

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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CSR – SERVICE TO THE STAKEHOLDERS: INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Economic globalization, besides offering opportunities for economic growth, has also given rise to a number of interrelated concerns in the social and environmental realms. The corporate world has been under immense pressure from various stakeholders to behave in a socially responsible manner through corporate self-regulation and voluntary initiative referred to as Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (hereafter referred to as CSR). Authors argue that the idea of corporate involvement in social welfare and responsible behaviour in business is as old as business itself in India. This paper attempts to show that business charity or corporate philanthropy – regarded as the earliest manifestation of CSR – is no longer considered an adequate response to the demands for social responsibility, given its limited rationale and scope. It further attempts to differentiate between charity, philanthropy, CSR and corporate citizenship and captures the shifts from corporate charity and philanthropy to corporate citizenship in India, with CSR in between. It identifies the common thread running through the constructs such as charity, philanthropy, CSR and corporate citizenship is service motive; the very idea which was envisioned by Sri Ramakrishna and explained by Swami Vivekananda. In the words of Swami Vivekananda “It is our privilege to be allowed to be charitable, for only so can we grow. The poor man suffers that we may be helped; let the giver kneel down and give thanks, let the receiver stand up and permit”. In line with the CSR practices, the paper finally delineates various corporate initiatives in India prompted by service to the employees, customers, suppliers, owners, environment, government and the community in general.

KEYWORDS

CSR, corporate citizenship, philanthropy, service.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social and environmental responsibility (hereafter referred to as CSR) is predominantly considered a western phenomenon due to its strong institutions, standards and appeal system which are found to be relatively weak in developing countries in Asia (Chapple & Moon, 2005). Aaronson (2002) argues that the concept, though evolved and developed in US, matured in Europe. As per a survey by KPMG (2005) Asian firms have been found to lag behind their western counterparts on CSR practices. By drawing practical instances from the corporate world, this paper is a humble effort to portray that the lifeblood of CSR is service first and service last.

UNDERSTANDING CSR

Authors argue that the idea of corporate involvement in social welfare, as voluntary response to social issues and problems (Vardarajan & Menon, 1988) and responsible behaviour in business, is as old as business itself (Sood & Arora, 2006). The term CSR includes environmental, social and human rights based impacts and initiatives of companies (Ward & Fox, 2002) and in many countries both concept and practice taken very seriously (Hopkins, 2003). A firm's survival and success depends on the ability of its managers to create sufficient wealth and satisfaction for its primary stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). Primary stakeholders include employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers, communities and natural environment. When stakeholders lose confidence in a firm's performance, the firm loses its critical support structure and customer base (Lee, 2008). Customers stop buying products or go for legal suits, shareholders sell their stocks, employees do not perform and environmental advocates sue (Wood, 1991). On the other hand, firms that are able to establish relationship with primary stakeholders beyond market transactions gain competitive advantage (Barney & Hansen, 1994; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Effective management of key shareholders acts as a value driver by leveraging performance and reducing stakeholder-inflicted costs. Lower employee turnover reduces hiring and training costs; legal suppliers reduce quality certification costs; supportive communities reduce legal and public relations overhead and stable shareholders reduce stock market volatility (McVea & Freeman, 2005). In order to achieve sustainability and prosperity, firms must identify key stakeholders affecting its business, identify their needs and design organizational policies and practices to cater to them. As per definition by Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) social responsibility is a series of actions taken by business enterprises and the professional managers for the employees, customers, suppliers, owners, government and the community in general to meet the needs and interests of these publics because business is a creation of society and must therefore, serve that society if it is to remain viable. Such actions are either to be made voluntary for goodwill, business necessity and cultural requirements or compulsorily to satisfy legislation and social pressures (APO, 1983).

CSR IN INDIA

The social background of India's business class is not homogeneous but made up of several traditional business communities (Tripathi, 2004). In keeping with the caste system prevalent in India, production was carried out by the artisan caste while production and distribution was largely financed by merchants (Rothermund, 2000). The Parsis, the Marwaris, the Gujratis and the Chettiars, had established examples not only in business but also in philanthropy (Sundar, 2000). Srivastava and Venkateswaran (2000) gave four reasons for adoption of CSR policies and practices by Indian companies. Contributing to society without expecting anything in return, or philanthropy, is the first reason; internal reasons, such as desire to improve relations with local communities, employees, customers and shareholders, is the second reason; better relations with the local communities, whether for publicity or for benefits, is the third; and finally, enlightened self interest. Sundar (2000) differentiates between charity, philanthropy, CSR and corporate citizenship and captures the shifts from merchant charity to corporate citizenship in India, with CSR in between. She highlights three distinctive features of Indian philanthropy. First, it is largely a story of Indian businessmen (not women). Second, it is a story of indigenous rather than expatriate business. Third, as in most of Asia, philanthropy is largely story of family business. She has clearly delineated four phases of Indian philanthropy which is relevant for our consideration.

