



Contextualizing the role of CSR initiatives in preservation and conservation of tangible and intangible heritage of India: A case analysis of public sector companies

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as a concept whereby companies integrate environmental, social, and developmental concerns in their business operations. Corporate firms across the globe have clearly defined their CSR strategies. Most of these firms largely focus on areas of environmental sustainability, health and sanitation, women's empowerment, workplace ethics, educational initiatives, leadership development, among other areas of community-centric work. Companies have taken keen interest in investing their resources for environmental protection as well as for enhancing the quality of health services. In India, multinationals as well as indigenous firms have been taking keen interest in CSR activities. Most of the firms in India have, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, developed a strategy for implementing their CSR plan. A major part of their strategy is focussed on sustainable development and environmental issues, and to some extent health, women's empowerment, and community work. An area which has largely remained untouched by business houses is conservation of heritage and culture. Although some companies have exhibited a desire to invest in conserving the dying heritage of India, it has not been taken up as a critical area of CSR investment. Some public sector companies in India, such as ONGC, NTPC and Indian Oil, have however, led the way as far as CSR investment in conservation of heritage is concerned. This paper aims to critically analyze the role played by these companies in preserving and conserving the tangible and intangible heritage of India.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR), women's empowerment, workplace ethics, educational initiatives

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility is understood as the ways in which companies manage their relations with the society^[1]. CSR is defined as a way through which a company achieves a balance between economic, environmental and social factors, while keeping up with the expectations of the stakeholders^[2]. Pioneering CSR scholar, Howard Bowen defined CSR as "obligations to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or follow those actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society^[3]." Therefore, CSR is understood as a business approach that contributes effectively to sustainable development.

CSR is a broad concept that encapsulates many areas such as environment, corporate governance, health and safety, working conditions, women's development, and other areas of social concern as well as workplace wellbeing. Most companies in the West have focused on these areas as far as CSR funding is concerned. However, there are also examples of some firms branching out to some niche areas such as heritage conservation and preservation. For instance, the American Express has invested millions of dollars in preserving more than 500 iconic historic sites across the world since 1974, including the Temple of Hercules in Rome and the Palace of Fine Art in Mexico City^[4].

However, heritage conservation has not been the key agenda for companies who have largely directed their CSR budgets towards solving environmental concerns and addressing workplace concerns, apart from spending a portion on other causes. Preservation of tangible and intangible heritage has

not been a priority for most companies, though some firms have displayed visible interest in this area and have invested in conservation projects in the past.

In India, a few companies have carried out programmes in the field of heritage and culture preservation. Public sector companies like ONGC, NTPC, Indian Oil, and GAIL have been undertaking renovation and maintenance activities at historical sites and monuments across the country, particularly in their respective operational areas.

Apart from these public sector companies, some private companies have also been involved in preservation efforts. The Tata Group, for instance, has taken a lead in promoting local structures and has also invested in setting up museums. It has also funded joint projects with the Archaeological Survey of India. Similarly, Coca-Cola India has been involved in a couple of restoration projects in the past. It has funded the restoration of two four hundred year old stepwells in the state of Rajasthan-the Sarai Bawari and Kale Hanuman ki Bawari^[5].

In this article, the key heritage conservation activities of three prominent public sector companies, i.e. ONGC, NTPC and Indian Oil, will be analyzed in detail in order to understand the contribution being made by these companies in resorting and preserving both the tangible and the intangible heritage of India.

Heritage Conservation as a Key Component of the CSR Policy of ONGC

The CSR Mission Statement of the Oil and Natural Gas

Corporation (ONGC) clearly states that the protection of national heritage is one of its major thrust areas:

“Protection of national heritage, art and culture including restoration of buildings and sites of historical importance and works of art; setting up public libraries; promotion and development of traditional arts and handicrafts [6].”

As per the CSR Sustainability Policy 2014, the company allocates a considerable percentage of its annual budget to the protection and preservation of national heritage. ONGC took the first step in this direction when in 2009 it signed a MoU with the National Culture Fund (NCF), a trust under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. As per this MoU, the ONGC is to take up various projects for the conservation and restoration of art, culture and heritage, both tangible and non-tangible. This collaborative venture also resulted in a project aptly titled “Amulya Dharohar,” under which ONGC agreed to fund important heritage conservation projects across the country.

