

CSR and Social Justice: An Ambedkarite Perspective on Responsible Business, Gender Equality and Inclusion in India

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility is a mechanism through which businesses contribute to social development by addressing issues of inequality and exclusion. However, conventional approaches have been based on charity and philanthropy, focusing on social development without addressing the structural dimensions of social inequality. This paper examines CSR from an Ambedkarite perspective, arguing that CSR can not only be seen as a tool for advancing social development but can also be advanced as an instrument for social justice, equality, and inclusive development. Drawing upon Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas of equality, dignity, education, economic empowerment, and the eradication of caste-based discrimination, this study critically examines the possibilities and limitations of CSR practices in women's empowerment in contemporary India. It explores how CSR can address the issue of structural disadvantages faced by women, particularly those arising from social, economic, educational, and caste-based inequalities.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Ambedkarite Perspective, Equality, Women Empowerment

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increasingly emerged as an important mechanism through which businesses engage with wider social and economic concerns. Early approaches to CSR largely emphasized corporate obligations and philanthropy, while later scholarship broadened the concept to include ethical responsibilities, stakeholder interests, and the social consequences of corporate activity (Carroll, 1979; Wood, 1991). This broader understanding is particularly significant in India, where corporate activities operate within historically embedded inequalities related to caste, gender, class, and socioeconomic status.

The Indian context gives particular importance to CSR because the Companies Act, 2013 formally recognizes areas such as education, vocational skills, livelihood enhancement, gender equality, and women's empowerment as legitimate CSR activities. Thus, CSR has increasingly become an important avenue through which corporations participate in social development and address disadvantaged communities (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2013). However, the effectiveness of such interventions

depends not only on the benefits they provide but also on whether they address the structural inequalities underlying social exclusion.

Women's empowerment is particularly relevant in this context. Despite improvements in education and development, women continue to face significant barriers to employment, entrepreneurship, financial resources, and economic opportunities. Contemporary CSR initiatives increasingly respond to these challenges through programmes involving education, skill development, healthcare, digital and financial literacy, entrepreneurship, livelihood generation, and employment. Such interventions can strengthen women's capabilities and economic participation, but they also raise an important question: do they merely provide welfare and opportunities, or do they address the structural conditions that produce women's inequality?

This question becomes particularly significant when CSR is examined through the perspective of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's philosophy places structural inequality at the centre of social justice. His critique of caste demonstrated how social institutions can determine access to education, employment, resources, dignity, and political representation. Kumar et al. (2022) argue that Ambedkar's writings provide a subaltern perspective for understanding inequality and offer important implications for organizational ethics. Their work suggests that organizations should not merely respond to inequality but critically examine how institutional arrangements reproduce or challenge it.

Ambedkar's ideas are particularly relevant to women's empowerment because he understood caste and gender as interconnected forms of social inequality. In *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, Ambedkar (1917/1979) identified endogamy as central to the reproduction of caste, thereby highlighting the importance of regulating marriage and women's social and sexual autonomy. Subsequent scholarship shows that his engagement with the women's question extended to education, equality, individuality, property rights, legal status, and social emancipation (Ghosal, 2023; Singh, 2020). His advocacy of the Hindu Code Bill further demonstrated his commitment to transforming women's position within marriage, inheritance, and property relations.

Thus, Ambedkar's conception of women's empowerment extends beyond welfare or economic assistance. It encompasses education, dignity, economic independence, legal equality, property rights, social participation, and freedom from caste- and gender-based discrimination. This perspective provides an important basis for evaluating contemporary CSR initiatives. Programmes that provide skills, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and education may contribute to empowerment, but an Ambedkarite approach requires asking whether they also promote substantive equality, dignity, autonomy, and social inclusion.

The present study therefore examines CSR through an Ambedkarite perspective on responsible business, with particular attention to women's empowerment in contemporary India. It seeks to assess the extent to which existing CSR initiatives correspond with Ambedkar's principles of equality, dignity, education, economic empowerment, social justice, and inclusion, while identifying their limitations in addressing structural inequality. The study argues that CSR has the potential to move beyond conventional philanthropy toward a more transformative approach in which women's empowerment is understood not

merely as welfare or development, but as a question of rights, equality, dignity, representation, and social justice.