DURING EARLY INDUSTRIALISATION (1850 – 1914)

This phase witnessed a shift from charity for purely religious reasons toward a more western form of philanthropy supposedly which is more secular in nature, extending benefits regardless of caste, creed and community and is aimed at bringing progress to society through modern institutions (Sundar, 2000). Rich business families set up trusts and institutions such as schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, widow homes, art galleries and museums. Such a movement was spearheaded by Jamsetji Jejeebhoy (1783 – 1859), Jamsetji Tata (1839 – 1904), Dinshaw M. Petit (1823 – 1901) and Premchand Roychand (1831 – 1906) of Gujrati and Parsi communities of the then Bombay. Lala (2004) states that Jamsetji Tata established J.N. Tata Endowment Fund (in 1892) to offer scholarships to students and pioneered labour welfare (installation of a humidifier and water sprinklers in his Nagpur Textile Mill in the 1870s; institution of pension funds; initiation of compensation for accidents etc). The substantial amount of Rs. 110 million left by Sir Dorab Tata was used to establish the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, which eventually promoted Tata Memorial Centre for Cancer Research and Treatment, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (Lala, 2004).

GOLDEN AGE OF INDIAN PHILANTHROPY (1914 – 1960)

Industrialists like G.D. Birla (1894 – 1983), Jamanlal Bajaj (1884 – 1942), Lala Shri Ram (1884 – 1963) and Ambalal Sarabhai (1890 – 1967), all believed to have been influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his theory of the “trusteeship” of wealth (Narayan, 1966), contributed greatly to Gandhi’s reform programs, such as those targeting the situation of the untouchables, women’s empowerment and rural development (Sood & Arora, 2006). In 1944 a group of industrialists, including J.R.D. Tata (1904 – 1993) and G.D. Birla, developed a survey called the Bombay Plan identifying India’s post war economic requirements and a detailed plan to achieve them (Tomlinson, 1979; Das, 2002). After independence, initiatives such as establishing institutes of scientific and technical research, study of Indian history and culture and scholarship funds to needy students etc., undertaken by the private business houses have been credited more to enlightened self interest rather to philanthropic activities.

REFINED PHILANTHROPY UNDER SOCIALIST POLITICAL PATTERN (1960 – 1980)

This period was fraught with social, economic and political troubles. The national strategy of import substitution, industrialization, foreign exchange control, reservation for and protection of small scale industries, industrial licence and raw materials etc. led to decline in interest in corporate philanthropy. At the same time there was surge in corporate malpractices and manoeuvring for survival and growth (Sood & Arora, 2006). Situation worsened by bureaucracy and corruption at both national and state levels. Unethical practices by some businesses and their narrow focus on profits contributed to a feeling of mistrust in the Indian business society (Sundar, 2000). A variety of changes such as growing dislike of the private sector, increasing efforts on the part of the Government to curb concentration of wealth in the hands of few industrialists, unwillingness on the part of the business to abide by principles and initiation of several enquiry committees by the Government provided impetus to renewed interest in social concerns in the new form of corporate philanthropy, as opposed to family business philanthropy. A seminar organized by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1965 ended with the adoption of a declaration that the social responsibility of an enterprise is responsibility to itself, its customers, workers, shareholders and the community (Narayan, 1966). The concept therefore matured from narrower notion of charitable giving for community affairs (Upadhyay, 1976) to the idea that business must be profitable, just, humane, efficient and dynamic (Narayan, 1976). The shift was considered essential for protecting business autonomy and interests as well as restoring its own power and prestige in order to better resist government control. Concerns over ethical practices and environmental issues started gaining importance. Business becomes concerned with wider aspects such as forest protection, scientific and technical education, preservation of monuments, women’s rights and consumer education (Sundar, 2000).

