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ONE PERSON COMPANY (OPC): EVALUATING ITS FIRST STEP IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In a glance it could be understood that OPC has several drawbacks over some limited advantages. The critical factor would be see how supporting legislation pushes the concept of OPC- would banks treat the OPC as a full-fledged company or compromise for a company? Is winding up an OPC as hectic and tedious as winding up a normal company? Will this new concept be able to attract more and more entrepreneurs? We need to understand that this concept holds good in a matured economy, where corporate governance is an integral part of all organisations. In India, OPC is in its stage of infancy and hence it requires ample time to usher throughout the economy.

KEYWORDS

OPC, corporate governance.

INTRODUCTION

fter some harsh criticism from both corporate and professional front, OPC ultimately got success to trickle down into new Companies Act, 2013. Already prevalent in Europe, Singapore, China, USA and several countries of Gulf region, OPC has got its first step in India. The need of flying solo and having limited liability gave a head start to the OPC concept. Appraised majorly for covering unorganised sector in a developing economy like India, it also provides ample flexibility to individuals and professionals to manage their business efficiently while enjoying all the benefits of being a company as well.

OPC is a new kind of enterprise which has characteristics of a company as well as of a sole proprietorship firm.

The crux is, it is a legal entity which functions on the same principles as a company does, but has only one member and one shareholder.

The following article will give a quick glimpse about the different sections of OPC, its advantages and hurdles. Also, this article will provide some recommendations to the government, financial institutions and the entrepreneurs to take steps in order to face challenges efficiently.

PROCEDURE FOR INCORPORATING OPC

- 1. Obtain Digital Signature Certificate [DSC] for the proposed Director(s).
- 2. Obtain Director Identification Number [DIN] for the proposed director(s).
- 3. Select suitable Company Name, and make an application to the Ministry of Corporate Office for availability of name.
- 4. Draft Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association [MOA & AOA].
- 5. Sign and file various documents including MOA & AOA with the Registrar of Companies electronically.
- 6. Payment of Requisite fee to Ministry of Corporate Affairs and also Stamp Duty.
- 7. Scrutiny of documents at Registrar of Companies [ROC].
- 8. Receipt of Certificate of Registration/Incorporation from ROC.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP FIRM AND OPC

It is right that OPC is mixture of company and sole proprietorship. It could also be said that OPC is one notch higher than sole proprietorship. The major difference between these two could be summed up as follows:

TABLE 1

Basis of Difference	One Person Company	Sole Proprietorship
Legal Entity	Has separate legal entity.	Owner and entity are same personality.
Debt Payment	It is not the sole responsibility of the owner.	It is sole responsibility of the owner.
Liability	Has limited liability.	Has unlimited liability.
Credit	Credit is granted after analysing the credit history of the company.	Credit is granted after analysing the credit history of the owner.
Tax Liability	Separate from owner's tax.	Tax paid by the owner.
Legal Requirement	It will need to be registered mandatorily.	No mandatory registration.

PROVISIONS FOR OPC

Now we shall discuss the provision regarding OPC in our new Companies Act, 2013:

Section 2 (62) "One Person Company" means a company which has only one person as a member.

Section 2 (40) "Financial statement" in relation to a company, includes—

(i) a balance sheet as at the end of the financial year;

(ii) a profit and loss account, or in the case of a company carrying on any activity not for profit, an income and expenditure account for the financial year;

(iii) cash flow statement for the financial year;

 $\ensuremath{\textit{(iv)}}\xspace$ A statement of changes in equity, if applicable; and

(v) Any explanatory note annexed to, or forming part of, any document referred to in sub-clause (i) to sub-clause (iv):

Provided that the financial statement, with respect to One Person Company,

small company and dormant company, may not include the cash flow statement.

