

## Corporate Social Responsibility---The Ancient Indian Way

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**Introduction:** Every business organization is a sub organization of the larger organization called society. Whatever an organization produces or delivers is nothing but a furnished output of the inputs it receives from the society. It is not possible for any organization to succeed without receiving inputs from the society and without society accepting its output. Thus every organization owes a moral responsibility to return to the society in some or the other way whatever it has acquired from it.

In ancient times big business men use to serve society in a number of ways under the popular umbrella of “*dharm karya*”. Modern business houses too have been since long parting a part of their profits in activities of social concern and thereby giving back to the society in lieu of what they took. Today such activities have been given the name of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is one of the most talked issues amongst corporate, society, government, academicians in today’s time. Today many organizations are heavily spending on CSR initiatives. It is being used as a marketing tool to create positive image by many organizations.

Today law also requires that business houses should engage in C.S.R. It also says that amount spent on CSR activities would attract tax benefits. The law is getting mixed response from all corners of society. People in favour of the law argue that this will force companies to undertake social activities that are making huge profits but not discharging their due social responsibilities. It would to great extent reduce government’s burden of spending on social issues.

Experts against the law argue that this will set a minimum level of amount which the companies will spend hence companies which are currently spending huge amount may also due to law reduce their spending. Further the proposed law does not mention the modalities and areas where the companies will have to spend. This might make the entire exercise an accounting jugglery without actually amount being spent.

Here it is noteworthy to understand that CSR is not be done as charity nor it is should be done under some compulsion. Because when it will be treated as charity or done in compulsion it loses its essence. CSR is in the larger interest of both the organization and society. Society and organization must stay in harmony with each other. If the goals of the organization run contrary to that of the society then the organization will not survive for a long. Survival is the first success of any organization. Therefore for survival it is necessary that it must work in harmony with society. A society will be in harmony when all those who receive some benefit from it duly discharge their responsibility towards society.

Indian culture has seen many ups and down in history and is one of the longest surviving society. Naturally such society must have thought of CSR and ways to undertake it. The concept of CSR is not new in India. It existed since Vedic period. We always believed in the philosophy of “*Sarva loka hitam*” which means “well-being of all”. Merchants carried out their responsibility by building wells, hospitals, places of worships, rest houses, schools etc. The purpose of Dharma

which is a part of *purusharthas* in Hinduism is to ensure that people do not neglect their obligatory duties towards the society. To ensure a stable social framework, our forefathers introduced the concept of fivefold debt (*panch rin*). It is considered undesirable to die indebted. Therefore for an honorable death people should discharge all the debt.

### **Types of Debts (Rin)**

According to the Taittiriya Sanhita (6.3.10.5), a child is born with three debts to repay in his lifetime. They are as follows:--

**Dev Rin** - Human beings get easy access to the objects created by nature like sun, earth, water etc. Our life on earth is dependent on proper functioning of these natural forces. Sun maintains the temperature of Earth, a slight change in the temperature of sun can prove to be fatal for everything on earth. Therefore, we are indebted to Sun and to express our respect we address him as God and worship him. Similarly Earth provides us food which is very necessary for our survival, clouds provide us water etc. Thus we are indebted to all the natural forces and the best way of discharging our duties towards them is not to waste natural resources. One must try to return as much as it has taken and have a feeling of respect.

**Pitri Rin** - A person is indebted to his ancestors as they have propagated their lineage and are the cause for his birth. One is highly indebted to his father and mother. Our existence is purely due to our parents. Howsoever uncultured, illiterate they might be but we exist due to them only. Their debt is on us and we must discharge it. The best way of doing it is to respect them, express gratefulness and gratitude whatever they have done for us. We must always be prepared to satisfy their economic and emotional needs, perform their last rights according to their fait not according to our own logical or rational thinking. If by some reason we had failed to do it when they were alive then we must compensate it after their death by doing some charitable work in their remembrance on their death anniversary.

**Rishi / Guru Rin** - We are indebted to knowledge creators and knowledge distributor intellectuals. Thus whole society is indebted to Lord Krishna, Lord Mahavira, Lord Buddha, and Albert Einstein ...etc. Howsoever bright and intelligent we might be we always need a human teacher to ignite the process of thinking and learning. It does not happen automatically. For example someone told us that this is "A" and is pronounced in a particular way. Otherwise it would have remained just a symbol for us. Therefore, we are indebted to everyone who has given or created knowledge for betterment of society. We must be respectful to our teachers and enhance the knowledge received by them for the betterment of the society not to cause any harm to the society.

Another ancient scripture, Shatpath Brahman (1.7.2.1-6), added two more debts. According to this scripture the two debts are as follows:--

**Nri /Manushya Rin** - A person is indebted to humanity at large which can be repaid by treating others with respect and helping them. We are indebted to the whole society as we are a part of society and do not live in isolation. We receive almost everything required for our survival from society only. Our survival is because of our togetherness with society. Therefore we are indebted to whole society as entire society contributes to our survival and development. CSR is a part of *Nir Rin*. We should always strive hard to protect the social fabric of our society not work towards

damaging it. Our efforts should be directed towards promoting harmony and balance in society. If we simply pay back our *Nir Rin* properly all issues of CSR will be taken care off.

**Bhuta Rin---** A person is indebted to plants, animals and nature etc. Our lives are dependent on plants and animals. We are part of nature and not its master. Some philosophy say man will conquer nature one day which is incorrect and illogical. Man is not master of nature he is a part of nature. Therefore man has to live as any other part of nature and not as master. We don't have any special right to exploit nature. It is our duty to live in coexistence with plants and animals.

It is true that human beings are at the highest level of food chain. This does not give us the right to exploit nature but increases our responsibility and accountability towards nature than any other creature on the earth. If we appropriately repay the *bhoot rin* there will be no issue like acid rain, ozone layer fragmentation and imbalance in the ecosystem.

If we sincerely internalize that we have all those debts on us and we must discharge them will full responsibility the all our action will be appropriate and major concerns of CSR will be taken care off. Issues like transparency, accountability, justice etc cannot just be dealt with by making laws and implementing them. Something more needs to be done. Education can make it happen.

An educated and enlightened civil society can work as a pressure on system and make the system work in a transparent and efficient way.

Thus the best form of CSR could be achieved when we make a resolution that we will discharge all our debts sincerely and use natural resource in an equitable, fair, transparent and judicious manner. If discharge of all these five debts is taken care of religiously, then all the aspects of modern day CSR is taken care of and probably then no law on CSR will be required.