The first project which the ONGC took up as part of this MoU was the renovation and restoration of the monuments of the Ahom kings in and around the area of Sibsagar in Assam [7]. Sibsagar is the operational area of ONGC in the state of Assam. ONGC also funds and collaborates on projects with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) for the conservation of old and dilapidated monuments in Assam. This includes the Ranghar ruins, Karenghar, Garhgaon, and a group of maidams (burial places of Ahom kings) at Charaideo in Sibsagar. For executing its heritage conservation plan in Assam, the ONGC

chalked out a 3.96 crore plan, which was to be allocated in two phases. In the first phase, the focus was on scientific measures of conservation and in the second phase, the focus was on the development of tourist amenities and the protection of the sites from human encroachment and damage [8].

Apart from the initiatives taken by ONGC in protecting and reviving the heritage of Assam, a considerable work has been done by this public sector company in restoring other heritage sites across the country. In 2015-16, ONGC took up a project of restoring a 15th century stepwell in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan. This was a collaborative project with the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). ONGC invested a total of 65.6 lakh rupees in this restorative project. The aim was to restore the original character and usage of the stepwell [9].

The conservation of monuments has been a priority for ONGC as far as their CSR initiatives are concerned. However, the ONGC has also taken up projects for the protection of intangible heritage. In 2015-16, ONGC collaborated with the Sanskrit Promotion Foundation for promoting the Sanskrit language. It invested 50 million rupees for the development of online tools and tutorials for students, teachers and guardians and the formal and informal school levels [10]. Apart from the promotion of Sanskrit, ONGC has also invested in constructing a 350-bedded boy’s hostel at the Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana at Bangalore [11].

The table given below show the involvement of ONGC in some heritage conservation projects in the year 2016-17:

Table 1

Sr. No.	Project Details	Implementing Agency	Project Cost (In Lakhs)	Expenditure in 2016-17 (In Lakhs)
1	Sanskrit Promotion through training, technology and research	Sanskrit Promotion Foundation	570	349.80
2	Beautification/Rejuvenation of park adjacent to Jantar Mantar, New Delhi	INTACH	78.17	27.47
3	Support for preservation and promotion of classical music	Legends of India	9.83	9.41
4	Cleaning and restoring four historic kunds at Varanasi	National Building Corporation	1146	764
5	Setting up Yoga Bhawan at Yoga Kendra, Madhav Seva Ashram, Lucknow	Bhaorao Deoras Sewa Nyas	82.91	70.48
6	Construction of multipurpose hall at Ayurveda Sewa Sadan, Dehradun	Ayurveda Sewa Sadan	17.28	3.45
7	Beautification of Clock Tower, Dehradun	Municipal Commissioner, Nagar Nigam, Dehradun	86	0
8	Organizing Cultural Festival- VIRAST 2016	REACH	46	46

Source: http://www.ongcindia.com/wps/wcm/reportspdf/common/csr_expenditure2016_17.pdf

The Heritage Conservation Efforts of NTPC

The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has also been at the forefront of heritage conservation efforts in India. It has not only undertaken monument conservation projects, but has also organized cultural meets in order to protect and popularize the local cultural traditions of areas in which NTPC has its units. In 2009, NTPC signed a MoU with the ASI and NCF for the restoration and conservation of heritage sites. Soon after the signing of the MoU, NTPC took up key projects for restoring heritage structure in Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Orissa. In Madhya Pradesh, the group of monuments at Mandu were taken up for restoration. The group of temples at Jageshwar in Uttarakhand were to be restored by the collective efforts of NTPC, ASI and NCF. Similarly, the archaeological site at Lalitgiri Dhauli in Orissa was taken up for restoration and conservation as part of the CSR efforts of NTPC.

Apart from the efforts at conserving monuments, NTPC has

also played a significant role in preserving the intangible heritage of India. In areas where it has its established units, NTPC has made concerted efforts in the direction of showcasing and popularizing local cultures by organizing cultural meets. It has also collaborated with Spic Macay in order to promote the artistic tradition of India. In 2011-12, NTPC organized a cultural meet in Faridabad, and in 2012-13, it organized a cultural meet at Farakka, West Bengal, to promote the culture of West Bengal and Jharkhand.