Section 2 (68) "private company" means a company having a minimum paid-up share capital of one lakh rupees or such higher paid-up share capital as may be prescribed, and which by its articles,—

(i) restricts the right to transfer its shares;

(ii) Except in case of One Person Company, limits the number of its members to two hundred:

Provided that where two or more persons hold one or more shares in a company jointly, they shall, for the purposes of this clause, be treated as a single member:

Provided further that—

(A) Persons who are in the employment of the company; and

(B) Persons who, having been formerly in the employment of the company, were members of the company while in that employment and have continued to be members after the employment ceased,

shall not be included in the number of members; and

(iii) Prohibits any invitation to the public to subscribe for any securities of the company;

Section 3. (1): Formation of company: A company may be formed for any lawful purpose by—

(a) seven or more persons, where the company to be formed is to be a public company;

(b) two or more persons, where the company to be formed is to be a private company; or

(c) one person, where the company to be formed is to be One Person Company that is to say, a private company,

by subscribing their names or his name to a memorandum and complying with the requirements of this Act in respect of registration:

Provided that the memorandum of One Person Company shall indicate the name of the other person, with his prior written consent in the prescribed form, who shall, in the event of the subscriber's death or his incapacity to contract become the member of the company and the written consent of such person shall also be filed with the Registrar at the time of incorporation of the One Person Company along with its memorandum and articles:

Provided further that such other person may withdraw his consent in such manner as may be prescribed:

Provided also that the member of One Person Company may at any time change the name of such other person by giving notice in such manner as may be prescribed:

Provided also that it shall be the duty of the member of One Person Company to intimate the company the change, if any, in the name of the other person nominated by him by indicating in the memorandum or otherwise within such time and in such manner as may be prescribed, and the company shall intimate the Registrar any such change within such time and in such manner as may be prescribed:

Provided also that any such change in the name of the person shall not be deemed to be an alteration of the memorandum.

Section 3 (2): A company formed under sub-section (1) may be either—

(a) a company limited by shares; or

(b) a company limited by guarantee; or

(c) an unlimited company.

Section 4 (1)(f): Memorandum: In the case of One Person Company, the name of the person who, in the event of death of the subscriber, shall become the member of the company.

Section 12 (3): Proviso: Registered office of One Person Company(OPC): Provided further that the words "One Person Company" shall be mentioned in brackets below the name of such company, wherever its name is printed, affixed or engraved.

Section 92(1): Proviso: Annual return: Provided that in relation to One Person Company and small company, the annual return shall be signed by the company secretary, or where there is no company secretary, by the director of the company.

Section 96 (1): Annual General Meeting (AGM): Every company other than a One Person Company shall in each year hold in addition to any other meetings, a general meeting as its annual general meeting and shall specify the meeting as such in the notices calling it, and not more than fifteen months shall elapse between the date of one annual general meeting of a company and that of the next.

Section 122 (1): The provisions of the below sections shall not apply to a One Person Company (OPC):

- Section 98: Power of Tribunal to call meetings of members, etc
- Section 100: Calling of extraordinary general meeting
- Section 101: Notice of meeting
- Section 102: Statement to be annexed to notice
- Section 103: Quorum for meetings
- Section 104: Chairman of meetings
- Section 105: Proxies
- Section 106: Restrictions on voting rights
- Section 107: Voting by show of hands
- Section 108: Voting through electronic means
- Section 109: Demand for poll
- Section 110: postal ballot
- Section 111: Circulation of members' resolution;
- Section 134: Financial statement, Board's report, etc.:

(1) The financial statement, including consolidated financial statement, if any, shall be approved by the Board of Directors before they are signed on behalf of the Board at least by the chairperson of the company where he is authorised by the Board or by two directors out of which one shall be managing director and the Chief Executive Officer, if he is a director in the company, the Chief Financial Officer and the company secretary of the company, wherever they are appointed, or in the case of a One Person Company, only by one director, for submission to the auditor for his report thereon.

(4) The report of the Board of Directors to be attached to the financial statement under this section shall, in case of a One Person Company, mean a report containing explanations or comments by the Board on every qualification, reservation or adverse remark or disclaimer made by the auditor in his report.

Section 137 (1): Copy of financial statement to be filed with registrar: (Proviso 3) also that a One Person Company shall file a copy of the financial statements duly adopted by its member, along with all the documents which are required to be attached to such financial statements, within one hundred eighty days from the closure of the financial year.

Section 149: Company to have Board of Directors: (1) every company shall have a Board of Directors consisting of individuals as directors and shall have—
(a) a minimum number of three directors in the case of a public company, two directors in the case of a private company, and one director in the case of a One Person Company; and

(b) a maximum of fifteen directors:

Provided that a company may appoint more than fifteen directors after passing a special resolution:

Provided further that such class or classes of companies as may be prescribed, shall have at least one woman director.