2. Review of Literature

Kumar, Bapuji, and Mir (2022) provide one of the most directly relevant contributions to the relationship between Ambedkar's philosophy and business ethics. Drawing on Ambedkar's writings, the authors examine inequality from a subaltern perspective and argue that organizations can both reproduce and challenge systems of inequality. They particularly emphasize Ambedkar's critique of caste, comprehensive institutional reform, and representational politics. The study proposes an Ambedkarite ethical perspective for extending business ethics beyond narrow organizational boundaries and towards broader questions of social justice and inequality. This work is highly relevant to CSR because it suggests that responsible business should address structural inequalities rather than merely undertake philanthropic activities.

Bapuji and Chrispal (2020) examine economic inequality through the institutional lens of caste and demonstrate how caste structures influence the distribution of resources, access to opportunities, and rewards for economic contributions. Although the article is not specifically about CSR, its organizational perspective is highly relevant to socially responsible business practices. The authors argue that inequality is reproduced through mutually reinforcing institutional processes, suggesting that organizations cannot be separated from the social structures within which they operate. From an Ambedkarite perspective, this provides a basis for evaluating CSR according to whether corporate practices challenge or reproduce historically embedded inequalities in access to economic resources and opportunities.

Chrispal, Bapuji, and Zietsma (2021) examine the largely neglected relationship between caste and organization studies. The authors argue that caste remains an important institutional force influencing workplaces, employment relations, precarious work, and broader organizational processes. Their analysis calls for greater scholarly attention to caste in organizational research and emphasizes the importance of creating more inclusive organizations. The study is particularly significant for an Ambedkarite CSR framework because Ambedkar's philosophy places the destruction of caste-based hierarchy at the centre of social transformation. Consequently, CSR initiatives concerning diversity, inclusion, employment, and community development should consider caste as an important dimension of social inequality rather than treating marginalized communities as a homogeneous category.

Alamgir, Bapuji, and Mir (2022), in their introduction to a special issue on ethical organizations in South Asia, highlight the need to bring South Asian social realities into business ethics scholarship. The authors point to caste, class, gender, community, and other forms of inequality as important dimensions for understanding organizations and ethical business practices. The work is particularly relevant to Ambedkarite CSR because it challenges the dominance of universalized Western approaches to business ethics and encourages attention to historically specific forms of inequality. It therefore creates theoretical space for interpreting CSR through an Indian and subaltern framework centred on justice, inclusion, and social transformation.

Bapuji, Ertug, and Shaw (2020) review research on the relationship between organizations and societal economic inequality. Based on a review of 151 conceptual and empirical studies, the authors demonstrate

that organizations are not merely passive actors affected by inequality but can also contribute to its creation and reproduction. Their findings are significant for CSR because they question approaches that portray corporations only as agents of social welfare while overlooking their contribution to unequal outcomes. When read alongside Ambedkar's critique of structural inequality, the study supports a conception of CSR that considers both the positive social contributions of corporations and the inequalities that may emerge through corporate employment, compensation, market practices, and resource distribution

Bapuji, Husted, Lu, and Mir (2018) examine how firms contribute to societal economic inequality through processes of value creation, appropriation, and distribution. Their work shifts attention from whether firms generate economic value to how that value is distributed among different stakeholders. This argument has considerable relevance to an Ambedkarite understanding of corporate responsibility because Ambedkar's conception of social justice emphasized substantive equality rather than merely formal equality. The study consequently provides a useful conceptual basis for examining whether CSR and corporate practices distribute economic and social benefits equitably among workers, communities, and other marginalized stakeholders. It suggests that responsible business should be assessed not only by the amount spent on CSR but also by the wider distributive consequences of corporate activity.

Pandey and Dubey (2023) examine the role of corporations in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, particularly beyond their mandatory CSR obligations. The study highlights how companies contributed through healthcare infrastructure, food distribution, oxygen supply, medical equipment, and support for vulnerable communities. It argues that corporate networks involving NGOs, expert agencies, and civil society can provide valuable human and material resources during catastrophic situations (Pandey & Dubey, 2023). The authors further suggest that businesses possess significant capacities that can be mobilized during future crises through appropriate governmental and policy support. Overall, the study presents CSR as a potential mechanism for strengthening corporate participation in social welfare and disaster management.

Bajarappa and Manasa (2026) explicitly examine contemporary CSR through the philosophical framework of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The authors argue that CSR has moved beyond traditional philanthropy towards concerns involving social justice, ethical governance, sustainability, and inclusive development. They identify Ambedkarite principles such as equality, accountability, human dignity, and the welfare of marginalized communities as useful foundations for developing a more people-centred model of CSR. The study further connects Ambedkar's human-centred conception of development with sustainable development and argues that corporate initiatives should address structural inequalities rather than focus exclusively on economic objectives. This is one of the most directly relevant recent studies for developing an Ambedkarite framework of CSR.

