

CSR and Inclusivity: A Case for Dalit Upliftment through CSR

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the invisibility of Dalits in corporate India, arguing that their exclusion from diversity policies, underrepresentation in corporate hierarchies, and systemic discrimination are deliberate outcomes of caste-blind practices within the corporate sector. It contends that this caste-blindness is extended to existing CSR policies, which often generalize poverty alleviation efforts, and so fail to account for the unique socio-economic challenges faced by Dalits. This paper centres on addressing Dalit invisibility, purporting that it is essential for companies to create CSR initiatives that drive genuine and sustainable change for the community, thereby aligning corporate actions with the true spirit of social responsibility.

Keywords: Dalit, corporate social responsibility, social exclusion, inclusivity

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INTRODUCTION

The economic reforms of the 1990s opened India's markets to international players, bringing new job opportunities. However, access to these opportunities was not equal. This is due to the division of Indian society along the basis of caste which operates on a system of exclusion. Centuries of oppression have denied "lower" castes access to education and resources. Consequently, Dalits and other marginalized groups still face significant barriers to entering the private sector (Babu, 2004). The emerging corporate sector, while focused on economic development, has interacted with the entrenched caste system, incorporating it into its operations. As a result, many discriminatory practices have quietly become part of corporate culture (Lindt, 2011).

Caste is no longer just a system of ideas and values; it reflects people's actual behaviours and their relationship with the society. Caste has shifted from being a rigid structure to one shaped by interpretation and purpose. It serves as a lens to understand the challenges facing Indian society, politics, and the economy, becoming more of a mindset or perspective of individuals rather than a fixed reality (Sharma, 2012). Although the government has put constitutional mandates and various laws denouncing the caste system and its practice, no actual change can be seen in the Indian society in the way how the marginalized or Dalits are treated to this day. Affirmative action provides a level playing field as it provides for reservation of seats in government-run higher education institutions and government jobs, but is not sufficient to eradicate discrimination (Rao, 2023). This is particularly evident in the private sector which has repeatedly opposed any introduction of reservation in jobs, citing a commitment to meritocracy. The harmful effects of casteism often begin at the recruitment stage, where candidates are not only evaluated on their qualifications, skills, or experience but also subtly screened based on caste affiliations inferred from their surnames. Though these biases are not overt or deliberate, they are rooted in implicit prejudices that reinforce systemic caste discrimination. Unfortunately, this discrimination does not end with recruitment; it persists throughout individuals' careers, often appearing in subtle ways that continually remind them of their marginalized status (CM, 2023).

Corporations often dismiss caste issues, labelling them as concerns limited to rural areas rather than metropolitan centres, even as they continue to uphold caste-based norms (Venkatraman, 2022). This disregard is reflected in their approach to corporate social responsibility practices as well. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) differs significantly from traditional corporate philanthropy. Unlike philanthropy, CSR recognizes the corporation's obligation to the community in which it operates, viewing the community as an equal stakeholder. It also emphasizes a partnership between businesses and social groups to provide financial and other resources, particularly for the development of disadvantaged communities, promoting social welfare in areas like education, women's welfare, and healthcare (Stobierski, 2021).

This paper's central argument emphasizes that Indian corporations must reorient their CSR policies to focus on the upliftment and empowerment of Dalits if they aim to truly fulfil the foundational goals of corporate social responsibility. Currently, achieving such a focus is difficult for institutions where caste biases have become ingrained and perpetuate exclusionary practices. To overcome this, corporations must actively work toward creating inclusive environments that are receptive to marginalized communities and invest directly in Dalit development initiatives. Inclusive CSR policies would not only support individual empowerment but would also contribute to reducing societal inequality, making corporations

active participants in India's social transformation. While reservation policies have long been a key mechanism to counter caste-based discrimination, CSR presents a complementary approach, offering corporations the opportunity to address caste inequities through targeted social programs, educational initiatives, and community investments. Additionally, advancing social justice and equality directly aligns with the primary objectives of CSR, underscoring its role as a vehicle for both economic and social value. By prioritizing Dalit upliftment within CSR frameworks, corporations can demonstrate a commitment to sustainable social change, positioning themselves as responsible and socially aware contributors to the broader goal of an equitable society. What is required is an all-encompassing approach to ensure that discrimination is dealt with and addressed in all spheres of life.