Section 152: Appointment of Directors: (1) Where no provision is made in the articles of a company for the appointment of the first director, the subscribers to the memorandum who are individuals shall be deemed to be the first directors of the company until the directors are duly appointed and in case of a One Person Company an individual being member shall be deemed to be its first director until the director or directors are duly appointed by the member in accordance with the provisions of this section.

Section 173: Meetings of Boards: (5) A One Person Company, small company and dormant company shall be deemed to have complied with the provisions of this section if at least one meeting of the Board of Directors has been conducted in each half of a calendar year and the gap between the two meetings is not less than ninety days:

Provided that nothing contained in this sub-section and in section 174 shall apply to One Person Company in which there is only one director on its Board of Directors.

Section 193: Contract by One Person Company: (1) Where One Person Company limited by shares or by guarantee enters into a contract with the sole member of the company who is also the director of the company, the company shall, unless the contract is in writing, ensure that the terms of the contract or offer are contained in a memorandum or are recorded in the minutes of the first meeting of the Board of Directors of the company held next after entering into contract: Provided that nothing in this sub-section shall apply to contracts entered into by the company in the ordinary course of its business.

(2) The company shall inform the Registrar about every contract entered into by the company and recorded in the minutes of the meeting of its Board of Directors under sub-section (1) within a period of fifteen days of the date of approval by the Board of Directors.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. As a separate legal entity, it would be treated and considered as a private company, subject to some pre-specified exceptions.
- 2. Mentioning the words "one person company" in brackets at the registered office of the company is mandatory.
- 3. Minimum numbers of members in its register of members shall be one. Number of directors can extend from minimum one to 15 in its board.
- 4. Name of the person, who shall become a member of the company at the incapacity of the existing member, must be included in the memorandum of association.
- 5. Simply by means of communication through a member of the company, the sole member may carry out any business after passing ordinary or special resolution as per requirements and by entering the same in the minute book.
- 6. Following relaxations shall be enjoyed by OPC:
- Preparation of cash flow statement is not mandatory.
- Even a single director can sign the annual report and director's report.
- No forbiddance to hold annual general meeting.
- Restriction to vote either by show of hand, electronic means, poll, postal ballot or by circulation (restriction of voting right).
- > No one shall have the power to call any meeting, give notice about a meeting and annexure thereto, call for a quorum, appoint a chairman, and proxies for a meeting.

PLUS POINTS

1. EASY INCORPORATION

a. OPC has an easy compliance. It follows simple step by step procedure and requires minimal documentation. It is because of the reason that such type of hectic-free process will attract more & more potential entrepreneurs.

2. SEPARATE LEGAL ENTITY AND LIMITED LIABILITY

a. This is another stress buster that new Company Law has brought for entrepreneurs. Risk in proprietorship is higher as the owner is personally responsible for the business because owner and business is treated as a single entity. Thus, owner bears unlimited liability. But under separate legal entity clause of OPC, entrepreneur will be treated separate from business and have limited liability. This provides as safeguard to the personal property of the entrepreneur.

3. BOOST FOR BEGINNERS

a. OPC is best suited for those who want to fly solo and who have great ideas but don't want to share with anyone. OPC breaks the hurdles of limited fund and capital. OPC is one notch higher than sole Proprietorship. It also provides better market, economic and management opportunities. Moreover, expansion can be done easily.

4. UNORGANISED SECTOR COVERAGE

The conventional ways of doing the business are still prevalent. But the question is:-

- a. Are they able to get any proper benefit from the govt. policies and schemes meant for their welfare?
- b. Not only this, a proprietorship can be a tax ineffective way of doing business. OPC can be the best answer of such problems. It will bring structured arrangements and accordingly, facilities would be availed by OPC. Thus, covering unorganised sector will help not only the entrepreneurs but the goyt, and economy as a whole.

HURDLES

Irrespective of many beneficial characteristics, OPC suffers from many disadvantages when compared with other forms of business organisations. These are given below:

1. SELF-RULING

By virtue of section 96(1) and the section 122, the owner alone is empowered to take any (or all) decision for the business. But this kills the democracy and hence, voting power has no means in such autocratic form of organisation. Being impractical, it also strikes the investors regarding the safety of their money, as a single person can't always take rational decision with the perspective of every stakeholder. Thus, one person decision can make or break the fate of OPC.

2. MISSING ACCOUNTABILITY

Meetings stipulated by the erstwhile Companies Act, 1956, installed a sense of accountability of the operations of a company. But the relaxations provided under OPC [section 96(1)] about holding Annual General Meeting leaves the organisation without any iota of accountability.

