



BOOK REVIEW

Business and Community: The Story of Corporate Social Responsibility in India

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DETAILS OF THE BOOK

Sunder, Pushpa; *Business and Community: The Story of Corporate Social Responsibility in India*; SAGE Response; New Delhi; 2013; ISBN-978-81-321-0955-6 (HB)

THE REVIEW:

Pushpa Sunder started her career as an Indian Administrative Service officer in 1966 and resigned in 1969. Since then she has worked with various organizations- national and international and has chronicled the social responsibility of Indian companies. She is the founder and first Executive Director of Sampradaan Indian Centre for Philanthropy, New Delhi. Her earlier work, 'Beyond Business: From Merchant Charity to Corporate Citizenship' (2000) described evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) against the background of different phases of India's Business history. In her present work, 'Business and Community: The Story of Corporate Social Responsibility in India', she revisits her earlier historical narrative in the wake of developments since the turn of the century. Globalization, technological advancements and economic reforms have assigned market forces a greater role in economic growth. There is increased expectation from business regarding social development also. CSR is seen as business community engagement and as such there is increased interest in theory and practice of CSR. This monograph has been written in three parts; *Business and Community: Yesterday (1850-1990)*, *Globalization and Beyond (1990-2012)* and *Tomorrow*.

Yesterday, begins with the transformation from merchants to Multinational Corporation. In

pre-industrial Indian merchant class apart from Hindu merchant communities, the Parsis, Jains and Islamic categories were also there. Merchant class consisted of communities based not only on religion, caste (Banias, Khattris, Lohanas, Komatis and Nakarattar Chettiers) but also on region (Marwaris and Ghettnad). The narrative details of each of this class and their changing profile with the onset of industrialization. This part also gives an interesting account of Bombay industrialists and emerging new stars. There are three chapters on state society engagement; Merchant Charity, Corporate Philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility. Merchant Charity (1850-1941) deals with religious and political motivations behind charity. Anecdotes from the lives of Jamsetji Tata, Nowrojee Wadia, Baldevdas Birla etc make Merchant Charity very interesting. Corporate Philanthropy phase (1941-1960) captures transformation of traditional merchant communities into modern industrial class and a move towards secular philanthropy. It elaborates factors influencing business and community engagement and influence of Gandhi on business philanthropy. Second part of the chapter records community initiatives of the Golden donors like the Tatas, the Birlas, the Bajajs, the Lalbhais, Lala Shri Ram and Sir Raja Annamalai Cahettiar. Education has been the key area of concern for these exemplary donors. Towards Corporate Social Responsibility (1960-1990) sees earlier notion of philanthropy making way for the idea of Social

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Responsibility of business in the environment of State and business disharmony. Malpractices on part of some in business community, escalation of social problems and failure of government to bring about social change demanded not only responsible and ethical behavior on part of business but also their contribution to basic development needs.

Second part deals with contemporary CSR in changed paradigm mainly due to economic reforms and globalization. With the end of cold war, spread of capitalism and enormous creation of wealth, expectations from business to contribute to social development have also increased. This chapter is prophetic as it cautions about mandatory approach to CSR and advocates proper procedures and accounting system prior to any compulsory CSR. With 2 percent Mandatory CSR for certain range of companies, from April 2014, the problems have begun to surface. New law allows lot of leeway for financial misreporting. The buck has been passed from state to business and from business to NGOs. Second chapter of second part, 'CSR in Action' narrates spread of CSR, types of engagements with the community through direct operations, Foundations, NGOs, public-private partnership and personal philanthropy. Lighter notes and satires are in abundance, 'people do not know much about Mukesh Ambani's philanthropy but they do know about his 27- story house'. Vijay Mallya also finds some place in this part of the book albeit for different reasons. This chapter also laments lack of vision in cotemporary philanthropists. Deficit part is well written and points at large number of gaps.

Part three or Tomorrow focuses on challenges-generic and issue based. This chapter takes a note of politics of CSR, making it different from other publications on social responsibility and suggests influencing public policy in one's favour without indulging in corruption. Environment protection and Land

acquisition, two most important challenges that business face today have been covered extensively. Concluding chapter, 'CSR as Trusteeship' acknowledges the effect of western practices in improving Indian CSR practices particularly in the whole supply chain. It also takes note of the achievements of Indian CSR as well as the flaws. It finds that there is wide gap between society's expectation of business and fulfillment of social role by business. Hence development discourse needs to shift focus from rights to responsibility. Here Gandhi's idea of Trusteeship with its emphasis on duties with rights becomes particularly relevant. Author suggests revisiting of Gandhi's ideal of trusteeship and making it suitable for modern times with certain changes to include trusteeship of the environment and the commons like land and water.

Towards the end the book gives brief sketches of CSR by some pioneers like TISCO, ITC, Infosys, Kanoria, Hindustan Lever Ltd. Author's exposure to philanthropy is evident from meticulous handling of this narrative. The story of CSR has been narrated beautifully with help of large number of small stories about Indian Merchant class. Anecdotes from the lives of men of great wealth but who lived very simple life make it a must read for younger generation obsessed with economic power. As we read these, we yearn for more. This book needs to be reviewed in the light of 2 percent compulsory spending on CSR. A vigilant reading of this monograph coupled with latest developments in form of mandatory CSR and its fallout completes the picture. After going through this narrative, one is forced to do some soul searching and ask if mandatory CSR was really necessary or we needed to revive our home grown tradition of giving back to society in form of charity, philanthropy and social responsibility.