

Discussing the Issues of Waste Management in CSR through the Lens of Buddhism

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Abstract

Following the beginning of industrialization, the amount of waste generated by the entire population has severely kept on increasing along with the exploitation of natural resources. The process of Waste Management requires the treatment of Waste from its formation to its disposal. The issue of Waste remains a challenge for many developed and under developing countries to build sustainable habitats. In the present era, Waste Management has become a concern for the whole world as it poses a serious hazard for the entire humanity. As the population and urbanization are rapidly expanding the quantity and characteristics of waste is also changing. India generates 277 million tons of waste annually and 1.50 lakh metric tonnes daily(2016 estimates). Corporate social responsibility is an evolving concept for every nation, and there is not a single accepted definition of CSR.CSR squarely can be defined as an attempt by the big corporates to alleviate the suffering of humankind and work for the betterment and wellbeing of the entire society. The ‘responsibility in CSR shall not only provide a check on their activity (as is understood by most of the corporates) but they shall also take care whether their manufactured product in any way lead to the degradation of the Environment or not. In the context of CSR, it is essential to del deep into the Buddhist text ‘Chakkavattiisuttam’ which touches on the point “that the real standard of the living of a nation does not merely depend on the number of rich people rather it lies more on the number of people that are alleviated of poverty and social suffering”. This paper attempts to focus on society and the environment concerning nature and the responsibility of corporate mobs to treat their waste efficiently.

Key Words: Corporate Social Responsibility, Environment, Buddhism, Humanity, Waste Management

Introduction

Right from the beginning of Industrialisation, numerous developments were happening in the commercial sector which totally changed the economic face of the Nation. However, the techniques and ways used and implemented by Modern commercial companies are harming society and affecting the wellbeing of the nation in various ways. This led to the evolution of the concept we know as CSR. CSR that stands for Corporate Social Responsibility is now a fully-fledged concept in the world. CSR in general terms is defined as the ways and work policies of the organisation which do not only benefit the stakeholders and partners of the organisation but also take full responsibility for the overall wellbeing of the society. CSR is about the measures taken by the companies and their effects on the life of their workers and their families, local surroundings, and the whole society. The different meanings and interpretations of this make this concept a little enigmatic. Howard Bowne is credited for coining the term CSR and it has its roots in the 1970s. CSR has been seen in similarity with the Chinese concept of Confucianist belief of harmony, prosperity, righteousness, and living society with morality. Earlier some activities of CSR came under voluntarily measures and philanthropic activities but now Government uses CSR as a ticket to solve social and economic problems by making some rules mandatory. In many places, people see no difference between CSR and philanthropy but a difference exists there as CSR is way beyond charity and voluntary activities. It is having the responsibility towards every area of the corporate starting from buying the raw materials to selling the products in the markets.

It is also worth mentioning that in many places CSR is considered to be Business ethics and it is wrong. As Crane and Matten define Business Ethics as “the study of Business situations, activities, and decisions where the issue of right and wrong are addressed”.

According to the European Commission CSR is defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with their stakeholders voluntarily”.

CSR is much beyond the activities of altruism and philanthropy because as it takes full responsibility for all the activities and their impact on the society and environment. CSR policies cover every sphere be it the working conditions of labourers, gender balance, sound management, or the issues related to the environment like waste Management. The environmental and religious principles played a pivotal role in the formulation of CSR. Religion or the Dhamma also guides us on the ways to make the Nation prosperous.

In this research paper, I am going to highlight the amount of waste the factories, small- and large-scale companies, and organisations are producing and how adversely this waste is harming society particularly the environment, and I am also going to discuss the ways by which we can manage the waste and eliminate its adverse effects to the maximum extent by following the Buddhist principles.

Waste and Waste Production in India

In laymen's terms waste can be defined as something that is a byproduct of something or some process that is of no use now. What is waste is also depends on the eyes of the beholder, a thing that is a waste for someone may be a raw material for the other. In the Basel convention of 1989 waste is defined as the “objects which are disposed of or are intended to be disposed of or are required to be disposed of by the provisions of law”. United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) describes Waste as “ Materials that are not prime products (that is, products produced for the market) for which the generator has no proper use in terms of his /her own purposes of production, transformation and consumption and of which he/she wants to dispose of waste may be generated during the extraction of raw materials, the process of raw material into intermediate and final products, the consumption of final products and other human activities. Residuals recycled or reused at the place of generation are excluded”.

For the past few decades, many industries have been set up, people have been moving to urban areas, changing their lifestyles. All of which has led to an increase in the production of Waste. As the population and urbanization are rapidly expanding the quantity and characteristics of waste is also changing. Globally around 2.01 billion tonnes of waste is produced out of which 33% is not treated effectively and directly possess a danger to the environment.