3. DOUBTFUL PERPETUAL SUCCESSION

Perpetual succession specifies for the long term operativeness of the company irrespective of the state of its members. Section 3 and section 4(1)(f) provides for the one name of any person to be included in Memorandum of Association (MOA) who shall become the member of OPC in case of death of existing member. However, inclusion of one name only doesn't guarantee successful continuance of the firm after retirement/death of the member because:-The succeeding member may not remain idle for years when his turn comes to take charge of the OPC.

Because the succeeding member himself may not remain in a state to take charge of OPC when the time comes due to illness/death/unsound mind. Because not being involved in day-to-day operations of the company, and thus having no knowledge & experience to succeed the business. Hence, due to any of the above reasons, the succeeding member may end up with wind up of the company.

4. INTEREST CONFLICT BETWEEN INVESTORS AND DIRECTORS

Separation of owners and controllers means that the people who invest in the firm (i.e. shareholders) and people who run the company (i.e. directors) are different. Directors want to maximize the profits whereas shareholders expect huge dividend. Thus, both have overlapping objectives.

This is the basic problem that new Companies Act, 2013 inherits from the Companies Act, 1956. The blurred line between ownership and control may call for serious unethical business practices and hence, may result into serious corporate governance issues.

LIMITED LIABILITY: A LUCRATIVE TRAP

Limited liability could be said a double edged sword. If it holds good for members, it might be dangerous for investors and other stakeholders. On the contrary, if this concept fails and the court applies the concept of lifting the corporate veil, it would be useless to incorporate OPC. In a nutshell, it could be said that in a country like India, which has ample pool of tax evaders and frauds, limited liability clause would be nothing more than a means to carry out scams and other fraudulent activities easily.

6. HIGH COST

When compared with sole proprietorship, it could easily be figured out that OPC has high incorporation cost and cost of statutory compliance which is of a recurring nature. Not only this, a proprietorship firm is easy to incorporate as well as easy to wind up without much complicated procedure, but so is not the case with OPC.

7. GREATER TAX LIABILITY

One must note that tax implications of OPC are much higher than that of sole proprietorship. The OPC is charged at a base tax rate of 30% along with other applicable taxes like minimum alternative tax (base tax rate 18.5%), dividend distribution tax (base tax rate 15%) and others. The tax incidence is the main deterrent for setting up of OPC.

8. DIFFICULT MARKETING AND CREDIBILITY

As we know, OPC is a combination of sole proprietorship as well a company.

But as it has one member, it would lack democratic decision making and accountability which would make it difficult for such companies to get loans from institutions. Also as it is a new form of organisation, no credit records will be available, which is the primary basis for banks and financial institutions to granting any loan.

Also, in the absence of separate ownership and control, the investors will feel threat in investing in such a company, as the owner also enjoys the advantage of limited liability and poor corporate governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The govt. should have separate tax slab for OPC with not so stringent rules. Harsh rules made for other forms of companies shall not be applied on OPC for a certain period of time to boost the prospective entrepreneurs.
- 2. Banks and financial institutions should not deny for the financial aid in the first go to the OPC as it is a new form of organisation and hence it will not have any past credit records. So, the banks and other financial institution should have a look to the promising future of the company as well as to the past credit history & capability of the entrepreneur while granting the loan.
- 3. OPC is more like a fancy concept in India. But entrepreneurs should step up for OPC only after they have gone through the pros & cons of the same. Also, after entering into this business, keen attention shall be paid to follow ethical practices only. Otherwise it could destroy them.
- 4. In India, J J Irani committee recommended the formation of One Person Company. It also suggested that it simpler legal procedure through exemptions should be provided to such an entity so that the single entrepreneur is not compelled to waste precious time, money and resources on procedural matters.

CONCLUSION

In a glance it could be understood that OPC has several drawbacks over some limited advantages. The critical factor would be see how supporting legislation pushes the concept of OPC- would banks treat the OPC as a full-fledged company or compromise for a company? Is winding up an OPC as hectic and tedious as winding up a normal company? Will this new concept be able to attract more and more entrepreneurs?

We need to understand that this concept holds good in a matured economy, where corporate governance is an integral part of all organisations. In India, OPC is in its stage of infancy and hence it requires ample time to usher throughout the economy.

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