Ray (2025) applies an Ambedkarite perspective to environmental politics and connects social justice with ecological sustainability. The study argues that environmental problems cannot be separated from existing caste and social inequalities because marginalized communities frequently experience unequal access to environmental resources and unequal exposure to environmental risks. Although the article focuses on environmental politics rather than CSR, its argument has important implications for responsible corporate behaviour. An Ambedkarite CSR framework can therefore incorporate environmental responsibility with

distributive justice by asking who benefits from corporate development, who bears its environmental costs, and whether marginalized communities participate in environmental decision-making.

Pandey and Dubey (2023) examine CSR and community-development initiatives undertaken by leading CSR-spending companies in India. Their study demonstrates that major corporations undertake CSR interventions across areas such as education, healthcare, livelihood, infrastructure, and community development. Although the study does not explicitly employ an Ambedkarite theoretical framework, it provides an empirical basis for examining CSR as an instrument of community development. From an Ambedkarite perspective, such initiatives can be evaluated more critically by asking whether they merely provide welfare benefits or actually promote equality, empowerment, dignity, and the social and economic advancement of marginalized communities.

Tomar and Seth (2025) examine CSR through the broader framework of Indian knowledge traditions and argue that corporate responsibility can be understood through culturally embedded ethical principles rather than exclusively through Western CSR theories. Their study emphasizes concepts such as welfare, ethical conduct, service, and responsibility towards society. While the paper is not exclusively Ambedkarite, it is relevant to the present research because it supports the development of indigenous approaches to CSR. Within this broader Indian framework, Ambedkar's principles of equality, social justice, dignity, and fraternity can provide a specifically social-justice-oriented foundation for responsible business practices in contemporary India.

3. Research Gap and Objective

The reviewed literature indicates that Ambedkar's ideas are increasingly entering business ethics and organization studies, particularly through the themes of caste, inequality, representation, inclusion, and social justice. However, there remains a clear gap in research specifically examining Corporate Social Responsibility as an Ambedkarite practice. Existing scholarship either examines Ambedkar primarily through social and political philosophy or discusses organizations through the broader lenses of caste and inequality. Only a limited number of recent studies explicitly connect Ambedkarite principles with CSR. Further research is required to develop and empirically examine a framework in which liberty, equality, dignity, fraternity, social justice, representation, and inclusive development become criteria for evaluating corporate responsibility in India. Therefore, this research aims to explore the alignment between Ambedkar's ideas of social justice, equality, and women's inclusive development and contemporary CSR policies and practices in India.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and exploratory research design based on secondary data. It examines CSR and women's empowerment through an Ambedkarite framework focusing on equality, dignity, education, economic empowerment, social justice, and inclusion.

Secondary data were collected from research articles, books, policy and legislative documents, and published reports on CSR initiatives. Selected contemporary CSR projects for women in India were examined, covering areas such as healthcare, education, skill development, digital and financial literacy, entrepreneurship, livelihood generation, self-help groups, and employment (The CSR Journal, 2025).

The selected initiatives were analysed thematically and compared with key dimensions of Ambedkar's ideas on women's empowerment. The analysis focuses on both areas of alignment, such as education, economic independence, dignity, and inclusion, and gaps, particularly regarding caste discrimination, patriarchy, legal equality, property rights, and structural inequality. The study therefore assesses whether contemporary CSR represents primarily a welfare-oriented approach or has the potential to function as a transformative instrument of social justice and inclusive development for women.

Ambedkar's Ideas on Women and Women's Empowerment

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's approach to women's empowerment was deeply connected with his broader philosophy of liberty, equality, fraternity, social justice, and human dignity. His writings and political interventions demonstrate that he did not view women's emancipation merely as a welfare issue; rather, he understood gender inequality as embedded in social institutions, particularly caste, marriage, family, religion, and property relations. Scholars have consequently emphasized that Ambedkar's engagement with the "woman question" was an important component of his critique of caste and his project of democratic social transformation (Ghosal, 2023; Singh, 2020).

Women's Equality and Social Progress

Ambedkar regarded the advancement of women as fundamental to the progress of society. His conception of social justice required women to enjoy equal status, dignity, and opportunities rather than remaining subordinate within traditional social structures. His approach therefore went beyond protective welfare and emphasized women as equal citizens and autonomous individuals. Ghosal (2023) observes that Ambedkar's efforts for women's emancipation combined social reform with constitutional and legislative measures intended to secure substantive equality. Similarly, Singh (2020) argues that Ambedkar sought freedom, equality, and individuality for women through both social criticism and legal reform.

