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EVOLVING ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: LEGAL MECHANISMS SHAPING CORPORATE STRATEGIES IN INDIA

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has transitioned from a humanitarian and voluntary practice to a legally mandated and strategically significant component of corporate governance. With the introduction of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, India became the first country to mandate CSR spending for companies meeting specific financial thresholds. This legal provision requires eligible companies to allocate at least 2% of their average net profits over the previous three years towards CSR initiatives, thereby institutionalizing social responsibility within the business ecosystem. The CSR mandate has compelled corporations to adopt structured policies, form dedicated committees, and ensure transparency through public disclosures. As a result, CSR is no longer viewed as an optional ethical choice but as a strategic obligation that contributes to brand reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term sustainability. This paper critically examines the evolving role of CSR in India, focusing on the influence of legal mechanisms on corporate behaviour and strategy. It explores how companies are aligning their CSR initiatives with national priorities and global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also, the paper highlights key implementation challenges, including lack of community engagement, limited innovation, inadequate impact assessment, and compliance-driven approaches that hinder genuine social impact. By adopting a legal and strategic lens, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how CSR is shaping the corporate landscape in India and offers insights into the potential for CSR to drive inclusive and sustainable development in the years to come.

Keywords: CSR, Sustainable Development Goals, ESG, Transparency, Accountability

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has experienced a remarkable evolution—from being a voluntary, philanthropic gesture to becoming a statutory corporate obligation[1]. Traditionally, CSR initiatives were undertaken informally by companies as part of their ethical or charitable duties. These efforts, though well-intentioned, were often unstructured and disconnected from a company's core business strategy[2].

The turning point came with the introduction of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, which made India the first country in the world to legally mandate CSR spending. Under this law, companies meeting specified financial criteria are required to spend at least 2% of their average net profits from the previous three years on CSR activities. Also, companies must form a CSR committee, draft a policy, and report their CSR expenditures and outcomes, thereby formalizing CSR as an integral component of corporate governance.

This legal mandate has brought CSR from the margins to the mainstream of corporate strategy. It has prompted businesses to align their social initiatives with broader business goals, national priorities, and global sustainability frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Increasingly, CSR is being viewed not just as a compliance obligation, but as a strategic tool for enhancing brand reputation, stakeholder trust, employee engagement, and long-term sustainability[3].

The objective of this paper is to explore how legal frameworks have reshaped CSR in India, transforming it into a vital element of corporate strategy. It examines the legal provisions, their implementation, and their impact on corporate behaviour. It also highlights emerging trends, challenges, and best practices that are influencing how companies approach CSR in today's dynamic socio-economic environment.

2. Conceptual Framework of CSR

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to the ethical, moral, and discretionary responsibilities that a business has toward society. It is broadly defined as the obligation of enterprises to contribute to sustainable economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce, their families, the local community, and society at large. CSR extends beyond legal compliance and aims at proactive initiatives that promote human rights, fair labour practices, environmental protection, and ethical governance[4].

The evolution of CSR can be traced through various stages. Initially, it was regarded as an act of philanthropy, where businesses donated funds to charitable causes or supported community welfare projects on an ad hoc basis. Over time, as stakeholders began to demand greater accountability and social commitment from corporations, the notion of CSR expanded. In the 1970s and 1980s, the focus shifted to responsible corporate behaviour in areas such as environmental protection, employee rights, and ethical marketing[5]. The 1990s saw the integration of CSR into the strategic objectives of firms, with many adopting triple bottom line approaches

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[1] (PDF) CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN INDIA: AN OVER VIEW, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318445440 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

[2] Corporate Social Responsibility in India: From Traditional Ethos to Contemporary Transitions | Request PDF, in RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/300337184 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

[3] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility in India: A Review of Corporate Contributions to Sustainable Development Goals, RESEARCHGATE (2025), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379806071.

[4] Sharofiddin Ashurov, Osman Sayid Hassan Musse & Taalbi Abdelhak, Evaluating Corporate Social Responsibility in Achieving Sustainable Development and Social Welfare, 5 BRICS J. ECON. 77 (2024).

[5] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282441223 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

emphasizing People, Planet, and Profit[6]. Today, CSR has matured into a globally recognized business practice that not only enhances corporate image but also contributes to long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

In the Indian context, CSR has seen a remarkable transformation from a philanthropic gesture rooted in ancient traditions and industrialist values such those of the Tatas and Birlas, to a legally mandated corporate responsibility under national legislation. This evolution signifies a growing acknowledgment that businesses have a crucial role in addressing societal challenges and contributing to inclusive development[7].

