This paper attempts to provide an overview to the contentious concepts of corporate sustainability (CS). The conclusions, drawing literary support from anecdotal evidences, theories and changing business dynamics reflect that CS is custom made process and thus one size fits all definition of the concept is imprudent. The notion of business entities’ social receptivity and responsible citizenship aren't novel and its genesis can be traced to history. As evident from the forthcoming literary discussion that conventional multiple notions of sustainability basically convey the same meaning and consequently corporate and academe often use them synonymously.

Introduction
Reputedly, sustainability has turned out to be corporate buzzword and heightened academic interest area. Sustainability however aims to enhance the adoption of sustainable business practices while simultaneously augmenting creation of the awareness regarding the concept. History is replete with numerous efforts targeted at defining sustainability and sustainable development more robustly. However the challenge is inherent in setting the limits for definition, in order to delicately balance the possibility of too narrow focus which might possibly exclude some important aspects, and a broad outlook, that could dilute the term to an extent being almost meaningless (Marshall and Toffel, 2005).

The research draws heavily on literary support over definition and various allied business-society constructs, thus enabling corporations to refer to these as enduring guide to exhibit socially responsible value system that facilitates attainment of sustainability and business objectives. Seeking profits alone without consideration to responsible management practices is a limiting decision of firms for its ability to be a sustainable business ultimately leading to death of corporation and failing in its ability to realise their purpose, let alone generate profits for shareholders.

As would be evident from forthcoming discussion, it reflects the approximate sequence of advent of major concepts linked with business-society. Repeatedly authors have opined and volumes of literature confirmed that multiplicity of allied concept and definitions have given rise to more questions than answers, aggravating the situation for scholars to compare their academic works and for corporate managers willing to adopt responsible-sustainable business practices, leaving them with their own interpretations of these concepts and respectively adopt (Marrewijk, 2003).

Setting the Milieu
The popular notion that businesses have social responsibilities towards communities in which they operate has existed almost for centuries. However, it was only second half of the 20th century that intensified an ongoing and escalating debate on corporate responsibilities both in academe and corporate circuits, led to the emergence of varied streams scrutinising the firm's role in society. Authors (Carroll, 1999; Garriga & Melé, 2004) agree that ever since then there has been flooding of inter-related and varied, most often conflicting terminologies, concepts, theories and models.

Historically, perhaps the most well established concept and guiding principle for business-society context was that of corporate social responsibility. Though CSR remains the prime catchphrase for 90s, post which the discussion was seemingly dominated by CS concept towards the start of this millennium. On parallel lines, prominent CSR researchers (Carroll & Shabana, 2010) also shared the shift from CSR to CS.

Though there are many concepts with blurred boundaries in business-society context, but given the breadth and scope of the paper, it is mostly limiting to most widely acknowledged concept of corporate sustainability. Theoretical and practical reasoning is the major underpinning as fundamental basis for selecting key concepts. This opinion has been backed by even secondary data analysis of non-financial disclosure reports by companies. Most often these sustainability reports were named after the major concepts as business responsibility report. Even the basic Google and Google scholar search with keywords of these varied concepts, also supported predominance of chosen concepts. The multitude of business-concepts have blurred boundaries, however the differing terminologies or operationalisation of construct is seemingly subjective owing to scholar’s interpretation and perspective towards the concept. To quote, in lieu of CSR, Brown (2004) prefers ‘corporate responsibility’ while European scholars prefer ‘societal responsibility’ as they view CSR being limiting concept by excluding moral and ethical considerations or while just being confined to social welfare issues respectively (cf. Dylick and Hockerts 2002, Andriof and McIntosh 2001). In sync with Scherer and Palazzo (2007) who asserts CS to be a considered as an umbrella term for debate on role of business in society.

