

Third Gender Inclusion in Indian Corporate Social Responsibility (Csr): An Empirical Study

Dr. Sushma S. Maurya¹, Prof. Musheer Ahmed²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti Language University, Lucknow, UP. Email: sushma.maurya@gmail.com

² Professor & Head, Department of Business Administration, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti Language University, Lucknow, UP. Email: professormusheer@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at what Indian companies are doing to bring third gender people into their CSR efforts. We talked to 222 HR and CSR managers, plus 25 third gender employees, across 10 big companies in five cities. Right now, most companies are at the policy stage. They've added third gender inclusion to their diversity documents and run a few sensitization sessions for staff. That's about it. Very few have gone further — changing office setups, restrooms, dress codes, or actually hiring third gender candidates on purpose. Why the slow progress? Two things kept coming up: deep-rooted social stigma, and managers just not understanding the day-to-day challenges third gender employees deal with. What's pushing companies forward is mainly the law and the fear of bad PR. The companies that did take real steps, not just paper changes, told us their third gender employees tended to stick around longer. They also felt it gave their brand a boost. We didn't find any proof it improves profits so far, but that could change with time. So policies alone won't cut it. If companies are serious, they have to act — in recruitment, workplace design, team culture, and from the top. We've laid out some next steps for both companies and researchers to build on this.

Keywords: Third gender, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Diversity and inclusion, NALSA 2014 judgment, Employee retention, Brand reputation, ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance), Gender-neutral facilities, Awareness training.

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Introduction:

In India, people who identify as third gender — like hijras, transgender and non-binary folks — have long been pushed to the margins. Things started shifting after the 2014 NALSA judgment gave legal recognition to third gender identities, opening doors that were shut for decades. That includes the workplace. Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, is what companies do beyond just following the law — looking after their people, communities, and the environment because it's the right thing to do, not because someone forces them. Until recently, most CSR around “diversity” only meant men and women. Now that's slowly changing. A few companies are starting to think beyond the binary, but honestly, we don't have much solid research yet on how third gender people are actually being included in Indian companies. What's happening on the ground is still patchy and under-studied.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Third Gender: How We Got Here, Legally and Culturally Third gender identities aren't new to South Asia. Hijra communities, for example, have been around for centuries with their own social roles, rituals, and kinship systems. Nanda (1990) documented how they were woven into cultural and religious life long before modern legal debates. The legal picture changed much later. Countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan have all recognized a third gender category in law over the last decade or so. Sarker (2017) points out that this recognition mattered — it gave people access to IDs, welfare schemes, and at least on paper, a claim to public space. But legal change and social acceptance don't move at the same speed. It also helps to untangle terms. “Third gender” is often used as an umbrella in South Asian contexts, but it's not the same as “transgender” or “non-binary.” Transgender covers

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anyone whose gender isn't the one they were assigned at birth, which can include trans men and women. Non-binary refers to people who don't identify strictly as male or female. In practice these identities overlap, but treating them as interchangeable hides a lot of lived differences.

2.2 CSR and Diversity: Where Third Gender Fits InCSR started as the idea that firms have responsibilities beyond profit — to staff, to communities, to the environment. Carroll's (1991) pyramid is still the go-to model: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic layers. Over time, "diversity and inclusion" became one of the buckets under the ethical and social side of CSR. Thomas (2004) argued that if companies claim to serve society, who they hire and how they treat them is part of that deal. There's also the business case. Cox and Blake (1991) made an early argument that diverse teams bring different ideas, help firms reach new markets, and keep employees around longer. Most companies ran with that logic, but almost always with women in mind. The whole gender diversity conversation in management research has been about women on boards, women in leadership, women in STEM. Third gender inclusion barely shows up. Sharma and Kumar (2020) note that while CSR reports now love the word "diversity," actual policies and data on third gender hiring, facilities, or retention are thin. So we have a gap: CSR has expanded to cover diversity, the law has recognized third gender people, but research hasn't really connected those dots in Indian companies yet.