According to the World Bank, the figure which is now 2.01 billion will reach around 3.40 billion by 2050 if no proper measures are taken. The income of the country is directly related to the amount of waste it generates. It has been seen that there is a huge gap in the amount of waste produced by the high-income and low-income countries. High-income countries are expected to increase waste production by 19% and low-income countries by 40% or even more. So, there is a straight connection between income and waste production.

In recent years, the production of waste generated in India has touched a very high figure even after taking so many initiatives and policies in this direction. India generates around 277 million tons of waste annually and 1.50 lakh metric tonnes daily (2016 estimates). As per a report by the “Swachhata Sandesh Newsletter” by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), India generated 1,47,613 million tons per day by January 2020 and it is expected that the figure will reach 11,95,000 TDP by 2050.

A large proportion of waste comes from small- and large-scale industries. The waste from these sources contains both hazardous and nonhazardous substances. The waste coming from these contaminates the water bodies and affects the soil as well, this brings adverse health effects on all those who depend on water for their survival and also gives an invitation to various diseases. This waste takes hundreds of years to decompose completely. According to data from the United States, 7.6 billion tons of waste are processed yearly (2017 estimate). The CSR rules implement on those industries whose turnover is greater than or equal to 1000 crore or whose net worth is greater than or equal to 500 crores, they have the responsibility to have a check on their activity and serve some part for the betterment of the society. These large industries have infrastructure and resources good enough to manage their waste and

bind to the rules and policies of CSR. But it does not mean that all the companies follow CSR rules effectively for ethical purposes, some also do it for the sake of profit. According to research done by Cone Communication in 2017, 87 percent of the people will purchase a product from a company if they learned that the company supported an issue they cared for .76% people will refuse to buy from a company if they learned that the company supported an issue contrary to their own belief. So, following the CSR policy only increases the revenue of the company. Therefore, we see that the waste production by large industries is not a concern as big as what it is for the small-scale industries. Contrary to large-scale industries, they don't have proper means of infrastructure, resources, and arrangements to manage the waste they produce. Any authority also does not keep a regular check on these small-scale industries as they think the amount of waste, they produced is not much but collectively they produce more waste than the large-scale industries. Therefore, they need to be more concerned and empathetic towards their surrounding.

Buddhist Perspective and Waste Management in Corporates

Buddha wanted his followers to treat the environment as a precious friend and it provides an attainable solution to all the suffering and problems. Buddhism works on a different philosophy than the corporates are presently working. Each and every organisation and industry aim to maximize their revenue and profit whereas Buddhism focuses on the goal of eradicating the suffering. In the Buddhist literature, one finds many texts where Buddha was talking about how a nation can become prosperous in various ways. Although the only variation at the time of Buddha was that there were no different spheres like science, politics, society, and economy. But even in the present time, one can easily apply the Buddhist teachings as they cover almost every sphere connected with living beings. Buddhism is a way of life and an epistemological way of thinking. This is a religion by the Human for the Human, Buddha never in his life claimed to be a god. The ways through which Buddha attained enlightenment are available to everyone. As said by Rahula, Buddha never tried to philosophies his teachings. He focused on the practical aspects. The Buddhist Sangha was educated instead of being devoted to religious practices. In many instances, Buddha condemned religious practices as the main focus should be on one's karma.

Buddhist literature never directly mentions Environment Protection and ways for waste management but Buddha always focuses on nature and for him, nature and humans are interconnected. Buddha said when a man performs any action in unethical ways then the ill effect of it is borne by the environment. The harm to the environment is the harm for the human and good to the environment is good to the human and vice-versa. The main issue creating so many problems and challenges is the desire to achieve more wealth and this desire

of achieving more at the cost of anything is the root cause of every problem. Industries' stakeholders are very well aware that their activities are harming society and degrading the environment despite that they are not taking proper action. As rightly quoted by Dr. K.T.S Sarao that "A civilization in which we must kill and exploit other forms of life to live is not a civilization of mentally healthy people". The *Cakkavattisuttam* of Buddhism reveals a causal relationship between material poverty and social deterioration and indicates that the Buddhist emphasis on 'Karma' implies a different way of understanding and addressing social problems.

There were various anthropogenic activities like over mining, deforestation, excessive use of insecticide and pesticide, dumping of various types of waste in the water bodies, excessive use of technologies that are degrading the environment. *Rukkha Sutta* of *Anguttara Nikaya* mentions fertility, infertility, the wholesome and unwholesome attitude of the people. Though the solution does not lie in the rejection of industries and technologies but in the proper use of them.