SOCIETY, RESPONSIBILITY AND NEW ACTORS (1980 ONWARDS)

Socially, underdeveloped persisted in the 1980s and much of 1990s. large population living below poverty line, high rate of adult illiteracy, villages with no potable drinking water, shrinking forest cover, child labour, widespread human rights abuse, infant mortality, children drop out from schools and discrimination against girl children etc. were found in high proportion. On the other hand, corporate sector witnessed high productivity and increasing revenue. Several new family-owned businesses such as Reliance Industries, Escorts, Gujarat Ambuja and Ranbaxy etc. became successful in very short time. Around the same time apolitical grassroot social formations began to emerge which eventually took the organizational form of NGOs (Kothari, 1986a, 1986b). These NGOs started drawing attention of the Government and the prospering corporate sector to the social poverty and deprivation. Sundar (2000) has termed this stage of renewed perspective, scope and rationale of social responsibility of business as ‘corporate citizenship’ as it moved away from charity and traditional philanthropy towards more direct engagement in mainstream development concerns and helping disadvantaged groups in society.

SERVICE: THE COMMON THREAD

Having considered the concept of CSR and how it has evolved over the last century in India, the focus is now turned to the very idea of service which CSR seeks to render to the various stakeholders. Besides other great personalities who defined and redefined service, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, “It is our privilege to be allowed to be charitable, for only so can we grow. The poor man suffers that we may be helped; let the giver kneel down and give thanks, let the receiver stand up and permit”. This section makes an attempt to present what the corporate world may draw from the teachings and practices of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in keeping with its objective of becoming more and more socially responsible.

One of the objectives of Ramakrishna Math (which is a monastic organization for men brought into existence by Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), the great 19th century saint of Bengal, who is regarded as the Prophet of the Modern Age) and Ramakrishna Mission (it is a registered society in which monks of Ramakrishna Math and lay devotees cooperate in conducting various types of social service mainly in India. It was founded by Sri Ramakrishna’s disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), one of the foremost thinkers and religious leaders of the present age.), which are twin organizations forming the core of a worldwide spiritual movement (known as Ramakrishna Movement or Vedanta Movement), is all-round development of human faculties, social equality and peace for all humanity, without any distinctions of creed, caste, race or nationality. Based on the principles of practical Vedanta, the twin organizations make all possible attempts to alleviate human suffering by spreading education, rendering medical service, extending help to villagers through rural development centres, etc. They also work for the all-round welfare of humanity, especially for the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden. Swami Vivekananda has given a noble philosophy of work for the modern world. He taught that all work is sacred. Even menial work such as sweeping the floor or mending shoes is to be done with as much attention and devotion as work in the shrine. In Ramakrishna Math and Mission, service is not restricted to a particular type of activity conducted at a particular time, but is a *way of life*. Various activities cover different areas of human need and social welfare such as education, health, rural development, self-employment, women’s welfare, moral life, spiritual guidance and relief to victims of calamities. All these activities are conducted as service, service to God in man. *Service as a way of life* as practiced in these twin organisations has distinct features, such as, selflessness, sacrifice, love; liberty, equality, fraternity; excellence, efficiency, teamwork; truthfulness, honesty, transparency and social commitment without politics. It seems these are the very features that the corporate world has been required to engage in and fulfil. The very idea of CSR is service to the society as business is a social organization even before it is a corporate organization. What Sri Ramakrishna taught about service to humanity was practiced by Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna Math and Mission, following the footsteps of both of them, have moved into medical service, educational service, work in rural and tribal areas, relief and rehabilitation work, welfare programs for youth and women and mass contact etc. As per data available till March 2011, Ramakrishna math and Mission has established 1010 centres for medical facilities including hospitals, dispensaries, mobile medical units, medical camps, old age homes, nurses’ training institutes and institutes for paramedical courses etc. The Math and the Mission centres lived up to their reputation in the field of education. They have established 1239 educational centres including degree colleges, Sanskrit college, teachers’ training institute, junior basic training institute, secondary and higher secondary schools, hostels, student homes, orphanages, polytechnics, junior technical and industrial schools, computer training centres, schools of language, vocational training centres, rural development training centres, non-formal education centres and coaching centres etc. Rural and tribal welfare work has come to occupy a prominent place in the list of services rendered by the Math and the Mission. Besides their multifarious permanent constructive works, from their very inception, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have ever been ready to promptly organize ameliorative and healing services whenever the nation has been faced with sudden calamities caused by freaks of nature, follies of men, or scourges of epidemics. Its relief activities have also extended well beyond Indian borders. To date the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have together conducted hundreds of relief works in India, Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, during calamities and hardships issuing from such a variety of causes as famines, floods, fires, epidemics, cyclones, tornados, riots, earthquakes, landslides and droughts. Relief works for evacuees and refugees were carried out on a very large scale during some of the worst national calamities. More than hundred years of uninterrupted service have given the Math and Mission the experience and expertise from which scores of other organizations have drawn lessons. In 1897, when the Ramakrishna Mission started its first relief work, there were hardly any other organized services in the field. It was in fact a pioneering activity of the movement. Sri Ramakrishna warned against philanthropy being demeaned by desire for name and fame, he commended selfless acts of charity as being ‘very noble’. In another occasion he said that “Our principle, therefore, should be love, and not compassion. ... for us, it is not to pity but to serve” (see www.belurmath.org).