2.1 Global Perspective vs Indian Approach

The approach to CSR varies significantly across global jurisdictions. In most countries, CSR remains largely voluntary, driven by market forces, consumer expectations, investor preferences, and international standards like the UN Global Compact, ISO 26000, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises[8]. In the United States, the European Union, and other developed economies, companies engage in CSR to demonstrate ethical conduct, reduce risk, and build reputation. CSR reporting in these countries is often encouraged through non-binding guidelines and sustainability indices, and companies voluntarily align their practices with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards[9].

In contrast, India has adopted a unique and pioneering approach by legislating CSR through the Companies Act, 2013, making it the first country to introduce a statutory obligation for CSR spending. According to Section 135 of the Act, companies with a net worth of ₹500 crore or more, turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or net profit of ₹5 crore or more are required to spend at least 2% of their average net profits of the preceding three financial years on CSR activities. These activities must be listed under Schedule VII of the Act and align with national development priorities such as education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and rural development[10].

The Indian model signifies a compliance-driven approach, where failure to spend or disclose CSR spending attracts scrutiny and penalties. While this legal framework ensures accountability and consistency, it also raises questions about the quality and impact of CSR initiatives when driven more by obligation than by values or innovation. Nevertheless, India's legislative model has helped formalize CSR, institutionalize governance mechanisms, and catalyze significant investments in social development sectors[11].

3. Legal Framework Governing CSR in India

The legal framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India is one of the most structured and comprehensive in the world. The enactment of the Companies Act, 2013 introduced a landmark provision Section 135 that made CSR spending mandatory for certain categories of companies. This legislative move

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[6] (PDF) An Assessment of the Triple Bottom Line Concept on CSR Effort in FMCG in Nigeria, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336870860 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

[7] (PDF) Indian CSR - An Overview, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340626287 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

[8] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility: Implementation and Integration, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369960622 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

[9] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Influence on Organizational Reputation, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378306350 (last visited Jul. 3, 2025).

[10] taxguru_in & Megha Paliwal, CSR Rules: Applicability, Net Profit & Obligation, TAXGURU (Jun. 5, 2025), https://taxguru.in/company-law/csr-rules-applicability-net-profit-obligation.html.

[11] (PDF) Analysing the CSR Spending Requirements Under Indian Company Law, in RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322895339 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

has transformed CSR from a voluntary, philanthropic effort into a statutory responsibility embedded within corporate governance structures[12].

3.1 Companies Act, 2013

Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 applies to companies that meet at least one of the following financial criteria: a net worth of ₹500 crore or more, an annual turnover of ₹1,000 crore or more, or a net profit of ₹5 crore or more during any financial year. Companies falling within this threshold are legally required to constitute a CSR Committee of the Board. This committee is responsible for formulating and recommending a CSR policy, determining the activities to be undertaken, and monitoring the implementation of approved projects.

Furthermore, the law mandates that eligible companies spend a minimum of 2% of their average net profits made during the three immediately preceding financial years on CSR activities. These activities must be in accordance with Schedule VII of the Act, which outlines specific areas such as education, health, gender equality, environmental sustainability, rural development, and disaster relief. In cases where the prescribed CSR amount is not spent, the company must provide valid reasons in its Board report. Otherwise, the unspent amount must be transferred to a specified fund, depending on whether the expenditure is tied to ongoing projects or not[13].

3.2 CSR Rules and Amendments

To support the implementation of Section 135, the Companies (CSR Policy) Rules, 2014 were introduced. These rules provide detailed guidelines for the formulation of CSR policies, project execution, reporting mechanisms, and the responsibilities of the CSR Committee and Board of Directors[14].

Significant amendments were made to these rules in January 2021 to enhance accountability and improve the quality of CSR spending. One of the major changes was the introduction of impact assessment for CSR projects with an outlay of ₹1 crore or more and companies with CSR obligations of ₹10 crore or more in the preceding three financial years. This ensures that large-scale projects are not only executed efficiently but also evaluated for their actual social and environmental impact[15]. Also, the amended rules mandate the transfer of unspent CSR funds. In the case of ongoing projects, the unspent amount must be transferred to a special Unspent CSR Account within 30 days of the end of the financial year and must be utilized within three financial years. If not associated with any ongoing project, the funds are to be transferred to a fund specified in Schedule VII, such as the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund, within six months[16].