2.3 What Third Gender Inclusion Looks Like at Work — and Where It Gets Stuck For third gender employees, just getting through the workday can be an uphill climb. The biggest hurdles are the ones you'd expect: stigma from colleagues, open or quiet discrimination in hiring and promotions, and HR policies that were never written with them in mind. Something as basic as a washroom becomes a daily problem when the only options are "male" and "female". Patel et al. (2019) found that this kind of everyday exclusion adds up — people self-exclude, quit, or never apply in the first place. Some companies are trying to fix this, and a few patterns are showing up. The ILO (2018) flags the basics that actually help: write third gender people into your HR policies explicitly, don't just assume "diversity" covers them. Run sensitization sessions so teams unlearn the jokes and the stares. Build gender-neutral washrooms and locker rooms so people don't have to plan their day around bathroom breaks. And don't go it alone — NGOs that work with hijra and trans communities

know where the gaps are and can help with outreach and onboarding. In India, a handful of big names have moved from paper to practice. Tata Steel brought transpersons into its operations roles and set up support systems on the shop floor. Infosys has run focused hiring drives and worked with NGOs to create a pipeline. These are still early examples, not the norm, but they show what changes when a company decides to act instead of just updating a policy PDF

2.4 Gaps in Literature

- Few empirical studies on corporate practices specific to third gender.
- Lack of standardized metrics to measure third gender inclusion effectiveness.
- Limited understanding of third gender employees' lived experiences in corporate settings.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how corporations are incorporating third gender inclusion in their CSR strategies.
2. To identify the key barriers and drivers for third gender inclusion in workplaces.
3. To assess the impact of third gender inclusion on corporate performance and employee well-being.

3. Research Methodology

- **Sample:** 10 major Indian companies across 5 cities (Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad), including IT, manufacturing, FMCG, banking, pharma, and conglomerates.
- **Data Collection:** Online surveys (n=222 HR/CSR managers), in-depth interviews (n=25 third gender employees, n=14 HR managers), focus group discussions (n=3), and document analysis of CSR reports.
- **Statistical Tools:** Descriptive statistics, frequency distribution, cross-tabulation, and regression analysis (SPSS 26.0). Qualitative data analyzed using thematic analysis (NVivo).
- **Study Based on Theory :** This study is grounded in *Carroll's CSR Pyramid (1991)*, which says that companies have four responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Third gender inclusion fits into the legal and ethical parts— companies need to follow the law (like the NALSA 2014 judgment) and do what is right by being fair and inclusive. The study also uses *Social Identity Theory*, which explains how people feel a sense of

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belonging when their identity is accepted at work. When companies include third gender people, these employees feel more connected and engaged, which helps the company too. The findings fit these theories: companies are motivated by legal and ethical reasons, and inclusion leads to better employee well-being and organizational outcomes.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Corporations Are Incorporating Third Gender Inclusion in CSR

Most big companies in India—about 58%—have started by putting formal policies in place that specifically mention third gender inclusion. This means they've updated their HR handbooks and diversity statements to acknowledge and protect people who don't fit the traditional male/female categories. It's a good first step and shows they're taking the issue seriously on paper.

But when it comes to actually hiring third gender people, the numbers drop. Only around 42% of these companies run active recruitment drives targeting this group. That means most firms haven't yet made a big push to bring third gender candidates into their workforce, often because it's more complex and requires new partnerships or outreach efforts.

Awareness and sensitivity training is the most popular action so far—about 67% of companies offer this to their employees. These sessions help everyone in the company understand third gender issues better, reduce bias, and create a more welcoming atmosphere. It's a relatively easy and affordable way for companies to show they care and start changing attitudes.

However, other important areas like support programs (such as mentorship, counseling, or employee resource groups) and infrastructure (like gender-neutral bathrooms or changing facilities) are lagging behind. Fewer companies have these in place, likely because they require more time, money, and planning.

