Swachh Bharat – A Corporate Social Responsibility Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Indian society traditionally had certain attitudes against manual labor that have led to a lack of cleanliness in India. Anyone who has been to India will notice how dirty it is. In line with this, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was introduced by the Prime Minister of India calling all the Indians to participate and make India clean. This paper reviews the corporate social responsibility angle for this mission and the provisions made in the new companies act.

KEYWORDS
Cleanliness, Corporate social responsibility, Swachh Bharat, Society.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility

Welfare of the common man has been the cardinal concern of the governmental machinery. Besides, the community, say the village or the neighborhood has partaken such responsibility of the wellbeing of the disadvantaged sections of the society. At last, the corporations have started during the last 40 years across the world with a view to compensate for the damages meted out to the society in one form or the other as a result of their manufacturing process and also from the standpoint of restoring what has been used rapaciously in the society. Thus, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has come of age. Of course the variant forms; more organized and more integrated with the business systems necessitating global concerns for bringing such efforts into global reporting procedures.

There has been a growing acceptance of the plea that corporations should be responsible to the society. The business enterprise which makes use of the resources of the society and depends on it for its functioning, should contribute to enhance the welfare of the society. Business, being one of the dominant institutions of the present day market-led-economy, wields considerable influence on the resources of the society and plays an important role in the process of socioeconomic and cultural modernization. Being organically linked to the wider socioeconomic and cultural system, it cannot distance itself from its commitment to the society, particularly in a developing country like India (Narwal and Sharma, 2008).

Cleanliness in India

Going farther back in time, Indian society traditionally had certain attitudes against manual labor that have led to a lack of cleanliness in India. Anyone who has been to India will notice how dirty it is. Although this fact embarrasses a lot of educated Indians, it is a fact that cannot escape notice. The unfortunate thing is that India’s dirtiness cannot be written off due to its poverty, as there are plenty of other poor societies that are cleaner than India.
Many Indian houses are meticulously cleaned and spotless. Yet right outside rows of these clean houses, there are filthy streets with mountains of garbage. This shows that the public sphere is a concept in Indian society that has traditionally been absent. People in India have traditionally stuck to their family, community and caste group, of which there are around 10,000. These groups and communities were the mediums through which most people conducted their social interaction. Thus, the concept of a shared public space, used by everyone and kept clean to everyone was not one to take hold in a segmented society. This is changing however, as old social barriers break down and more and more people mix and congregate in urban areas.

Related to the concept of class and caste are Indian attitudes towards cleaning and manual labor. When the concept of cleaning and doing physical work in order to make spaces clean is associated with lower classes and castes, there is little incentive for anyone to work hard at keeping public spaces clean. Better-off people do not feel it is dignified to clean while worse-off people resent being boxed into the tasks of cleaning, which in India are often extremely dehumanizing due to the extreme accumulation of garbage and feces. They thus have absolutely no incentive to do a thorough job.

This has created a destructive cycle in Indian society that India is only now recovering from. Often the materials, including water, that are necessary for cleaning are denied to the cleaners themselves because they are perceived as unclean. Fear of contamination and pollution thus reinforces that uncleanness of cleaning communities and society in general. Handling trash, including human waste, literally makes certain people in India untouchable because these people clean the garbage of others but cannot really clean themselves. This is a recipe for the accumulation of dirt throughout India. At the opposite end of the spectrum, well-bred individuals have traditionally refused to clean.

The attitudes against manual labor, though, seem to be deeply ingrained in Indian society for a variety of sociocultural reasons and there is a general perception that blue-collar work is degrading while white-collar work is uplifting. This is, of course, true in most societies as well but in India there is a strong bias against working with one’s hands, which is closely connected to status. This in turn leads to a lack of professionalism and quality in the performance of many physical tasks, including cleaning.

This is one of those cases where there is really no scope to justify and contextualize a certain viewpoint. Indian society’s traditional attitudes towards manual labor are harmful in a moral sense and are also damaging toward the economy, society, and public spaces. In short, it has to change and people ought to understand that there is honor in manual labor as well. There needs to be a broad social acknowledgement that the artisan — one who works with his or her hands — is equally dignified in labor as one who works with the mind. This in turn will help make India a cleaner place as well (thediplomat.com).

It is in light of these facts that Prime Minister Modi launched his Swacch Bharat Abhiyaan.