In 2013-14, NTPC collaborated with Spic Macay to organize a concert in Dadri. It also organized a theatre workshop in collaboration with Spic Macay in Jhanor, Gujarat. In the same year, a cultural meet was held in Kahalgaon, Bihar, and a Kathak dance workshop was organized in collaboration with Spic Macay in Talcher, Orissa. In 2014-25, NTPC organized cultural meets in collaboration with Spic Macay at Farakka, Ramagundam (in Telangana), Talcher, and Rihand (Uttar Pradesh). A cultural meet for women and children was also

organized at Singrauli. In 2015-16, the organization sponsored rural cultural meets in Auraiya, Dadri and Tanda in Uttar Pradesh, Farakka in West Bengal, Jhanor in Gujarat, Ramagundam in Telangana, Simhadri in Andhra Pradesh, Sipat in Chhattisgarh. NTPC also organized Pali Mahotsav in Korba, Chhattisgarh, to popularize the Pali language.

Conserving India's Cultural Heritage: Initiatives Taken by Indian Oil Foundation

The conservation and preservation of Indian heritage, particularly the monuments of India, has been an integral component of Indian Oil's CSR initiatives. In the year 2000, the company created a non-profit trust, the Indian Oil Foundation, in collaboration with the Archeological Survey of India and the National Culture Fund, Government of India. The Foundation agreed to contribute 25 crores to the initial corpus, while agreeing to contribute 10 crores annually. The Foundation also pledged to adopt one heritage site in every state and Union Territory. The website of the Indian Oil Foundation spells out its mission and vision for the protection and preservation of monuments:

"To protect, preserve and promote national heritage with ASI and NCF. To promote awareness, knowledge and involvement in national heritage and culture^[12]."

The Indian Oil Foundation, like ONGC and NTPC, has carried out its heritage preservation programmes in a phased manner. In the first phase, some monuments were identified in each zone: Qutub Minar in the North, Konark Sun Temple in the East, Kanheri Caves in the West, Hampi in the South, and the Khajuraho Group of Temples in Central India. The Indian Oil Foundation is committed to building world-class facilities and conveniences for the tourists at these sites. It has also pledged to invest in raising awareness about the monuments and involving communities in preservation of India's national heritage.

The Foundation is currently developing tourist facilities at many historical sites, including Konark Sun Temple (Odisha), Khajuraho Group of Temples (Madhya Pradesh), Kolhua (Bihar), Kanheri Caves (Maharashtra), and Bhoganadishwara Temple (Karnataka). Apart from this, the Chittor Fort in Rajasthan and the Indus Valley site of Dholavira in Gujarat have also been added to the list of sites which need special attention because of their historical significance.

At the Konark Sun Temple, the Foundation has landscaped the main avenue for a better view of the iconic Sun temple. It has also opened an Interpretation Centre which comprises four display galleries, an audio-visual centre, a VIP lounge, a brochure/souvenir centre, apart from other important counters. The Foundation has also built a parking area which has eased the parking problem for the tourists. At the Khajuraho Group of Temples, the Indian Oil Foundation has created a Visitor Facility Centre. It has also developed the approach road to the temple complex, and has contributed to the restructuring of the entrance gates, parking area, toilet blocks, etc.

At Vaishali in Bihar, the Foundation has proposed the setting up of Kolhua Interpretation Centre, which would be fully equipped with an audio-visual centre, display galleries, office block and reception, ticket counter, VIP lounge, cafeteria, souvenir shop, security arrangements, among other essential facilities. At Kanheri Caves, the Indian Oil Foundation has

proposed the development of various types of facilities including a ticket counter, souvenir shop, cafeteria, and rain shelter. Apart from this, the proposed plan also includes the renovation of the main entrance, landscaping, renovation of toilets, signages, interpretation centre, security arrangements, and drinking water facilities.

The India Oil Foundation has also proposed a plan for the development of tourist facilities at the Bhoganadishwara Temple near Bangalore in Karnataka. Apart from the other basic amenities which the Foundation proposes to set up in all the sites, at this temple site, the Foundation also proposes to invest in illumination of the temple complex and environmental improvement.

The Foundation has displayed its commitment to the cause of heritage conservation by adding to its corpus of conservation projects every year. In the year 2016, the Foundation got the Veer Savarkar Jyot erected at the Cellular Jail in Port Blair as a lasting tribute to the revolutionary freedom fighter, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. The Indian Oil Foundation is providing LPG free of cost for making this lamp lit permanently. The lamp was unveiled on the 133rd birth anniversary of Veer Savarkar.

Conclusion

A critical analysis of the case studies suggests that ONGC, NTPC and Indian Oil have contributed immensely in heritage conservation efforts in India. In collaboration with the ASI and NCF, these public sector companies have invested a considerable portion of their CSR budget to preserving India's valuable cultural heritage.

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