This understanding is particularly relevant to contemporary women's empowerment because it shifts attention from simply providing benefits to women toward transforming the conditions that create their dependence and exclusion.

Education as an Instrument of Women's Empowerment

Education occupied a central position in Ambedkar's philosophy of emancipation. He considered education a means through which socially marginalized people, including women, could develop awareness, self-respect, and the capacity to challenge oppressive social practices. Contemporary scholarship on Ambedkar's approach to women's empowerment similarly identifies education as an important component of his broader strategy for improving women's social and economic position (Lucy et al., 2024).

For Ambedkar, therefore, women's education should not be understood merely in terms of literacy. Education had an emancipatory function because it could enable women to become aware of their rights and participate more effectively in social, economic, and political life. In an Ambedkarite framework, education becomes a means of agency, dignity, and social transformation.

Interconnection Between Caste and Gender

One of Ambedkar's most significant intellectual contributions to understanding women's oppression can be found in his early work *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*. Ambedkar

(1917/1979) explained that endogamy was fundamental to the maintenance of caste. Because caste boundaries depended upon regulating marriage within the caste, the regulation of women, marriage, widowhood, and sexuality became closely connected with the reproduction of caste itself.

This insight has become particularly important in subsequent scholarship on caste and gender. Singh (2020) argues that Ambedkar recognized caste and gender as interconnected structures rather than treating women's oppression as an isolated social problem. Similarly, scholarship examining Ambedkar through the concept of Brahmanical patriarchy highlights his understanding that caste hierarchy and patriarchal control reinforce each other.

Thus, an Ambedkarite understanding of women's empowerment requires not only improving women's individual circumstances but also confronting structural forms of caste- and gender-based inequality.

Critique of Patriarchy and Traditional Social Institutions

Ambedkar critically examined religious and social traditions that legitimized the subordinate status of women. His writings on Hindu social order examined how religious prescriptions and social customs historically restricted women's independence and reinforced male authority. His broader critique of Brahmanical social organization therefore included an important critique of the institutional foundations of women's subordination (Ambedkar, 1987).

Recent scholarship has interpreted this aspect of Ambedkar's work as anticipating later discussions of Brahmanical patriarchy, in which caste hierarchy is reproduced partly through patriarchal control over women and marriage. From this perspective, women's empowerment requires changing not only individual attitudes but also social institutions that systematically reproduce unequal power relations.

Women's Rights in Marriage and Family

Ambedkar considered reform of marriage and family relations essential to achieving gender equality. This became especially evident through his involvement with the Hindu Code Bill. The proposed reforms addressed major issues concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance, and women's legal status within the family. Singh (2020) notes that these reforms were intended to place women on a more equal legal footing with men, particularly in matters of inheritance and marriage.

The importance Ambedkar attached to the issue can also be seen in the contemporary legislative discussions surrounding the Hindu Code Bill, where equal status for women was explicitly connected with the broader reorganization and progress of Indian society.

The underlying principle was significant: a woman should be recognized as an individual possessing rights rather than merely as a dependent member of the patriarchal family.

Property Rights and Economic Independence

Ambedkar recognized that social equality could not be separated from economic rights. His support for reforming inheritance and property relations through the Hindu Code Bill represented an important attempt to strengthen women's economic position within the family. The proposed legislation sought substantial changes in women's legal rights relating to inheritance and family property (Singh, 2020).

Ghosal (2023) similarly emphasizes the significance of Ambedkar's legislative interventions for safeguarding women's rights. From an empowerment perspective, access to property and economic resources is important because legal equality without economic independence may leave existing relations of dependence largely intact.

Ambedkar's approach can therefore be interpreted as supporting a multidimensional conception of women's empowerment involving both social status and material resources.

Women as Equal Citizens: Constitutional and Legal Empowerment

Ambedkar's ideas concerning women were also connected to his broader commitment to constitutional democracy. As chairman of the Drafting Committee and independent India's first Law Minister, he played a central role in India's constitutional development while consistently emphasizing dignity, freedom, rights, and social democracy.