Buddhist practices along with CSR that are helpful in Waste Management

The very basic Buddhist principle which we need to implement in the organisation is the law of karma. As per Buddhism, our life is predetermined. From birth to death everything is fixed. What we are getting is the effect of one's karma that is the cause and effect. If we considered ourselves fortunate in this birth that may be because of the results of karma of our previous birth, and in the next birth we will face the effects of karma of this birth and this cycle goes on and on. This law of karma applies to every individual be it rich or poor. Therefore, Buddhism advises having control over one's thoughts and actions. Only those who do not believe in this cycle will live their life irresponsibly, greedily, and always tend to hurt others either by their thought or by actions.

Buddha always advised: "Buddhists should not either kill themselves, or tell the killers, use the means of killing, praising the killing, seeing killing but depending on the wedding, the ring comes to use the charm to kill, and so on, all the beings have no life, they will not intentionally kill them or: "Often the mind is murdered, the more the karma grows, the more it spins in the samsara, there is no day to leave".

The heart of Buddhist Dependent Origination or *Pratītyasamutpāda* explains that everything is connected with the other thing. Not a single entity exists independently. For survival, everyone is depending on others. So, either in life or in the organisation, we must do actions in such a way that it does not harm anything or anyone because the survival of even the tiny creatures is important for our survival. As humans, we are not able to see this relatedness but it exists. This interconnectedness between things is mentioned in the *Avatamasaka sutta*. Only when we realize this interconnected relationship do we understand the four mental qualities (the Brahma Viharas)

Compassion (Karuna), loving-kindness (metta), Sympathetic joy (Mudita), and equanimity (upekkha). Buddha wants humankind to live a life according to these four mental qualities.

Buddhism tells that if we want to live a happy and stable life, we need to stop harming the environment.

Humankind is creating the disbalance mainly because of two reasons.

1. The desire to get more and more wealth
2. They don't feel guilty about harming others for their profit.

Humans are doing the business at the cost of harming the environment whereas the technologies and setting up of many companies have simplified our life in various ways but it has also created various problems for us. Though the companies are following the CSR policies which are for the benefit of humanity many people are using this just for the sake of the obligations and brand image. To bring balance in society we need to follow basic Buddhist Principles.

The flower garland sutra of Mahayana mentions the *paramitas* (ten qualities), one of them being dana or generosity. Whatever we have we need to donate a part of it to those who need it. Corporates should work in such a way that they also uplift those who cannot have resources. It will not only change the life of some but also bring a positive atmosphere in the workplace.

Panatipata Veramni Sikkhapadam Samdiyami First precept of the famous Pancasila of Buddhism comes while doing anything. Industries dump their waste in the water bodies and it takes the lives of many living creatures who depend on water for their survival. It has led to the extinction of many species and the extinction of even one species, as we know does not harm only them but affects the entire food web.

Industries need to work in collaboration in such a way that the byproduct of one can be used as the raw material for the other. We even have many examples where this process is being used. The by-products of the steel industry- fly ash and slag are now being used in the cement industry as a raw material for brick making. There is not any perfect way to get the most out of the waste but there have been incidents where people, corporates, and governments have tried to use the waste for a good purpose. One of those incidents takes us to Thailand of the year 1984 when there was too much production of waste which resulted in the destruction of the environment. The group of Thai Buddhists started collecting all this waste to clean the city and later used them in constructing a temple. Today that temple is known as *Wat pa Maha* or the “temple of Million bottles” is a temple of 1.5 million bottles. They continued this practice of collecting. Abbot San Kataboonyo said “the more bottle we get, the more buildings we make”.

Conclusion

One might think or interpret that Buddhism, a religion that focuses on simplicity and quality of life would avoid profit-making but it is not the case. As *Kutadanta sutta* refers “to the need to develop the private sector for the prosperity of a country”. But the way modern corporates are doing business is a problem because they are doing this for the sake of making money for themselves even at the cost of destruction of the environment and human life. The coming of CSR is a good initiative but there are some loopholes in it as well. The stakeholders are doing it for the sake of regulations set up by the government and for maintaining their Brand image which somehow undermines the genuineness of CSR. Also, the Policies under CSR were formulated by the government so many problems of the society got neglected in them. The main purpose to implement CSR is to alleviate the miseries but it, in many cases is being used as a means to maximize profit. In most organisations, these policies are limited up to paper only. To cover these loopholes corporates, need to start doing their business by following the Buddhist principles of Karma, Dependent Origination, paramitas, precepts, karuna, mudita, upekkha metta. To protect our environment and bring balance in society CSR policies and Buddhist philosophy need to go hand in hand, not just in papers but also in practice.

In last I will end the paper with a famous quote from 20th century leading management guru Peter Drucker “Business should not only address problems of the society but should also ensure that its activities, its impact on society negatively should be addressed”.

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