CORPORATE INITIATIVES AND PRACTICES IN INDIA

The corporate sector has engaged itself in giving to the needy of the society by way of scholarship funds, establishment of schools, colleges, institutions of higher studies, hospitals, arrangement of drinking water, development of roads, localities, maintenance of garden, forests, pilgrimage and rehabilitation works as and

when needed etc. Gautam and Singh (2010) have conducted a survey on the CSR practices of 30 Indian companies and their impact on the society. Most of the companies have undertaken projects which, directly and/or indirectly, led to community service, contributed to community development and provided for environmental protection. Castrol India has undertaken rehabilitation of earthquake affected victims in Gujrat. WIPRO, the IT giant, has been providing rehabilitation to the survivors of natural calamities and enhancing learning abilities of children from underprivileged sections. BPCL has provided for rain water harvesting, health awareness, HIV care and prevention measures. NIIT has launched International Women's Month uplifting Indian women, spread computer literacy and created awareness about AIDS. NTPC founded Global Compact Society for India in 2003 and has focussed on rehabilitation and resettlement policy, community work, gender equality and policy of grant of paternity leave etc. It has also been identified that CSR practices of companies such as Bajaj Auto, Mahindra and Mahindra, ITC, ICICI, Colgate Palmolive and few others, have directly and/or indirectly contributed to development of the community. Bajaj Auto by undertaking long term projects in rural areas seeks to develop the weaker sections of the society. Mahindra and Mahindra, another leader in the automobile industry, sets aside 1% of profit after tax for CSR practices such as free education for girls, free surgeries etc. ITC, the FMCG major, through its 'e-choupal' projects helps farmers to plan and build water harvesting structures, livestock development, promotes social forestry and integrated watershed development. Colgate Palmolive provides free oral care through different community programs. Hero Honda stresses that the company must do something for the community from whose land the company generates wealth. ICICI, though its various initiatives, seeks to empower million of economically and socially challenged Indians. Hindalco Ltd bagged the Asian Award for Integrated Rural Poverty Alleviation Program. Dabur India, the pharmaceutical FMCG, not only extracts its raw materials from the environment but, at the same time, promotes ecological regeneration and protection of endangered plant species. BHEL, the engineering major, adopted 56 villages and provided for infrastructure for schools for physically challenged children. Launching of wind electric generators, solar heating systems, solar photovoltaic systems, solar lanterns and battery powered road vehicles are some of its environment friendly innovations. Tata Steel in its "Green Millennium" campaign planted more than 1.5 million trees in order to contribute to healthy environment. Dr. Reddy's Lab, the pharmaceutical major, believes that prosperity of communities is integral to success of companies. It has greatly contributed to areas such as water usage, energy usage, wastewater usage, COD and TDS load discharge, HW-hazardous waste disposal and GHG emissions etc.

CONCLUSION

What the corporate world is doing today in order to remain socially and environmentally responsible seems to have been visualized, expounded and practiced by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda long ago. The real motive of CSR, regardless of how it is executed today, should be selfless service, honest and transparent disclosure of all relevant information to the stakeholders and social commitment leading to equality and excellence. Such service should be proactive, selfless and wholesome. The corporate world needs to be guided the philosophy of *service as a way of life*. The greater call is to 'give' than to 'receive'.

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