His approach is important because it conceptualizes women's empowerment as a question of citizenship and rights, rather than benevolence toward a disadvantaged group. The constitutional framework of equality before law, non-discrimination, and equal opportunity provided institutional foundations through which women's claims to equal citizenship could be advanced. Ghosal (2023) therefore connects Ambedkar's contribution to women's emancipation with both constitutional protections and legislative reform.

Dignity and Self-Respect of Women

An equally important element of Ambedkar's thought was human dignity. His emancipatory politics sought to enable marginalized people to reject social identities imposed upon them by hierarchical structures and to claim equal human worth.

Paik (2022), examining Ambedkar's engagement with Dalit women and sexuality, demonstrates that his politics involved complex questions of caste, sexuality, social inclusion, and the construction of *manuski*, or human dignity. Her analysis shows that Ambedkar's interventions concerning women need to be understood within his wider project of transforming the social conditions through which marginalized people could claim humanity and dignity.

Consequently, an Ambedkarite conception of women's empowerment cannot be reduced to income, education, or employment alone. Dignity, recognition, freedom from humiliation, and the capacity to exercise agency are equally important dimensions of empowerment.

Women as Agents of Social Transformation

Ambedkar's philosophy did not conceptualize marginalized women simply as passive recipients of reform. His larger emancipatory project emphasized the capacity of oppressed groups to participate in transforming their own social circumstances. Scholarship examining his engagement with women consequently highlights both his legislative interventions and the participation of women within anti-caste struggles (Ghosal, 2023; Paik, 2022).

This distinction is important for contemporary empowerment programmes. An Ambedkarite approach would regard women not simply as beneficiaries of development schemes but as rights-bearing

participants and decision-makers who should have a voice in institutions and programmes affecting their lives.

Ambedkar's Multidimensional Conception of Women's Empowerment

Taken together, Ambedkar's writings and interventions suggest a multidimensional understanding of women's empowerment. It encompasses education, economic independence, property and inheritance rights, equality within marriage, legal protection, political citizenship, dignity, self-respect, and freedom from caste- and gender-based discrimination (Ghosal, 2023; Lucy et al., 2024; Singh, 2020).

His contribution is particularly significant because he connected individual empowerment with structural transformation. Women cannot be fully empowered merely by being incorporated into existing unequal institutions; the social structures that produce inequality must themselves be reformed.

CSR and Women's Empowerment

From an Ambedkarite perspective, CSR programmes for women should move beyond charity-oriented interventions and focus on substantive equality and structural empowerment. CSR initiatives could therefore be evaluated according to whether they provide marginalized women with quality education and skills, sustainable employment, entrepreneurship and access to productive resources, financial independence, leadership opportunities, legal awareness, dignity, and participation in decision-making.

Such an approach would allow CSR to be conceptualized not merely as a mechanism of women's welfare, but as an instrument of women's empowerment and social justice. In particular, an Ambedkarite framework draws attention to women facing intersecting forms of caste, gender, and socioeconomic disadvantage (Singh, 2020; Paik, 2022).

Recent CSR Projects and Initiatives for Women's Empowerment in India

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has increasingly emerged as an important mechanism for addressing gender-based socioeconomic inequalities in India. Contemporary CSR interventions for women have expanded beyond conventional philanthropic assistance to include education, skill development, healthcare, digital and financial literacy, entrepreneurship, livelihood generation, self-help groups (SHGs), and employment creation. These initiatives are particularly significant for women from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds because they seek to improve access to resources, capabilities, and livelihood opportunities. The CSR Journal (2025) reports that major corporate initiatives in India have increasingly focused on areas such as girl-child education, maternal health, menstrual hygiene, skill development, gender equality, financial inclusion, and the economic empowerment of marginalized women.

One notable recent initiative is the **Swasth Mahila Swasth Bharat (SMSB)** campaign undertaken by Xiaomi India in partnership with the Yuvraj Singh Foundation (YouWeCan). The initiative focuses on women's healthcare, particularly breast cancer screening and awareness. According to The CSR Journal (2025), Phase I of the programme was implemented across 15 aspirational districts in 15 states and screened approximately 1.5 lakh women while providing breast-health education to more than four lakh women. The programme also focused on awareness regarding early detection and self-breast examination, with a subsequent phase planned to reach an additional 60,000 women. From an empowerment perspective, this initiative demonstrates the importance of healthcare access as a dimension of women's well-being and social participation. Rather than limiting CSR to economic interventions, it illustrates how

corporate initiatives can address health-related vulnerabilities that may restrict women's ability to participate fully in family, community, and economic life.