Dalits have historically faced systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to resources and opportunities. Dalits continue to face high rates of poverty, limited educational opportunities, and restricted access to quality employment (Rao, 2023). By focusing CSR efforts on Dalit empowerment, companies can contribute to addressing these deeply rooted social inequities and promote a more inclusive society. CSR initiatives that provide skills training, educational scholarships, and economic opportunities specifically for Dalit communities can help improve their economic status and enable social mobility. Focusing CSR policies on Dalits can help companies align with national social goals and government priorities, thereby strengthening their compliance with evolving legal expectations.

The paper begins by examining the phenomenon of caste blindness within corporate structures, challenging the myths of a "casteless" corporate culture and "merit." It then explores the underlying reasons for this oversight and how it has become internalized and institutionalized within corporations. Next, the diversity and CSR policies of the top 10 companies listed on the National Stock Exchange are analyzed to substantiate claims about the lack of Dalit representation and the absence of targeted CSR policies. The next section tries to explain how the need for inclusivity and targeted CSR policies go hand-in-hand. The institutional theory is then applied to justify the need for focused CSR efforts. Following this, a comparative analysis using an American study supports the argument for Dalit representation and demonstrates how inclusivity can lead to more effective CSR policies for Dalit upliftment. The paper concludes with recommendations, proposing a mix of hard and soft law approaches to encourage inclusivity while respecting corporate autonomy.

Caste-Blindness

Caste-blindness is the idea of being indifferent to caste and caste associations in social and personal relationships. However, some argue that caste-blindness is an affectation that only the privileged can afford, and that "lower" castes cannot be indifferent to caste. In other words, the identity of the upper caste can be entirely replaced by chosen modern professional identities, while the lower caste identity is deeply ingrained and supersedes all other identities and the associated choices. This is the main challenge of caste in today's context - it is highly visible for those considered lower castes and invisible for those considered upper castes (Deshpande, 2013). "India lives and breathes caste. Whether you realize it or not, your caste is chasing you from the time you are born," says a 29-year-old Dalit woman working in the corporate sector, which encapsulates how other Dalit workers experience life in supposedly "casteless" environments, where your performance is valued over your caste (Kannampill, 2020).

All these barriers ensure that Dalits are kept out of the corporates. An informal study (Gupta,

2016) conducted by Fortune India on the top 100 companies in the Fortune 500 List revealed that there are likely only about four individuals from non-"upper" caste backgrounds in leadership positions, and even that is uncertain. It is important to note that the Fortune 500 includes both private and public sector companies, indicating that Dalits are not leading either government or public sector companies. Also, a study done by Prof. Surinder Singh Jodhka found that almost 94% of the top jobs were occupied by non-Dalits (Jodhka, 2008). All this clearly point to the fact that there is lack of representation of Dalits in the private sector.

The Myth of "Casteless" Corporates

Most companies in India are privately owned and therefore not obligated to follow the government's affirmative action policies. This reinforced the belief that entry into such companies was based solely on individual merit, with factors like religion, gender, and caste being irrelevant. However, in practice, the companies did not eliminate inequalities; instead, caste hierarchies persisted. A 2011 report on caste in the Indian IT sector concluded that caste is not disappearing from society but is adapting to modern conditions (R. Kumar, 2022). In 2007, a study led by Sukhadeo Thorat, Professor Emeritus at Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Paul Attewell from the City University of New York Graduate Centre, aimed to challenge claims from the private sector that there was no evidence of discrimination against Dalits. The study involved three key experiments (Thorat & Attewell, 2007):

1. **Resume Experiment:** Researchers responded to job advertisements from Indian private sector companies with three sets of identical resumes. The only difference was that set 1 had names linked to higher castes, set 2 had Dalit names, and set 3 had Muslim names. The findings showed that Dalits had only a 67% chance of receiving a positive response compared to their higher caste counterparts, while Muslims had just a 33% chance.
2. **Employer Interviews:** The second experiment involved interviewing Indian employers about their hiring practices. It revealed that employers relied heavily on regional stereotypes, favouring candidates from certain family backgrounds regardless of their education.
3. **Student Interviews:** In the third experiment, they interviewed post-graduate students from different castes, focusing on their job expectations and search methods. Dalit students tended to have lower expectations for roles and salaries compared to higher caste students, with many believing it was futile to apply for private sector jobs due to perceived barriers. Furthermore, they lacked access to the same job opportunities through social networks that were available to higher caste students.