These overarching concepts are confusing and interchangeably used with allied concepts. Nevertheless, no matter what organisation name this responsible behaviour, what remains in the end is whether firms behaves responsibly or not as its core rather just pretending to be socially responsible. Ensuring this responsible conduct is crucial as Wood (1991) opines that business and society are intertwined instead being distinct entities. Thus, society has certain expectations of suitable corporate conduct and subsequently, the degree of congruence with societal expectations determines the respective legitimacy of the corporation.

ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to provide an overview to the contentious concepts of corporate sustainability (CS). The conclusions, drawing literary support from anecdotal evidences, theories and changing business dynamics reflect that CS is custom made process and thus one size fits all definition of the concept is imprudent. The notion of business entities’ social receptivity and responsible citizenship aren't novel and its genesis can be traced to history. As evident from the forthcoming literary discussion that conventional multiple notions of sustainability basically convey the same meaning and consequently corporate and academe often use them synonymously.
Though Hediger (1999) asserts the earliest references to the term ‘sustainable’ is in context of forestry. However, the first formative academic work on CSR is credited to Bowen in 1953, entitled as ‘social responsibility of businessmen’ advocating that firms own responsibility towards society (Carroll, 1979; p.497; Matten & Moon, 2008, p.405). This credited Bowen the coveted title of “father of corporate social responsibility” (Carroll, 1999, p.270), proposing that businesses must operate in sync with societal values (Bowen, 1953, p.6). It was only after seminal contribution of Bowen, Carroll (1979, 1991) considerably systematised the business-society domain. In the 1990s and 2000s the most cited and influential CSR model was “The Pyramid of CSR. In his hierarchical order, he strongly stressed that economic responsibility is the most crucial social responsibility of business. Thus, it infers that first and foremost than other obligations, businesses ought to be profitable and must render superior quality goods and services. The verticals were in order of economic base, a legal layer, an ethical and at the top the philanthropic engagement, which was criticized due to the messages of firms, who took this layer as the most important claim (Carroll, 1991). However, Schwartz argued that this layer misguided the firms as it lead them to think if they only added philanthropic donations, they were exercising a full concept of their responsibility (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p. 505). Given this, the four-dimensional pyramid of CSR was modified into “three-dimensional approach” (Crane & Matten, 2005; Visser, 2008). In this approach authors had merged the “philanthropy” into the “ethical” part de-emphasizing it as the uttermost imperative as a top in a pyramid could suggest (see Schwartz & Carroll, 2003, p.509, Figure 2).

To recap CSR is a strategic approach to improving sustainability. Sustainability cannot be improved without CSR practices and hence CSR is not an option but a must for companies that want to improve sustainability. On the other hand, CSR calls companies to behave responsibly to improve sustainability. CSR literature focuses on responsible behavior as the main factor in CSR. The terms “behavior responsibly”, “act responsibly”, “responsible business”, “responsible revolution”, “responsible organization” can be found in all related CSR activities such as academic journals, books, conferences, and academic programs. The common message of these terms is to ask the organization to act responsibly for improving the sustainability. It is clear from the CSR literature that the responsible behavior of companies has a significant function in making CSR practices achieve the improvement of sustainability. Without responsible behavior of companies, CSR practices cannot work. The CSR literature shows that CSR practices are not working well, and many academics consider that CSR has failed. If CSR cannot work without responsible behavior of organization and CSR failed, this means, the responsible behavior of companies is not functioning properly. In other words, the responsible behavior of companies is a major issue and requires a solution. As concluded before, a systems perspective is the appropriate approach to deal with responsible behavior. This means that the responsible behavior of a company is the responsible behavior of the system as a whole. So, by replacing this understanding in the field of CSR and sustainability, we can say that in order to improve sustainability companies has to have the ability to improve the responsible (ethical) behaviour of their system.