Another important initiative is the partnership between **Pearl Academy and SETU Foundation**, which focuses on developing industry-ready skills among disadvantaged women and youth. The programme has reportedly provided technical, creative, and professional skills to more than 260 students, with over 100 women subsequently employed in fashion designing and beauty and wellness roles. The initiative provides specialized training in areas such as fashion design, garment construction, makeup, hair, and grooming, while its curriculum is aligned with contemporary industry requirements (The CSR Journal, 2025). The significance of this initiative lies in its emphasis on employability and economic independence. Skill development can strengthen women's productive capabilities and improve their prospects for wage employment or entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to a shift from welfare-based support toward economically oriented empowerment.

CSR interventions have also addressed the vulnerabilities of elderly and destitute women. The **Malabar Group's Grandma Home** in Bengaluru, supported through the Malabar Charitable Trust, provides shelter, food, medical assistance, and mental and physical healthcare facilities for elderly women. The facility has a reported capacity of 104 women and includes medical services, a dialysis centre, clinic, pharmacy, and trained social workers for elderly care (The CSR Journal, 2025). Although this initiative is primarily welfare-oriented rather than employment-oriented, it demonstrates another dimension of women's empowerment—namely, protection, security, health, and dignity for women facing extreme social and economic vulnerability. Such initiatives are particularly relevant for women who may not be able to benefit immediately from conventional skill-development or entrepreneurship programmes.

Digital and technological capabilities constitute another emerging area of women-oriented CSR. The **Women Empowerment Through Technology** initiative of American Express, in partnership with NASSCOM Foundation, seeks to train 700 women graduates through employment-linked technology and entrepreneurship training. The programme covers areas including cloud and data analytics, blockchain, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, along with communication, personality development, and interview skills. Successful participants are also expected to receive professional certification and employment opportunities (The CSR Journal, 2025). This initiative is significant because the digital economy increasingly influences access to employment and entrepreneurship. By providing women with technology-oriented skills and connecting training with employment, CSR can potentially reduce gender-based disparities in access to emerging economic opportunities.

Similarly, **BNP Paribas**, in partnership with NASSCOM Foundation, has undertaken an employment-linked skill-development programme for marginalized young women engineering graduates. The initiative provides technical training in areas such as Python development and data analytics, together with soft skills, business etiquette, problem-solving, and interview preparation. The programme reportedly works with women engineering graduates from Tier II and Tier III institutions in Bengaluru, Tumkur, Mumbai, and Pune and facilitates employment opportunities through placement drives and job fairs (The CSR Journal, 2025). The initiative is particularly relevant to the question of inclusive development because it seeks to address both technical skill gaps and unequal access to employment opportunities among women from marginalized backgrounds.

Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages, in collaboration with the Y4D Foundation, represents another significant example of CSR focused on women's financial and digital empowerment. The initiative sought to provide financial and digital literacy training to 25,000 women across India. Its financial literacy component included banking, account opening, UPI, investment guidance, net banking, and awareness of government schemes, while the digital component included mobile banking, digital market linkages, and cyber safety (The CSR Journal, 2025). The programme was subsequently reported as completed for 25,000 women and incorporated practical knowledge intended to strengthen women's participation in the digital economy and household financial decision-making. Such interventions are important because financial literacy can increase women's ability to independently access formal financial services and participate in economic decision-making.

The **Visa–United Way Mumbai** initiative provides a more explicitly entrepreneurial model of women's empowerment. Visa pledged US\$1 million to support women-owned and women-focused businesses over a three-year period across 170 villages and towns in Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, and Karnataka. The programme aims to train more than 8,500 women and focuses on financial inclusion, entrepreneurship development, and the formation of sustainable self-help groups (The CSR Journal, 2025). The significance of this intervention lies in its emphasis on combining entrepreneurial capabilities with access to financial services and collective organization. From an empowerment perspective, such an approach can potentially strengthen women's economic agency by linking skills with financial inclusion and institutional support. The partnership between **Standard Chartered Bank and Habitat for Humanity India** further illustrates the role of CSR in promoting livelihood-based empowerment. The initiative, *Empowering Women and Improving Life through Livelihood Interventions*, reportedly supported 969 women in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Odisha through upskilling, alternative livelihood opportunities, and assistance in establishing micro-enterprises. The programme also sought to strengthen 85 self-help groups and provided training in business development, marketing, government schemes, and financial record-keeping, along with seed funding and technical assistance (The CSR Journal, 2025). This model is particularly significant because it combines individual skill development with collective organization through SHGs. It therefore addresses not only employability but also entrepreneurship, access to resources, financial management, and collective economic action.