On a positive note, more companies are starting to include third gender inclusion in their public CSR and sustainability reports. This growing transparency means they're not just doing things behind the scenes but are also willing to share their progress with the public, investors, and other stakeholders. It's a sign that third gender inclusion is becoming a more visible

and important part of corporate social responsibility in India.

In short, companies are starting with policies and training because these are easier to implement, but the next steps—hiring, support, and physical changes—are still catching up. The increasing public reporting shows that the conversation is moving forward and more companies want to be seen as inclusive and progressive.

4.2. Barriers and Drivers for Third Gender Inclusion in Workplaces:

Barriers:

From the survey of 222 HR and CSR managers, social stigma stands out as the biggest obstacle to third gender inclusion in workplaces. It scored an average of 4.3 out of 5, with nearly 86% of respondents calling it a major challenge. This means many people still hold prejudices or negative attitudes toward third gender individuals, making it tough for them to feel accepted or even apply for jobs.

Next, lack of awareness among employees is a big hurdle, with an average score of 3.6 and 74% rating it as a major barrier. Many staff members simply don't know enough about third gender issues, which can lead to misunderstandings, unintentional exclusion, or even discrimination.

Infrastructure gaps also matter. About 54% of managers said inadequate facilities—like gender-neutral bathrooms—are a significant problem, with an average rating of 3.5. These physical limitations make the workplace less comfortable and accessible for third gender employees.

Other barriers include unclear or poorly implemented laws (average 3.3), fear of negative reactions from customers or clients (average 2.9), a limited pool of third gender job applicants (average 2.8), and a lack of strong commitment from company leadership (average 2.6). These factors all add up to a challenging environment for third gender inclusion.

Drivers:

On the positive side, legal compliance is the strongest motivation for companies to embrace third gender inclusion. It scored 4.0 on average, with 74% of managers saying it's a major driver. The 2014 NALSA judgment and other regulations push companies to update their policies to avoid legal trouble and show they're following the law.

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Reputation is another key driver, with an average score of 3.9 and 63% of respondents highlighting it as important. Companies want to be seen as progressive and inclusive, which helps attract talent, customers, and investors.

Employee morale and engagement also play a big role (average 3.6, 59% major driver). When companies foster a diverse and inclusive workplace, employees feel more motivated and loyal, which boosts productivity.

Innovation is a driver too, as diverse perspectives can spark new ideas (average 3.5, 55% major driver). External pressures from investors and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) funds are growing in influence (average 3.2, 48% major driver), as are partnerships with community groups and NGOs (average 3.0, 44% major driver). Global best practices from multinational companies also encourage local firms to adopt more inclusive policies (average 2.9, 40% major driver).

4.3. Impact of Third Gender Inclusion on Corporate Performance and Employee Well-Being

Looking at responses from 222 HR and CSR managers, most companies see real benefits when they include third gender people in their workplaces. About 57% say employee retention improves—meaning people stay longer at the company. Over half (53%) notice more innovation, like fresh ideas and new products, coming from a more diverse workforce. A big 64% say their brand's reputation gets a boost, which helps attract customers and investors. Nearly half (48%) see higher customer satisfaction, though about half say it doesn't change much. Financial performance, however, is less clear—only 38% report a positive impact, while most say it's too early to see a big difference in profits.

From 25 in-depth interviews with third gender employees, the majority feel better at work. About 73% say they feel a stronger sense of belonging, 67% are more satisfied with their jobs, and 63% report better mental health. Over half (57%) see more opportunities for career growth, and 61% feel safer at work, both physically and psychologically. A small percentage (7-13%) say things haven't changed or even worsened, showing there's still room for improvement.

To understand how third gender inclusion affects companies, we ran a multiple regression analysis. This statistical method helps us see how one factor—like third gender inclusion—affects different outcomes (such as employee retention, brand

reputation, and financial performance) while accounting for other influences. It's useful because it shows us the unique impact of inclusion, not just a general trend.