In the extensive content analysis work of Dahlstrud (2008), he also shares a concern that in spite of long established journey and unambiguous literature, CSR is still not completely defined. He extends further that overabundance of CSR definitions and allied concepts pose challenge to businesses to be translated into sustainable business strategies (pg.6). This is in sync with what Marrewijk (2003) laments “CSR has to be broadly defined and is therefore too vague to be useful in corporate debate or in corporate implementation” (p. 96). Matten & Moon (2008) also opines that CSR is an ‘umbrella term’ (p.405) sharing blurred boundaries and often used synonymously with corporate citizenship, business ethics, corporate philanthropy, and sustainability.

Evolution of CS: Wilson (2003) proposes a slightly different perspective and theorization for CS. He states that corporate level sustainability is based on four conceptually different principles. Contrary to popular notion, he considers SD to be derived from principles of economics, ecology and social justice. He refers to SD as precondition for shared common societal goal. Second mainstay asserts that CSR offers ethical arguments emanating from ethical and moral philosophy in favour of firm’s motives for adopting sustainability initiatives. Third pillar refers to stakeholder theory as offering argument for sustainability adoption. Lastly, legal compliance driven approach offers ethical arguments for sustainability adoption. This quadra faceted model of an otherwise multidimensional and multidisciplinary construct of sustainability depicts succinctly the underlying connections and apparent contradictions (pg… pillars of sustainability, source: based on Wilson, p.2)

The Blurred Boundaries: CSR & CS

Finally to draw inferences on link between CSR & CS, the distinctive history and paradigms taken to define these concepts may be credited as to why CSR & CS traditionally been viewed as distinct concepts. Montetis’s (2008) most comprehensive review of academic literature on CSR points out that mostly studies have focused on social issues at the cost of environmental concerns and these two concepts are “more and more used synonymously and seem to be converging” (p. 260). To strengthen this argument further that both concepts inspite of unlike histories and origin, have become more interwoven concepts (Loew, Ankele, Braun, and Clausen (2004, p. 12) and Marrewijk 2003, p. 102). CSR & CS are supposedly two sides of the same coin and Keijzers (2002) asserted that notions of CSR and CS though have shown separate paths, but recently have grown into convergence. Divergently, Dahlstrud (2008) proposed that CSR in its conceptualisation and practical application still gives prominence to social issues rather than environmental aspects. The most noted researchers Frederick (1960) & Bowen (1953) shared an opinion that earlier version of CSR dealt with social issues while later years witnessed the inclusion of environmental aspect (Marrewijk 2003, CEC 2001). On contrary, at many instances, SD is equated with ecological sustainability (@ Stark & Rands, 1965). In the past, sustainability had a limiting notion to the environment while CSR being to societal aspects. This notion slowly and subtly attributed to missing reference to environmental dimension in previous scholarly works. Alternatively it can be attributed to the increasing and evolving societal expectations and values which might have possibly urged the businesses to consider environmental factors as well.

Therefore, notwithstanding diverse terminologies, the concepts of strategic CSR, CR, and corporate social and environmental responsibility are closely guarded concepts to corporate sustainability. Recently there has been heightened interest in integrating social and societal aspects into CS. CS is even targeted as ultimate goal with CSR as intermediate stage whereby companies attempt to balance TBL (Wempe and Kaptein, 2002). On similar note, sustainability is targeted to be balanced between different dimensions in CSR as defined by Carroll and allied concepts.

In the past few years, environmental perspective has been emphasized with the corporate environmental performance (CEP) gaining attention as a key sustainability parameter. Though stakeholder theory attempts to identify “to whom are businesses socially responsible”, while CS attempts to answer “what are the businesses responsible for?” (Maignan & Ferrell, 2003, p. 56).
The paper attempts to bring orderliness to otherwise disordered business-society concepts of CS. Throughout the research it is observed that many allied concepts of sustainability, rarely rely on clear, concise and singular well defined definitions individually or in context of related terms and concepts. This subsection attempts to bring clarity and suggest nature of interrelationships between most frequently used concepts in relation to sustainability – corporate social responsibility, CSR.

REFERENCES