The **AU Udyogini programme of AU Small Finance Bank** provides another example of entrepreneurship-focused CSR among rural women. According to The CSR Journal (2025), the programme had empowered 787 women to become self-reliant entrepreneurs in Jaipur, Karauli, and Baran districts of Rajasthan, with 133 women-owned businesses inaugurated. Initially launched as a pilot project involving 25 rural women, the programme provides training for establishing different types of businesses, including spice-related enterprises, handicrafts, and beauty parlours, while also facilitating market linkages (The CSR Journal, 2025). The programme is significant because it links vocational training with entrepreneurship and market access, thereby attempting to create sustainable income-generating opportunities for women from disadvantaged rural backgrounds.

Women's entry into traditionally male-dominated occupations is illustrated by **Hyundai Motor India Foundation's Drive4Progress initiative**. In collaboration with Navjyoti Transforming Lives & Careers Society and BluSmart, the initiative sought to provide employment opportunities to 250 trained women

drivers. The broader programme aims to train more than 1,500 young people, with women constituting at least 30% of the beneficiaries, and focuses on participants from several Indian states and economically disadvantaged communities. Training includes professional driving, road safety, vehicle maintenance, customer service, and soft skills, with support for obtaining permanent driving licences and certification (The CSR Journal, 2025). This initiative is particularly noteworthy from a gender-equality perspective because it challenges occupational stereotypes and creates opportunities for women to enter a sector traditionally characterized by male dominance. Its employment-linked design also strengthens the connection between skill development and economic independence.

Tata Motors Samaj Vikas Kendra has adopted a livelihood and collective-enterprise approach among women in rural Uttar Pradesh. The initiative provides women with training in the traditional craft of Chikankari and organizes them into self-help groups engaged in credit and thrift activities. The programme has involved more than 150 women and, over time, expanded its skill-development activities to include the production of jute bags, candles, herbal Gulal, cloth bags, and artificial jewellery. The initiative also assists women in accessing government welfare schemes and income-generation opportunities (The CSR Journal, 2025). The programme illustrates how CSR can combine the preservation of traditional skills with livelihood creation, collective organization, and market-oriented production. Its emphasis on SHGs is also important because collective organization can provide women with greater access to credit, knowledge, and economic networks.

Finally, **Diageo India's micro-enterprise initiative for smallholder women farmers in Nashik, Maharashtra**, represents an example of CSR connecting women's empowerment with agricultural value chains. The initiative initially targets 100 smallholder women farmers and provides training, financial support, and equipment to help them process surplus agricultural produce through sun-drying and solar-drying techniques. In collaboration with Savitribai Phule Ekatma Samaj Mandal and S4S Technologies, the programme seeks to connect women producers with consumers through the food supply chain and create stable income opportunities (The CSR Journal, 2025). The distinctive feature of this initiative is its value-chain approach: women are not merely provided with training but are integrated into processing, marketing, and supply mechanisms. Such an approach has the potential to enhance women's economic participation by transforming agricultural surplus into marketable products and creating micro-enterprise opportunities.

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate that contemporary CSR for women in India operates across several interconnected dimensions. The initiatives can broadly be classified into health and well-being, education and skill development, digital and financial literacy, entrepreneurship, livelihood generation, employment, self-help groups, and economic inclusion. The initiatives undertaken by Xiaomi and YouWeCan emphasize women's health; Pearl Academy–SETU, American Express, BNP Paribas, and Hyundai focus substantially on skills and employment; Visa, Standard Chartered, AU Small Finance Bank, Tata Motors, and Diageo emphasize entrepreneurship and livelihood generation; while Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages focuses strongly on financial and digital literacy. From the perspective of the present study, these CSR initiatives are particularly relevant to an Ambedkarite understanding of women's empowerment. Ambedkar's conception of emancipation emphasized education, economic independence, dignity, equality, and the removal of structural barriers to social participation.

The initiatives reviewed above show that CSR is gradually moving beyond direct charitable assistance toward interventions that develop women's capabilities and economic agency. Nevertheless, an Ambedkarite assessment would require attention not only to the number of beneficiaries or services delivered but also to whether such initiatives contribute to substantive equality, long-term autonomy, dignity, economic independence, and inclusion of women facing multiple forms of social disadvantage. Thus, the contemporary CSR landscape provides an important empirical basis for examining whether corporate responsibility in India can move from welfare-oriented philanthropy toward a more transformative model of social justice and inclusive women's empowerment.