The study clearly highlights that the private sector continues to mirror and perpetuate the inequities of the society, thus challenging the idea that corporate hiring is purely meritocratic.

In another study, Bhalla, Goel, Konduri, & Zemel (2019), investigated how cultural proximity, specifically shared caste identities between board members of firms, influences merger and acquisition (M&A) decisions in India. The authors argue that shared caste identities between firm directors increase the likelihood of entering M&A deals due to informal information channels. Using data from Indian firms, the study finds that firms are significantly more likely to engage in M&As with firms whose boards share the same caste affiliations. The study compares the rate of caste-proximate mergers with simulated samples, concluding that these mergers do not occur by chance and are systematically driven by cultural proximity.

The Myth of “Merit”

The idea of "merit" dominates hiring practices in the corporate sector. The central argument is that "merit" is often presented as a neutral and objective standard for recruitment, ignoring the social and economic privileges that enable individuals to perform well in exams and interviews. Despite its claims of being inclusive and based solely on merit, the private sector reproduces existing social hierarchies because those from upper and middle classes —primarily urban and upper caste — are better equipped with the cultural capital necessary for success in this sector. Industry relies on educational achievements, fluency in English, and certain "soft skills" which privilege candidates from higher social backgrounds who have access to better education. As a result, merit becomes a mechanism that upholds the exclusion of individuals from lower socio-economic and caste backgrounds, perpetuating existing inequalities in the workforce (Upadhya, 2007). Many feel it to be seemingly inconceivable that Dalits can excel or even surpass their non-Dalit counterparts in performance, even when a highly qualified Dalit candidate who meets all the criteria is selected.

The above discussion demonstrates that caste has become a deeply ingrained element within Indian corporations, influencing various business aspects, from hiring practices to M&A deals. Given its pervasive impact, it is reasonable to expect corporations to show the same commitment to eradicating discriminatory practices within their structures and to establish CSR policies specifically aimed at Dalit upliftment and empowerment.

Reasons for Caste Blindness

Caste is a centuries-old system that is deeply embedded in Indian society. While everyone in India is aware of caste, many upper-caste individuals — who dominate corporate spaces — may not see it as a current issue. For many, caste operates as an “invisible” system, especially those who benefit from it. This makes it easy to ignore or deny the existence of caste-based discrimination, especially in elite spaces like the corporate sector, where upper-caste individuals are overrepresented (Mosse, 2018). Unlike issues of gender or LGBTQ+ rights, which are framed as progressive and modern, caste discrimination is often seen as an “old” issue that does not need attention. Many people, particularly in urban corporate environments, believe that caste does not affect modern life, even though it continues to operate in subtle, insidious ways. The narrative of meritocracy in the corporate world often sidesteps caste discrimination. Corporates may argue that they hire based on “merit,” ignoring the structural disadvantages Dalits and other marginalized castes face in education and employment. The merit narrative often obscures the fact that caste privilege plays a major role in who has access to the opportunities that allow them to succeed.

Gender diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusion have gained significant traction in corporate spaces largely because they align with global business trends and international corporate standards. Multinational companies, in particular, bring with them global frameworks for diversity and inclusion, which prioritize gender and sexual orientation. These issues are often seen as universal, progressive, and more marketable (Perez-Chao & Pipic, 2024). Unlike gender or LGBTQ+ issues, caste is seen as a uniquely Indian phenomenon. Many companies — especially those aspiring to be seen as global players — may prefer to focus on issues that have international relevance, rather than something they see as a "domestic" issue like caste. Moreover, caste discussions can make companies uncomfortable, as it requires them to address deeply entrenched inequalities within their own ranks. Gender and LGBTQ+ diversity

initiatives, while important, are often viewed as “safer” forms of activism for companies. They allow corporations to signal their commitment to inclusion without addressing deeply controversial issues like caste. Caste discrimination, tied to historical and social hierarchies, is more contentious, and addressing it requires confronting social privilege and injustice that many corporates are uncomfortable acknowledging (Minj, 2024).