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[12] Kayode Akinsola, Corporate Social Responsibility in Multinational Corporations: Legal and Governance Considerations in Global Markets and Operations (Feb. 2, 2025), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=5126571.

[13] CSR Compliance: Unveiling the Legal Obligation and Social Responsibility under the Company Law, HTTPS://WWW.TAXMANN.COM,https://www.taxmann.com/research/company-and-sebi/top-story/ 1050100000000 23032/ (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[14] Companies CSR Policy Rules, 2014 – The Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules, 2014 (CSR Rules) – IBC Laws, https://ibclaw.in/the-companies-corporate-social-responsibility-policy-rules-2014-csr-rules/ (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[15] Rule 8- Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility) Rules, 2014, COMPANIES ACT INTEGRATED READY RECKONER|COMPANIES ACT 2013|CAIRR, https://ca2013.com/rule-8-companies-corporate-social-responsibility-rules-2014/ (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[16] Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Tax Implications in India, https://taxguru.in/company-law/corporate-social-responsibility-csr-tax-implications-india.html (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

Companies are also required to make public disclosures of their CSR activities and policies on their websites and in the Board's annual report. These requirements aim to improve transparency, encourage stakeholder engagement, and prevent superficial or tokenistic compliance[17].

3.3 Penalties and Enforcement

Non-compliance with CSR provisions now carries specific legal consequences. Initially, CSR spending was treated as a "comply or explain" provision, where companies could avoid penalties by providing justifications for non-spending. However, following the amendments in 2021, CSR compliance has been reinforced through civil penalties[18].

If a company fails to transfer the unspent amount to the prescribed fund or Unspent CSR Account, it may face a penalty of twice the unspent amount or up to ₹1 crore, whichever is less. Additionally, every officer responsible for the default may be fined up to ₹2 lakh. These penalties mark a shift towards a more stringent enforcement mechanism that holds both the company and its executives accountable[19].

This robust legal framework reflects the Indian government's commitment to integrating social responsibility into corporate functioning[20]. While it imposes compliance obligations, it also opens new avenues for businesses to contribute meaningfully to national development goals and societal well-being[21].

4. CSR as a Strategic Tool

In the contemporary business environment, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is no longer seen as a peripheral activity or a mere act of philanthropy. Instead, it has become a strategic instrument that contributes to a company's long-term growth, reputation, and sustainability. Companies increasingly recognize that socially responsible behavior not only fulfills legal requirements but also enhances their competitiveness, stakeholder relationships, and brand value[22].

4.1 Strategic Integration of CSR

CSR is now deeply embedded in corporate strategies, with companies aligning their social initiatives with broader business objectives. Rather than viewing CSR as a cost, many organizations treat it as an investment that yields reputational returns, customer loyalty, and operational efficiencies. Strategic integration involves identifying CSR initiatives that are closely related to a company's core business activities. For example, a technology company might focus on digital literacy programs, while a pharmaceutical firm may invest in public health infrastructure[23].

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[17] Shreya Dubey, Navigating Corporate Social Responsibility: Bridging Voluntary Initiatives and Legal Accountability (Apr. 4, 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4784282.

[18] Avik Mukherjee, Navajyoti Samanta & Shouvik Kumar Guha, Impact of Adopting Mandatory CSR Regulations in India on Total CSR Spending (2002-2019): Utilising A Regime-Switching Threshold Regression Analysis (Apr. 1, 2022), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=5233177.

[19] taxguru_in & Editor, Failure to Transfer Unspent CSR: MCA Imposes 33.83 Lakh Penalty, TAXGURU (Sep. 27, 2023), https://taxguru.in/company-law/failure-transfer-unspent-csr-mca-imposes-33-83-lakh-penalty.html.

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[21] Dr Sunil Kumar, CSR Non-Compliance and Corporate Accountability in India: Examining Corporate Social Responsibility Violations.

[22] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Influence on Organizational Reputation, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378306350 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[23] Oliver Harris, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Its Effect on Financial Performance: Evidence from Sustainable Firms (Jul. 23, 2024), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=5248803.

This alignment allows companies to address social and environmental issues while simultaneously enhancing their own market positioning. A well-crafted CSR strategy supports brand differentiation, builds stakeholder trust, and contributes to employee satisfaction. Companies that are seen as responsible and purpose-driven are more likely to attract socially conscious investors, partners, and consumers. As a result, CSR serves as a competitive advantage in an increasingly responsible and transparent global marketplace[24].

