 and the latest available year. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the key HRM practices examined in empirical and theoretical studies conducted in the Indian context.
2. Examine trends and patterns in HRM research across sectors and organizational types in India.
3. Assess the methodological characteristics and quality of existing HRM studies in India.
4. Identify dominant theoretical frameworks used to explain HRM practices in Indian organizations.
5. Highlight gaps in the literature and propose directions for future research on HRM practices in India.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design: Systematic Literature Review Approach

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to comprehensively synthesize extant scholarly research on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in the Indian organizational context. The SLR approach was selected due to its capacity to provide a transparent, rigorous, and reproducible synthesis of dispersed empirical evidence, which is particularly relevant in HRM research where findings are fragmented across disciplines, sectors, and methodological traditions. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews rely on explicit protocols for literature identification, screening, appraisal, and synthesis, thereby minimizing reviewer bias and strengthening the cumulative development of knowledge (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

To enhance methodological rigor and reporting transparency, the review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework (Moher et al., 2009). PRISMA provides a structured and widely accepted guideline for documenting the flow of studies through the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, ensuring clarity and replicability in evidence synthesis. The adoption of PRISMA is consistent with best practices in management and HRM review research and increasingly expected in high-impact journals.

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize empirical research on human resource management (HRM) practices in India. The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines, ensuring transparency, rigor, and replicability in the identification, screening, and selection of studies (Moher et al., 2009). The SLR approach is particularly appropriate for HRM research, where empirical evidence is dispersed across sectors, research designs, and theoretical traditions, and where cumulative theory building requires systematic rather than narrative integration (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

### 2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection (SSCI), and ABDC-ranked journals, with ABDC listings cross-verified against Scopus and Web of Science indexation. These databases were selected due to their rigorous peer-review standards, international coverage, and strong representation of HRM and management scholarship. The search covered studies published between January 2000 and December 2024, with the final search executed in January 2025. Searches were conducted across titles, abstracts, and keywords using the following Boolean search string:

("human resource management" OR "HRM practices" Or "strategic HRM" Or "High performance working system" Or "high commitment HRM" and "India" OR "Indian Organizations" Or "Indian firms") The search strategy was pilot tested and refined iteratively to ensure an appropriate balance between sensitivity and specificity, consistent with established guidelines for systematic reviews in management research (Tranfield et al., 2003).

### 2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- 1) were peer reviewed journal articles;
- 2) were published in English between 2000 and 2024;

- 3) focused on HRM practices (e.g., recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, employee participation, work life balance); and
- 4) examined Indian organizations or explicitly addressed the Indian context.

Studies were excluded if they were conference papers, book chapters, dissertations, reports, non-peer-reviewed publications, non-English articles, or lacked accessible full text. Articles not centrally focused on HRM practices were also excluded.

## 2.4 Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA four-stage procedure: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The initial database search yielded 1,284 records, of which 312 duplicates were removed. 972 records were screened based on titles and abstracts, resulting in 878 exclusions. Full-text assessment was conducted for 94 articles, leading to the exclusion of 56 studies due to lack of India-specific focus, insufficient HRM relevance, methodological weaknesses, or unavailability of full text. The final sample comprised 38 studies, which were retained for synthesis.