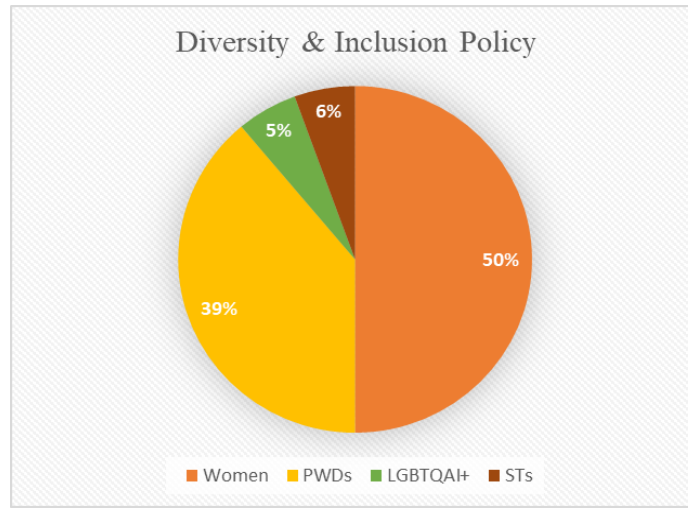
Addressing caste directly can provoke strong reactions. Caste is a highly sensitive topic, and discussions around it can lead to backlash from upper-caste individuals who may feel threatened by caste-based affirmative action or other inclusion measures. Many corporations may fear that adopting caste-sensitive policies could lead to internal conflicts, public backlash, or even legal challenges. The corporate world in India has often opposed caste-based reservations, viewing them as antithetical to merit. There is a perception that focusing on caste could lead to demands for affirmative action in the private sector, which many business leaders oppose. This creates a reluctance to acknowledge caste discrimination or incorporate it into any policy decisions.

Analyzing Diversity Reports and CSR Policies

To further validate the claims regarding the lack of Dalit representation in the workplace and the absence of targeted CSR policies for Dalits, an analysis of diversity and CSR policies was conducted. This analysis drew on Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) disclosures, focusing specifically on the top 10 companies listed on the National Stock Exchange. The Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) introduced the BRSR framework, mandating the top 1000 listed companies in India to disclose information related to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues. This framework aims to promote transparency and sustainable business practices, allowing investors access to standardized ESG disclosures to assess companies' sustainability risks and opportunities for informed decision-making. By focusing on the nine principles of the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGBRC), the BRSR framework includes essential (mandatory) and leadership (voluntary) indicators, encouraging companies to enhance their ESG transparency. Ultimately, this framework supports long-term value creation, attracting more capital and investment through improved ESG standards (EY India, 2023).

The top 10 companies on the NSE were chosen due to their influence on market trends, robust reporting standards, and significant social impact, setting benchmarks for corporate practices. The companies are Reliance Industries, Tata Group, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India, ITC Limited, and Hindustan Unilever. Their scale and resources make them ideal for assessing the presence or absence of Dalit representation and targeted CSR policies, as any gaps in these prominent firms may indicate systemic issues within corporate India. Additionally, focusing on these large entities provides a standardized, comparable sample that can reveal broader trends in diversity and CSR practices, with implications for investor and public accountability.