4.2 Linking CSR with Sustainable Development Goals

The strategic importance of CSR has grown further with the advent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These 17 goals, aimed at ending poverty, protecting the environment, and ensuring prosperity for all, have provided a global framework for sustainable development. Indian companies have begun aligning their CSR initiatives with specific SDGs such as quality education, clean energy, gender equality, health and well-being, and climate action[25].

This alignment not only reinforces the relevance and impact of CSR initiatives but also demonstrates a company's commitment to global and national development agendas. For example, initiatives that promote inclusive education in rural areas or support women's entrepreneurship directly contribute to multiple SDGs. Companies are increasingly mapping their CSR outcomes to SDG targets, using global benchmarks to track progress and improve their developmental impact[26].

Furthermore, alignment with SDGs enhances a company's international credibility and facilitates collaborations with NGOs, multilateral organizations, and government agencies. By positioning CSR within the SDG framework, companies can amplify their contributions to inclusive and sustainable growth while simultaneously addressing stakeholder expectations for ethical and accountable conduct[27].

4.3 CSR Reporting and Transparency

Transparency and accountability are critical components of any CSR strategy. In India, reporting requirements for CSR have become more stringent following the enactment of the Companies Act, 2013 and its subsequent amendments. Companies are now required to disclose their CSR policies, activities, and expenditures in their annual reports and on their corporate websites. These reports must provide detailed information on the nature of the projects undertaken, the amount spent, and the outcomes achieved[28].

Such mandatory disclosures serve multiple purposes. They ensure regulatory compliance, inform stakeholders about the company's social performance, and help build public trust. Transparent reporting also allows investors to assess a company's non-financial performance and commitment to sustainability, which increasingly influences investment decisions in the ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) space[29].

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[24] (PDF) Integrating Corporate Social Responsibility into Business Strategy: Creating Sustainable Value, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379007773 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[25] (PDF) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), RESEARCHGATE (2025), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358052936

[26] (PDF) Scoping the Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Research in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Era, RESEARCHGATE (2025), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342862292

[27] (PDF) Multinational Enterprises and the Sustainable Development Goals: An Institutional Approach to Corporate Engagement, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325721415 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[28] Ramana Deshmukh, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Norms in India: Evolution, Implementation, Where to Next? (Jun. 15, 2022), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4175835.

[29] Dr Monica Kharola, Mrs Surbhi Goyal & Dr Surya Saxena, Mandatory ESG Reporting in India: Legal Obligations and Management Strategies, 2 J. MARK. SOC. RES. 167 (2025).

Moreover, clear and consistent CSR reporting enables benchmarking, promotes best practices, and facilitates knowledge sharing across industries. As a result, CSR reporting is not only a compliance requirement but also a vital tool for companies to communicate their values, demonstrate social impact, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders[30].

5. Sectoral Analysis of CSR in India

Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives in India vary significantly across sectors, reflecting the unique priorities, resources, and stakeholder expectations of different industries. This section highlights how key sectors have integrated CSR into their operations[31].

5.1 IT and Pharma Industries

The Information Technology (IT) and pharmaceutical sectors have been proactive in aligning CSR with social needs. IT companies primarily focus on digital literacy, education, and skill development, leveraging their technological expertise to bridge the digital divide. Leading firms like Infosys Foundation support programs in rural education and infrastructure, while Wipro promotes sustainability and inclusive education[32].

Pharmaceutical companies, given their domain, prioritize public health, sanitation, and disease awareness. The Cipla Foundation and Dr. Reddy’s Foundation, for example, implement initiatives focused on access to affordable healthcare, community health programs, and capacity building in underserved areas.

5.2 Manufacturing and Heavy Industries

Manufacturing and heavy industries, which often have significant environmental footprints, focus their CSR efforts on environmental sustainability, resource conservation, and infrastructure development. These companies also invest in vocational training and livelihood programs for local communities, especially in regions where they operate. Many steel, cement, and mining companies contribute to building roads, schools, and healthcare centers in rural areas[33].

5.3 Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs)

Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) have a long-standing tradition of community engagement, even before CSR became a legal mandate. Post-2013, they operate under strict government norms and guidelines, often aligning their CSR strategies with national development priorities such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, rural electrification, and women’s empowerment. PSEs like ONGC and NTPC are among the top CSR spenders in the country[34].