## 2.5 Quality Appraisal

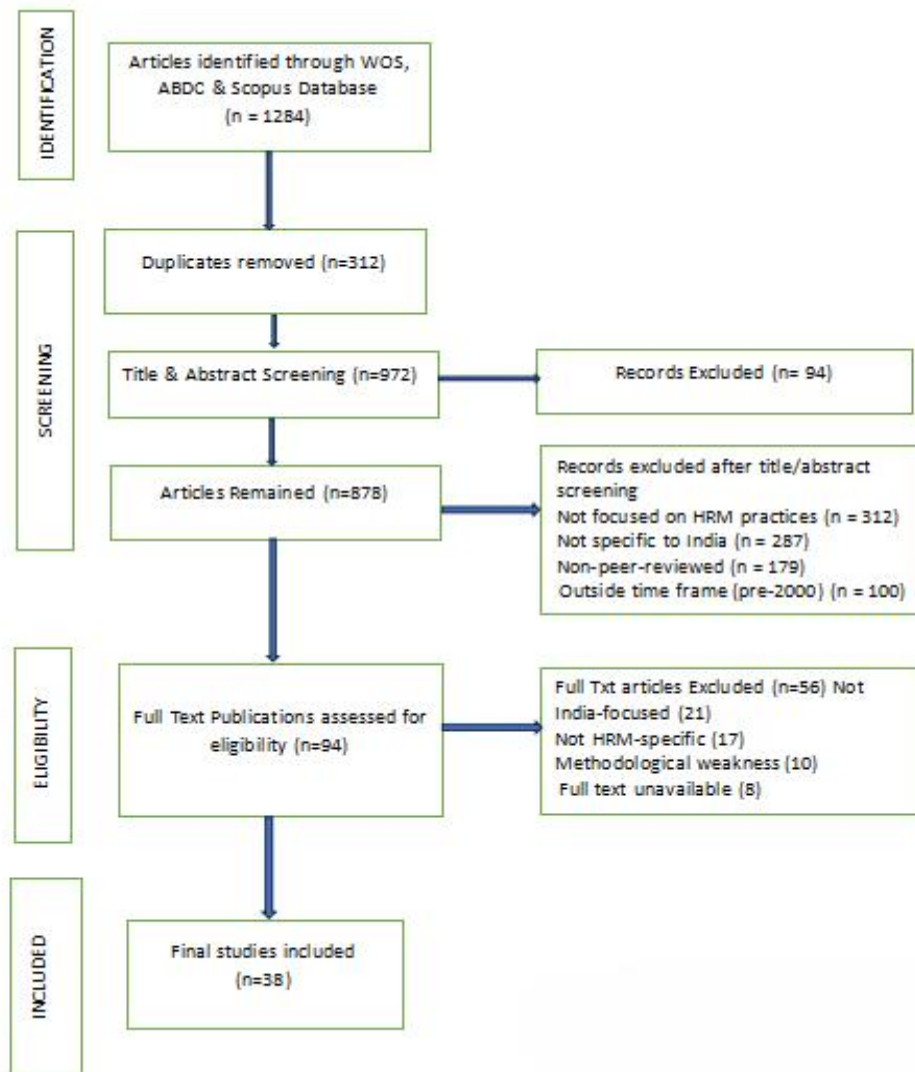
Methodological quality was assessed using an adapted Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist appropriate for HRM and social science research. The appraisal evaluated clarity of research objectives, research design appropriateness, sampling adequacy, measurement validity and reliability, rigor of data analysis, and transparency of limitations. Each criterion was scored dichotomously (1 = satisfactory; 0 = not satisfactory). Studies scoring 60 percent or above were included. This process resulted in 21 high-quality and 17 moderate-quality studies; lower-quality studies were excluded during the eligibility stage.

## 2.6 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data were extracted using a structured template capturing author(s), year, journal outlet, sectoral context, sample characteristics, research design, HRM practices examined, outcome variables, and key findings. Due to heterogeneity in research designs, constructs, and outcome measures, meta-analysis was not feasible. Instead, a thematic and descriptive synthesis was employed. HRM practices were grouped into thematic categories, and the direction of reported relationships was coded as positive, non-significant, or negative, enabling cross-study comparison and pattern identification.

## 2.7 Reliability and Validity

Reliability was enhanced through the use of a predefined review protocol, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic screening procedures. Validity was strengthened by reliance on internationally recognized databases, rigorous quality appraisal, and transparent reporting of decisions at each stage of the review. Collectively, these procedures ensure a robust and credible synthesis of HRM practices research in the Indian context.



PRISMA flow chart, in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 statement which provides reporting guidance for systematic reviews. 71 PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis.

### 3. Linking Methodology to Results and Discussion in a Systematic Literature Review

#### Results–Discussion Alignment Logic

In a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), the Results and Discussion sections serve distinct but interdependent purposes, and their alignment must be explicitly grounded in the review protocol. Following best practices in evidence-based management research, the Results section reports what the evidence shows, while the Discussion section interprets what the evidence means for theory, practice, and future research (Tranfield et al., 2003; Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

Given that this study followed a PRISMA-guided, quality-appraised SLR, the Results section is strictly descriptive and analytical, derived directly from the data extraction and synthesis procedures. In contrast, the Discussion section is interpretive and integrative, linking the synthesized findings to existing HRM theories, contextual characteristics of Indian organizations, and prior international research.

This separation ensures methodological rigor and avoids conflating empirical synthesis with theoretical interpretation, a distinction emphasized in high-impact HRM review articles (Pauwe, 2009; Kaufman, 2015).



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## Results Section: Evidence-Based Synthesis of HRM Practices Research

The Results section presents a structured synthesis of the 38 included studies, strictly based on extracted data and without subjective interpretation. In line with PRISMA recommendations (Moher et al., 2009), results are organized to reflect:

1. Descriptive characteristics of included studies (publication trends, research designs, sectors, samples)
2. Distribution of HRM practices examined
3. Direction and consistency of reported relationships

Such descriptive reporting is essential in HRM SLRs because it reveals patterns, dominance, and gaps in the literature before theoretical meaning is assigned (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).