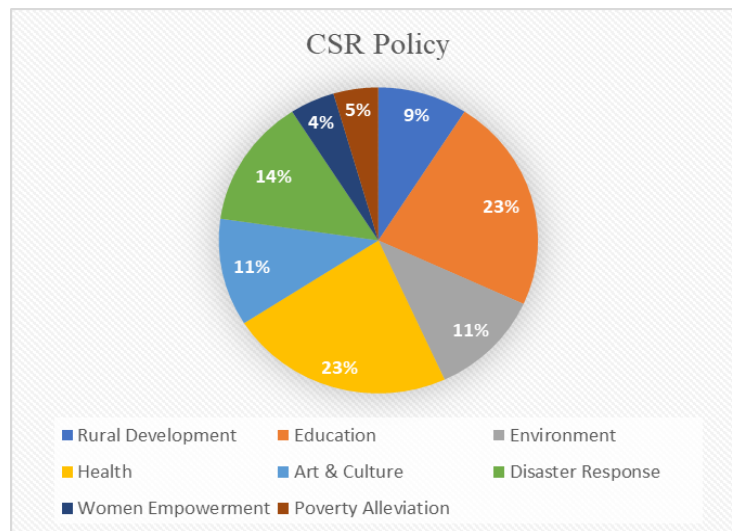
FIGURE 1: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY IDENTIFIED FROM BRSR DISCLOSURES



Source: author's own, compiled from multiple sources

Figure 1 showcases the groups organizations focus on while drafting diversity and inclusion policies. Analysis of the data shows that the majority of companies provide inclusion for women and people with disabilities by making provisions for specifically hiring them. SBI can be excluded from this as they follow affirmative action policy being a public sector bank. Only TATA group has provisions for hiring people from LGBTQ+ community. Interestingly, TATA Steel has provisions for hiring people from the ST communities under the Affirmative Action Community with a special focus on tribal community. Their report states that 12% of the workforce comes from the affirmative action groups.

FIGURE 2: CSR FOCUS AREAS IDENTIFIED FROM BRSR DISCLOSURES



Source: Author's own

Figure 2, based on a plain reading of the CSR policies of the companies being studied,

highlights the different heads under which CSR-related activities can be broadly classified. CSR policies have similar focus areas, the most popular being health and education. Other focus areas are rural development, environment, art & culture, disaster response, women empowerment, and poverty alleviation. No company has Dalits as their targets for CSR policy and throughout the reports, “poor” has been used as a vague umbrella. No company except ITC Limited provided data on the beneficiaries of the CSR activities. ITC also has data on ST, SC, and women beneficiaries.

Inclusivity and Targeted CSR Policies

The issues of inclusivity and targeted CSR policies are closely interconnected. Corporations must first address and eliminate casteism within their own structures before attempting to tackle broader caste-related issues. Without such internal reflection and reform, any CSR efforts will be largely performative and unlikely to produce meaningful outcomes. Therefore, it is essential that both inclusivity and targeted CSR initiatives be pursued in tandem.

CSR policies serve as a means for corporations to engage with the broader society, giving back to the communities that have contributed to their success. Corporates should view this as an opportunity to tackle the systemic issues facing the country. This is not an act of charity or philanthropy, but rather a way for them to fulfil their responsibilities to society (PIB, 2024). Hence if corporates were to be more inclusive of Dalits, there will be more chances of concerns of Dalits being acknowledged and an effort to address them through CSR policies. The umbrella term “poor” denotes how CSR projects in India broadly refer to underprivileged people without attempting to distinguish between different marginalized groups, such as Dalits. This generalized approach is problematic because it overlooks the specific challenges and deeper forms of marginalization that Dalits endure, particularly those from rural areas compared to the general poor population. While CSR projects claim to serve the rural poor or economically disadvantaged, they fail to account for the intersectionality of caste, which compounds poverty for Dalits. As a result, Dalits are doubly marginalized — first by their economic status and then by their caste, which is not addressed directly.

This homogenization dilutes the unique struggles of Dalits, leading to further exclusion from CSR efforts that should ideally focus on more nuanced, targeted interventions. The use of “poor” as an umbrella category thus prevents CSR projects from addressing caste-based exclusion and entrenched social hierarchies that continue to oppress Dalit communities (Bihari, 2023). As highlighted earlier in the paper, the lack of representation of Dalits in higher managerial positions, dominance of upper caste or non-Dalits in private corporates and the operation of caste hierarchies within the corporate structure ensure that no such targeted efforts could be made.