CALL FOR SWACHH BHARAT

Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan is launched by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi on October 2, 2014 at Rajpath in New Delhi. The Prime Minister exhorted people to fulfill Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of Clean India. The tag-line for this mission is “Ek Kadam Swachhta Ki Ore”.

Out of Gandhiji’s two dreams – Quit India and Clean India, the people had helped to ensure that the first became a reality. However, the second dream – Clean India still remained unfulfilled. It is our social responsibility as citizens of India to help fulfill Gandhiji’s vision of Clean India, by his 150th birth anniversary in 2019.
The Prime Minister applauded and appreciated the work done by all previous Governments and social, religious and cultural organizations towards cleanliness. He repeatedly emphasized that the work of cleaning India cannot be done by one person, or by Government functionaries alone – it has to be done by 125 crore people, who are sons and daughters of Mother India. He said the work of Swachh Bharat should become a mass movement, and people should neither litter, nor let others litter.

According to the World Health Organization, an average of Rs. 6500 per person was lost in India due to lack of cleanliness and hygiene. Swachh Bharat would therefore make a significant impact on public health, and in safeguarding income of the poor, ultimately contributing to the national economy. The Prime Minister exhorted people to devote 100 hours every year towards the cause of cleanliness. The Prime Minister also emphasized the importance of building toilets. He said sanitation should not be seen as a political tool, but should only be connected to patriotism and commitment to public health.

Nine public figures were invited by the Prime Minister: Mridula Sinha, Sachin Tendulkar, Baba Ramdev, Shashi Tharoor, Anil Ambani, Kamal Hasan, Salman Khan, Priyanka Chopra and Team Tarak Mehta ka Oolta Chashma – to make a contribution towards Swachh Bharat, share the same on social media, and invite nine other people to do the same, hence forming a chain. He urged people to share their contributions on social media using the hash-tag #MyCleanIndia (pmindia.gov.in).

**SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

India is the first country to implement mandatory CSR for certain class of companies who are required to shell out at least 2 per cent of their three year annual average net profit towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities under the Companies Act, 2013. CSR norms, which came into effect from April 1, are applicable to companies having at least Rs 5 crore net profit, or Rs 1,000 crore turnover or Rs 500 crore net worth. Such companies would need to spend 2 per cent of their 3 year average annual net profit on CSR activities in each financial year, beginning 2014-15 fiscal.

In a bid to invite corporate funds for its flagship schemes, like Swachh Bharat and Clean Ganga initiatives, the government has decided that corporate contributions towards these two key initiatives will now be counted as CSR spend (thecsrjournal.in).

Contributions made by corporates towards Swach Bharat Kosh and Clean Ganga Fund will be considered as social welfare spending under the new companies law, according to the government. Swach Bharat Kosh and Clean Ganga Fund are among the key initiatives unveiled by the Narendra Modi-led government as part of its efforts to ensure cleanliness. While Swach Bharat Kosh is to attract funds for works to improve sanitation facilities, the Clean Ganga Fund is for pooling money to be used for cleaning up Ganga river.

Certain class of profitable companies are required to shell out at least two per cent of their three-year average annual net profit towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. The provision, which is part of the new Companies Act, came into force from April 1, 2014.

The Corporate Affairs Ministry, which is implementing the new companies law, has now brought contributions to Swach Bharat Kosh and Clean Ganga Fund under the CSR ambit. The Ministry has inserted the words "including contribution to the Swach Bharat Kosh set up by the central government for the promotion of sanitation" in Schedule VII of the Act.

As per the new companies law, CSR norms would be applicable to companies having at least Rs 5 crore net profit, or Rs 1,000 crore turnover or Rs 500 crore net worth. Such companies would need to spend two per cent of their three-year average annual net profit on CSR activities in each
financial year, beginning 2014-15 fiscal. Livelihood enhancement and rural development projects, working towards protection of national heritage, setting up public libraries, promotion and development of traditional arts and handicrafts, are among the activities coming under CSR activities (businessstoday.in).

CONCLUSION

What is needed in India is a Japanese-style attitude towards cleanliness where everyone, no matter their social status, learns that it is his or her duty to clean shared spaces, starting in elementary school. Apart from individuals, corporate should adapt the mission Swacch Bharat into their CSR activities to help clean India. Thus, it is a great thing that the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is sending this message to the people of India. It has both a practical component as well as a psychological component, both of which are necessary for India to become clean.

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