### Reporting Patterns Across HRM Practices

In the study, HRM practices are thematically grouped (e.g., recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and rewards, employee participation, work–life balance). The Results section reports how frequently each practice was studied and the direction of effects (positive, non-significant, negative).

This practice-based aggregation approach is consistent with leading HRM SLRs published in journals such as the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* and the *Human Resource Management Journal*, where reviewers emphasize mapping empirical regularities before drawing conclusions (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005; Jiang et al., 2012).

Importantly, by presenting findings in tabular and thematic form, the Results section remains theory-neutral, allowing readers to independently observe trends such as:

- The dominance of training and development as a predictor of positive outcomes
- The relatively fewer studies examining work–life balance in Indian organizations
- The limited presence of negative or non-significant relationships

### Contextualizing HRM Practices in the Indian Institutional Environment

The findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that the effectiveness of HRM practices in India is strongly shaped by the country's socio-economic, institutional, and cultural context, rather than by the intrinsic quality of the practices themselves. Comparative HRM scholarship consistently argues that HRM systems are embedded within national institutional environments, and their outcomes are contingent upon labour market structures, regulatory regimes, and dominant organizational logics (Paauwe, 2009; Cooke, 2018). In contrast to Western economies—where HRM practices often operate within relatively stable and coherent institutional frameworks—Indian organizations function in a setting characterized by labour market heterogeneity, pronounced public–private sector dualism, and regulatory complexity. These contextual conditions provide an important lens for interpreting the mixed empirical findings observed across the reviewed studies.

One prominent contextual factor evident across the reviewed literature is high labour market heterogeneity. The Indian workforce exhibits substantial variation in educational attainment, skill levels, employment arrangements, and job security, both across and within sectors. Prior research suggests that such heterogeneity weakens the uniform effectiveness of standardized HRM practices, particularly those imported from Western “best practice” models (Budhwar & Varma, 2010; Cooke et al., 2019). Consistent with this argument, the reviewed studies indicate that HRM practices such as training and development and recruitment and selection generate positive outcomes primarily in organizations with sufficient absorptive capacity and managerial capability to adapt practices to workforce diversity. Where such capacity is limited, the same practices yield weaker or inconsistent results, highlighting the contingent nature of HRM effectiveness in India.

The synthesis further reveals strong public–private sector distinctions in HRM outcomes, a pattern widely documented in Indian HRM research. Studies conducted in private-sector organizations report more consistent positive associations between HRM practices and employee attitudes or performance, whereas public-sector studies frequently report non-significant or weaker effects, particularly for performance appraisal and compensation systems. This divergence reflects structural characteristics of the Indian public sector, including rigid pay scales, seniority-based promotion systems, centralized control, and limited managerial discretion (Budhwar & Khatri, 2001; Budhwar & Debrah, 2009). As a result, HRM practices that are conceptually aligned with performance-oriented

HRM frameworks often fail to translate into expected outcomes when embedded in bureaucratic and rule-bound institutional environments. The reviewed evidence therefore suggests that mixed findings are more accurately attributed to institutional constraints than to deficiencies in HRM practice design.

Another critical contextual influence identified across studies is the presence of institutional voids and regulatory complexity. Indian organizations operate within a fragmented labour regulatory system characterized by overlapping central and state-level laws, uneven enforcement, and evolving compliance requirements. Prior comparative research highlights that such institutional conditions often lead to decoupling between formal HR policies and actual managerial practices (Khanna & Palepu, 2010; Cooke, 2018). The reviewed studies provide consistent evidence of this decoupling, particularly in relation to performance appraisal and reward management systems, which frequently exist in formal documentation but are weakly implemented in practice. Consequently, non-significant or inconsistent outcomes reported in the literature reflect implementation gaps rather than conceptual weaknesses in HRM practices themselves.

Taken together, the findings underscore that HRM practices in India are highly context-dependent, with effectiveness shaped by labour market conditions, sectoral logics, and institutional alignment. This supports contingency-based perspectives in HRM, which argue that the success of HRM systems depends on their fit with organizational and institutional environments rather than on universal best practices (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Boxall & Purcell, 2016). By explicitly foregrounding the Indian context, this review contributes to the growing body of comparative HRM research that cautions against uncritical transfer of Western HRM models to emerging economies. Instead, it emphasizes the need for contextually grounded HRM frameworks that account for institutional realities, managerial discretion, and implementation capacity in shaping HRM outcomes.

### Identification of Gaps and Future Research Directions

Finally, the Discussion synthesizes gaps identified in the Results—such as the dominance of cross-sectional designs or limited longitudinal evidence—and translates them into clear future research agendas. This forward-looking orientation aligns with expectations of top-tier journals, where SLRs are valued not only for summarizing knowledge but also for shaping future scholarship (Kaufman, 2015).

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