Justifications for Dalit Representation

Research indicates that diversity within corporate leadership can significantly enhance organizational outcomes. Drawing on an American study (Conrad, 2023) that examines the positive impacts of workplace diversity and Black CEOs, an attempt was made to explore how increased representation can similarly benefit Dalits within Indian corporations. Race and caste are not the same. The paper does not conflate the terms but instead draws parallels based on the structural aspects of marginalization. This comparison leverages insights from international

research on diversity to highlight potential benefits.

Despite growing attention to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI&B) in corporate America, the higher one looks at organizational hierarchies, the more significant the disparity between Black and White employees. For instance, Black individuals make up only 5.9% of all chief executives in the U.S., with just over 1% among Fortune 500 CEOs. This study found that the market capitalization of companies with Black CEOs increased within three days of their appointment, while companies appointing White CEOs saw a decline over the same period.

The market's response to Black CEO appointments is one of many examples that highlight the business case for DEI&B. Research from Great Place to Work supports this, showing that the most successful companies consistently prioritize DEI&B, regardless of economic conditions. Data like this should encourage executives and investors to implement comprehensive diversity initiatives and enhance their public messaging on DEI&B. In fact, 80% of Fortune 500 companies justify their focus on DEI&B through a business case, while only 5% frame it as a fairness issue centred on equity and equal opportunity. Although the business case might resonate with top executives, it does not always inspire broader societal change. For real progress, especially for Black individuals, the fairness case may be more effective.

However, neither the business case nor the fairness case resonates as much with underrepresented candidates as a neutral approach, which does not try to justify DEI&B but treats it as inherently valuable — much like qualities such as trust, innovation, and integrity. This neutral approach recognizes the intrinsic value of all human beings. While the business case exists, prioritizing DEI&B should not be seen as a purely strategic decision like a merger or acquisition. Rather, it should be more about the human aspect. Business leaders wield significant influence, far beyond their products and services. They impact politics by funding campaigns and shaping culture through their messaging and advertising. From entertainment to food industries, these leaders do not just react to human behaviour; they actively shape it. Therefore, they must take responsibility for promoting DEI&B, both within the workplace and in the broader society where their businesses prosper.

A similar case for Dalit inclusion in Indian corporates can be made by focusing on the systemic disparity in representation and the untapped potential Dalits bring to corporate spaces. Indian corporations striving to include Dalit leaders could not only strengthen internal corporate culture but also enhance public and investor trust, particularly as caste equity should be seen as a societal priority. Finally, as major influencers of societal change in India, corporations wield significant power to promote social equity beyond mere business practices. From political influence to cultural impact, corporate leaders have the potential to shape societal norms around caste and equality, which can bridge social divides and foster a more inclusive society.

Institutional Theory for Justification

Institutional theory, as applied to corporate social responsibility (CSR), suggests that companies adopt certain practices not just because they are effective, but because they conform to the norms and expectations of the society in which they operate. This helps them gain legitimacy, survive longer, and succeed. The idea is that organizations follow established societal standards, and by doing so, they gain benefits like increased respect, stability, support

from the community, and a better ability to attract employees. Later, DiMaggio and Powell expanded this theory by introducing the concept of isomorphism, which means that organizations become similar over time. They described three types of pressures that lead to this phenomenon (Ashrafi, Magnan, Adams, & Walker, 2020):

- Coercive isomorphism: Companies conform because of legal or formal pressures.
- Mimetic isomorphism: Companies imitate others, especially when they are uncertain about what to do.
- Normative isomorphism: Companies adopt similar practices because of professional standards or shared norms in the industry.

In India, the fight against caste discrimination is a significant social issue. By adopting targeted CSR policies for Dalits, corporations align themselves with societal expectations of fairness, equity, and social justice.

