

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF PRESENTATION OF THE NATIONAL
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AWARDS**

New Delhi, October 29, 2019

1. First of all, let me compliment the Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister and her team for this initiative to recognize excellence in CSR through National Awards. I congratulate all winners and those who have found honourable mentions in the various categories of the National CSR Awards. I commend the whole corporate sector for its contributions towards society over and above creation of wealth and jobs. It is heartening to see companies competing in good deeds.
2. The term 'CSR' is a recent coinage, but the spirit behind it has a long history in our land. All religious traditions that flourished here propagated the कर्म-सिद्धान्त, that is, Theory of Karma. For us, this principle of Karma is in consonance with the principles of nature that nurture harmony and peace. In India, every child has heard inspiring tales of legendary greats like 'daanveer' Karna, known for his generosity. Thus, what is now called CSR is very much in our DNA.
3. The legacy was carried forward by entrepreneurs of early industrialism. Illustrious business families like Tata, Birla and Bajaj and many others associated with our freedom struggle were sensitive to their social responsibilities. Mahatma Gandhi developed the principle of trusteeship, not only from his deep understanding of our various religious traditions, but also on the basis of the generosity of industrialists associated with him.
4. It is befitting that the Ministry of Corporate Affairs is launching the National CSR Awards in this year of Gandhiji's 150th birth anniversary. I am happy to learn that henceforth these Awards

will be conferred every year on October 2, the Mahatma's birth anniversary. Gandhiji found the seeds of the principle of trusteeship especially in the Ishavasya Upanishad and the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita offers this advice on the best way of giving:

दातव्यमिति यद्दानं दीयतेऽनुपकारिणे ।

देशे काले च पात्रे च तद्दानं सात्त्विकं स्मृतम् । [Chapter 17, verse 20]

It means:

“Charity, given as a matter of duty, without expectation of any return, at the right place and time, and to the right person is said to be sattvika.”

5. After independence, more and more business families and industries started following Gandhiji's advice and returned a part of their profits to society, when the nascent republic needed all help. They complemented the efforts of the government and the public sector, especially in education and healthcare.
6. In order to build on our rich tradition of CSR and to engage the whole of corporate India as agents of social transformation, a policy was brought in. The Companies Act was amended in 2013-14, making it mandatory for companies with a specified level of profit to spend two percent of it on social welfare. I am told it is one of the world's largest experiments in promoting CSR.
7. During this early phase of implementation, the response of companies to the CSR framework has been highly commendable. Every fiscal year since 2014-15, the corporate sector has set aside a total of more than Rs 10,000 crore for social welfare. A diverse range of social sectors have benefitted from this effort. I am especially glad to see among them education, environment, health, poverty eradication and nutrition, safe drinking water, and sanitation.

8. The National CSR Awards aim to encourage competition and infuse excellence in CSR activities. The three categories for the awards are well chosen – excellence in CSR, contribution of CSR in challenging circumstances/ aspirational districts and contribution of CSR in National Priority Areas. The ‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ has been a policy priority of the government. Under this innovative programme, 131 districts have been selected for a more focused development initiative. I am glad that the Awards recognize the exemplary CSR work done in these Aspirational Districts. I am also happy to see that the winners and honourable mentions of National CSR Awards represent the full diversity of industry sectors as well as regions.
9. It is indeed heartening to note that those sections of society that need the helping hand most are among the main beneficiaries of the CSR activities. The corporations have, thus, made a worthy contribution towards the national goals. They are helping the nation progress towards the cherished goal of building a more equitable society. They have focused on sustainable projects creating a long-term impact.
10. Broadly, CSR initiatives have been aligned with the national priorities such as public health, education, livelihoods, water conservation, sanitation, and natural resource management. They are also in tune with the global priorities. I am referring here to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. The 17 goals with 169 targets are to be achieved by 2030. I am confident that we will achieve all targets well in time. In fact, on the parameter of sanitation, India has achieved the target far ahead of the time. The advent of an effective CSR regime is indeed a timely development in this context. I sincerely hope that innovative solutions to persisting development challenges will emerge from the CSR activities.

11. As you all are aware, India has been consistently improving its rank among the nations on the ease of doing business thanks to the efforts of our government. The government is also sensitive about the need to calibrate the CSR regime to make it more effective. In September, the scope of the CSR activities was widened to include more categories of research incubators. This thrust on research and development will immensely help innovators.
12. It is equally important to internalise social welfare in the corporate culture. Hence I will also urge upon you to motivate your employees and sensitise them to this higher calling in service of the marginalised sections of society. This single step will generate enough goodwill for wealth creators among ordinary people.
13. On this occasion, I want to share a vision I have with you. When it comes to helping those in the need in our society, we have the resources, we have the will and now we have a framework too. Whom shall we help most? I have in my mind orphan children and Divyang. While the government has done what it can to give them a helping hand, society and especially the corporate sector can still do more for them. Can we plan in such a way that within a foreseeable future, every orphan child can get personal care? We can set 2030 as a deadline to ensure providing care to every child and reap the benefits of demographic advantage that we have. I leave this suggestion to you as food for thought and action.
14. It is my pleasure to participate in the celebrations of the First National CSR Awards. I once again congratulate all award winners and those who have achieved honourable mentions as well as the jury and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. You all have shown that it is possible to be profitable, while being socially and environmentally responsible. Standing before you here today, I see ancient sages were right when they said:

गौरवं प्राप्यते दानात् न तु वित्तस्य सञ्चयात्

स्थितिरुच्चैः पयोदानां पयोधीनामधः स्थितिः

It means:

“Respect is achieved by donating the wealth, and not by storing it. Clouds attain a higher position by giving away water whereas the oceans remain at a lower position by storing water.”

May you occupy even higher positions and inspire others too!
I wish the very best in your endeavours ahead.

Thank you,
Jai Hind!