Analysis of Women-Centred CSR Initiatives from an Ambedkarite Perspective

The CSR initiatives examined above reveal a broad and increasingly multidimensional approach to women's empowerment in India. The programmes cover healthcare, education, skill development, digital and financial literacy, entrepreneurship, employment, self-help groups, livelihood generation, and financial inclusion (The CSR Journal, 2025). In this respect, several initiatives show clear convergence with Ambedkar's emphasis on education, economic independence, self-reliance, dignity, and equal opportunities (Ghosal, 2023; Singh, 2020).

The strongest alignment is visible in education and skill development. Initiatives such as Pearl Academy–SETU, American Express–NASSCOM Foundation, and BNP Paribas–NASSCOM Foundation provide women with industry-oriented and technology-based skills linked to employment. These programmes are consistent with Ambedkar's view of education as a means of developing capabilities and improving women's social and economic position. However, contemporary CSR generally approaches education through employability and market skills, whereas Ambedkar attached a wider emancipatory significance to education, including awareness, self-respect, and the ability to challenge social inequality.

There is also considerable alignment in economic empowerment. Visa, Standard Chartered, AU Small Finance Bank, Tata Motors, and Diageo support entrepreneurship, self-help groups, livelihood generation, market linkages, and financial inclusion. These interventions correspond with Ambedkar's emphasis on women's economic independence. Nevertheless, they primarily promote income generation and entrepreneurship and do not necessarily address the deeper issues of property ownership, inheritance, unequal household power, or control over productive resources that were important to Ambedkar's conception of substantive equality.

The initiatives also address health, dignity, and social protection. Xiaomi-YouWeCan's breast-cancer screening programme and Malabar Group's support for elderly women demonstrate CSR engagement with women's health, safety, and basic well-being. These initiatives can be related to Ambedkar's broader concern with human dignity; however, healthcare and welfare are also conventional components of contemporary CSR and cannot, by themselves, be considered specifically Ambedkarite.

The Hyundai Drive4Progress programme, which trains women as professional drivers and facilitates employment, has additional transformative potential because it challenges gender-based occupational stereotypes and expands women's access to non-traditional employment. Similarly, SHG-based programmes can strengthen collective economic participation. These aspects are compatible with

Ambedkar's emphasis on women's autonomy and participation, although the available evidence does not establish whether they significantly alter wider power relations.

The major limitation, however, is the absence of an explicit focus on caste and structural inequality. Ambedkar understood women's oppression in connection with caste, patriarchy, marriage, endogamy, and social hierarchy (Singh, 2020; Paik, 2022). The CSR initiatives reviewed target disadvantaged, rural, underserved, and marginalized women, but they do not explicitly address caste discrimination, patriarchal structures, freedom in marriage, inheritance and property rights, access to justice, or political representation. Thus, their approach is largely developmental and capability-oriented rather than structurally transformative.

Overall, the projects demonstrate partial alignment with Ambedkar's ideas but are better understood as broader contemporary CSR approaches to women's empowerment. They strongly correspond with Ambedkarite principles of education, skills, economic independence, self-reliance, dignity, and inclusion, but they generally do not address the deeper structural dimensions of caste, patriarchy, legal inequality, and social discrimination. Therefore, these initiatives can be described as "CSR initiatives with Ambedkarite potential" rather than explicitly Ambedkarite CSR. A more genuinely Ambedkarite model would combine economic and capability development with rights, equality, social justice, caste-gender intersectionality, legal empowerment, property rights, political participation, and transformation of discriminatory social structures.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that contemporary CSR initiatives for women's empowerment in India demonstrate partial alignment with Ambedkar's vision of social justice and women's emancipation. Initiatives in education, skill development, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, healthcare, and livelihood development contribute to women's economic independence, dignity, capabilities, and social participation.

However, these initiatives largely represent a broader developmental and welfare-oriented approach rather than a fully Ambedkarite model. Most programmes do not explicitly address structural issues such as caste discrimination, patriarchy, unequal property and inheritance rights, access to justice, and political representation.

Therefore, CSR can be considered to have significant "Ambedkarite potential". To become more transformative, CSR should move beyond providing benefits to women and address the structural conditions that produce inequality. An Ambedkarite CSR framework would integrate education, economic empowerment, dignity, substantive equality, social justice, caste-gender inclusion, legal empowerment, and women's participation in decision-making.

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