If leading companies in India begin implementing targeted CSR policies for Dalits, others may follow suit to remain competitive or avoid being perceived as socially regressive. This imitation helps companies maintain legitimacy in a socially conscious market. Institutional theory emphasizes that organizations respond to the demands of key stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, governments, and civil society groups, to secure legitimacy. The growing activism around Dalit rights and social inclusion has empowered stakeholders to demand more from corporations in terms of addressing caste-based exclusion. There is ample evidence present where corporations do talk about issues of diversity and inclusivity when it comes to gender, race and sexuality. It is time for them to adopt a more informed approach, recognizing and addressing caste issues within the complex web of intersecting differences that exist in Indian society. By adopting targeted CSR policies for Dalits, corporations contribute to social integration and upliftment, directly addressing one of the most entrenched forms of inequality. This not only benefits marginalized communities but also helps create a more just and equitable society, which is ultimately beneficial for corporate stability and social harmony.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Companies listed on the National Stock Exchange's main board spent INR155 billion on CSR in FY23 (A. Kumar, 2024). Since such substantial funds are allocated annually, corporates must use the money effectively to produce real societal impact. Relying solely on companies to ensure targeted CSR efforts, however, may not be feasible, as they have often shown limited interest in investing the time and resources needed for such initiatives, viewing them as lacking economic benefit. Thus, waiting for companies to voluntarily implement CSR policies for Dalit upliftment may not yield results. The government should intervene to make corporations more inclusive to address the systemic inequalities faced by marginalized groups like Dalits and fulfil constitutional commitments to equality and justice. It is time for the government to step in, using a balanced mix of soft and hard law approaches. A purely hard law approach may interfere with corporate autonomy, potentially causing more harm than good, so a combination of flexible and binding measures is essential to encourage compliance without stifling corporate functioning.

To ensure corporates actively develop CSR policies targeting Dalit empowerment and upliftment, a comprehensive approach is essential. Governments can incentivize such initiatives by offering subsidies to companies that develop and implement CSR policies specifically aimed at empowering marginalized communities. This could encourage companies to allocate

resources toward these initiatives. Regulatory bodies like the SEBI could mandate disclosures on caste-related CSR impacts as part of frameworks like the BRSR. As highlighted earlier in the paper, ITC Limited is already doing such disclosures on the beneficiaries of its CSR-related activities; mandating such disclosures will encourage transparency and accountability.

Corporations should engage directly with Dalit community organizations and representatives to create programs that address genuine community needs. Additionally, capacity-building programs like skills training, scholarships, and targeted employment programs for Dalits can enhance both empowerment and diversity in the corporate sector. As discussed earlier, an affirmative action community program like that of Tata Steel is a good example of similar measures that can be adopted by others. Diversifying the corporate workspace by making it inclusive and ensuring Dalit representation in corporate boards or leadership roles would also amplify advocacy for equitable policies within organizations. Collaborating with NGOs, government bodies, and academic institutions can provide valuable insights for designing effective and sustainable Dalit-focused CSR policies. More representation can perhaps ensure some policies that address the needs of Dalit communities and promote equity within the organization. Legal mandates could require a portion of CSR funds to be directed toward marginalized communities. This can be done by introducing public-private-partnership activities related to Dalit empowerment as a separate entry in Schedule 7 of the Companies Act, so that companies can effectively direct their CSR funds towards such activities. These strategies can create an environment where companies actively contribute to Dalit upliftment through meaningful and measurable CSR initiatives.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper highlights the critical need for Indian corporations to actively incorporate Dalit empowerment into their corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks. By prioritizing Dalit-focused initiatives within CSR policies, corporations can become agents of positive change, contributing to the broader societal goal of caste equity and inclusion. Through a combination of inclusive hiring practices, community development programs, and educational support, companies can help dismantle systemic barriers that limit Dalit advancement. This approach not only fulfils the ethical objectives of CSR but also enhances the credibility and social impact of corporate entities. Reservation alone cannot fully address caste discrimination; CSR can serve as a valuable tool in bridging existing gaps and promoting sustainable, meaningful inclusion. (Hindustan Unilever Limited, 2023)

Ultimately, a commitment to CSR policies that address caste-based disparities aligns with the fundamental goals of corporate social responsibility, emphasizing that economic success should go together with social progress. By embedding principles of social justice and equity within their CSR strategies, Indian corporations can lead the way toward a more inclusive and fair society, reinforcing their role as responsible stakeholders in India's socio-economic landscape.

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