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[30] (PDF) Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Reporting on Firm Performance, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378320116 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

[31] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility: Best Practices and Industry Comparisons, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383517045 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

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[34] (PDF) Mandated CSR in India: Opportunities, Constraints, and the Road Ahead, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339357558 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

6. Challenges in CSR Implementation

Despite the legal mandate and increasing corporate awareness, the effective implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India faces several challenges. While many companies have institutionalized CSR into their strategies, the impact and sustainability of these initiatives often fall short due to structural and operational issues[35].

One of the most significant challenges is the misalignment between CSR projects and actual community needs. In many cases, companies design CSR programs without conducting comprehensive needs assessments or engaging with local stakeholders. As a result, initiatives may not address the pressing issues of the target communities or may duplicate efforts already being undertaken by other organizations or government bodies. This top-down approach undermines the relevance and long-term effectiveness of CSR interventions[36].

Another major issue is the lack of robust monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms. Although large-scale projects are now legally required to undergo impact evaluations, many companies still struggle to measure outcomes effectively. CSR reporting often focuses on financial outlays and quantitative data, such as the number of beneficiaries, rather than the qualitative impact on communities. This weakens accountability and limits the scope for learning and improvement[37].

Limited innovation in CSR programming is also a persistent concern. Many initiatives follow conventional models such as organizing health camps or distributing school supplies without exploring innovative, sustainable, or scalable solutions. This results in short-term interventions rather than systemic change. Companies often avoid experimenting with new ideas due to fear of failure or lack of expertise in social development[38].

Additionally, tokenism remains a critical barrier to meaningful CSR. In some organizations, CSR is treated purely as a compliance requirement, resulting in minimal investment, poorly designed programs, or one-time charitable donations. This compliance-centric mindset restricts the potential of CSR to serve as a tool for transformative development and stakeholder engagement. Without genuine commitment from senior leadership, CSR risks being reduced to a box-ticking exercise rather than an integral part of corporate strategy[39].

Addressing these challenges requires a shift in perspective from compliance to commitment, from charity to strategy, and from short-term outputs to long-term impact. It also calls for greater collaboration between corporations, NGOs, local communities, and government bodies to ensure that CSR efforts are both need-based and sustainable[40].

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[35] (PDF) Corporate Social Responsibility- Issues and Challenges in India, in RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372420180 (last visited Jul. 4, 2025).

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7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in India has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a voluntary, philanthropic activity to a legally mandated component of corporate governance. With the enactment of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, CSR is no longer an optional exercise but a statutory obligation for qualifying companies. This legal framework has played a critical role in institutionalizing CSR practices, compelling businesses to adopt structured, transparent, and purpose-driven social initiatives that align with both corporate objectives and national development goals.

The integration of CSR into core business strategy has had several positive outcomes. Companies have increasingly aligned their CSR efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enhanced stakeholder trust, improved brand equity, and contributed to the broader vision of inclusive growth. However, the journey is not without challenges. Issues such as poor alignment with community needs, lack of innovation, inadequate monitoring, and a compliance-driven approach continue to hinder the transformative potential of CSR.

To address these challenges and elevate the impact of CSR, several forward-looking strategies are recommended. First, technology driven CSR should be encouraged. The use of artificial intelligence, data analytics, and blockchain can significantly improve impact tracking, transparency, and resource optimization. Second, there is a need to strengthen governance through clearer operational guidelines, mandatory third-party audits, and effective collaboration with credible NGOs and civil society organizations.

Third, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) should be actively encouraged to participate in CSR. Although currently exempt from mandatory CSR requirements, policies such as CSR incentives, pooled funding mechanisms, or simplified compliance processes can help bring SMEs into the fold of responsible business practices.

Furthermore, policy-level innovations such as CSR tax rebates, public CSR rating systems, and integration of CSR modules into management education can play a vital role in institutionalizing social responsibility in the next generation of business leaders. These steps will not only broaden the CSR landscape but also enhance its depth and sustainability.

In conclusion, CSR in India stands at a critical juncture. The legal mandate has successfully laid the foundation for responsible corporate behaviour. Moving forward, the focus must shift from compliance to commitment, from charity to impact, and from isolation to integration. With strategic planning, technological support, and strong stakeholder collaboration, CSR can become a powerful vehicle for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.