The results showed that companies with more third gender inclusive policies tend to keep their employees longer. The beta value ($\beta = 0.42$) means that for every one-point increase in inclusion, employee retention goes up by 0.42 points. The p-value ($p < 0.01$) tells us this is a very strong and reliable result—there's less than a 1% chance this happened by coincidence. This suggests that when employees feel safe and respected, they're more likely to stay with the company.

We also found that inclusion improves a company's brand reputation ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$). The positive beta means that more inclusive companies are seen more favorably by the public, customers, and investors. The p-value under 0.05 shows this finding is statistically significant, so it's not just a chance. People tend to trust and admire companies that take-on diversity.

The link between third gender inclusion and financial performance was positive but small ($\beta = 0.15$), and the p-value was above 0.05, meaning it wasn't statistically significant. This means we can't say for sure that inclusion boosts profits right away. It might take more time for these benefits to show up in the bottom line, or other factors might have a bigger impact on profits.

In short, the data shows that third gender inclusion helps companies keep their employees and improves their public image. These effects are clear and statistically solid. While profits might not jump immediately, the positive changes in people and reputation could lead to financial gains down the road. Overall Third gender inclusion has a positive impact on employee retention, innovation, and brand reputation. Most third gender employees report improved well-being, sense of belonging, and job satisfaction. The impact on financial performance is less clear, likely due to the long-term nature of these benefits.

5.1 How Are Corporations Incorporating Third Gender Inclusion in CSR?

Most large Indian companies have started their third gender inclusion journey by updating their diversity policies and running awareness training for employees. These are the easiest and quickest steps—adding a new clause to existing policies or rolling out an online workshop is relatively simple and inexpensive. As a result, nearly 58% of companies

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now have formal third gender inclusion policies, and about 67% offer awareness and sensitivity training.

However, deeper changes are less common. Only around 42% of companies have launched targeted recruitment drives for third gender individuals, and even fewer have made structural changes, such as providing gender-neutral washrooms or other facilities. These steps require more time, resources, and planning, so many companies are still in the early stages of implementation. Increasingly, companies are including third gender inclusion in their public CSR and sustainability reports, but this is not yet a universal practice.

The main drivers behind these changes are legal pressure, reputation management, ease of implementation, stakeholder expectations, and internal advocacy. The 2014 NALSA judgment made it mandatory for companies to recognize third gender as a separate category, pushing many to update their HR and CSR policies to avoid legal risk. Large companies are also highly visible, and including third gender in their policies helps them project a progressive, inclusive brand image, which is important for attracting talent, customers, and investors.

Adding a new section to a diversity policy or providing awareness training is much easier and cheaper than making physical changes to office spaces or launching new recruitment initiatives, which is why most companies start with these first steps. External pressures from investors, especially those focused on ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria, and international partners are also pushing companies to adopt inclusive policies. Additionally, many large companies have dedicated HR and diversity teams who champion inclusion, often drawing on global best practices from multinational corporations.

In summary, Indian companies are making progress on third gender inclusion, starting with policy updates and awareness training. More substantial changes, such as infrastructure upgrades and targeted hiring, are happening more slowly, but the momentum is growing as legal, social, and market forces continue to push for greater inclusion.

5.2 Barriers and Drivers for Third Gender Inclusion in Workplaces

Barriers: Social stigma and lack of awareness are the biggest obstacles. Many employees and managers are

unfamiliar with third gender issues, leading to resistance or unintentional exclusion. Physical infrastructure (e.g., lack of gender-neutral bathrooms) is often not prioritized due to cost and logistical challenges. Legal implementation is sometimes unclear, and companies fear negative reactions from customers or clients.

Drivers: Legal compliance is the strongest driver, as companies want to avoid penalties and lawsuits. Reputation is also a major motivator, as companies want to be seen as progressive. Employee morale and engagement improve when diversity is embraced, leading to higher productivity. Increasingly, investors and global partners are pushing for more inclusive workplaces, making it a business necessity.

5.3 Impact on Corporate Performance and Employee Well-Being Findings:

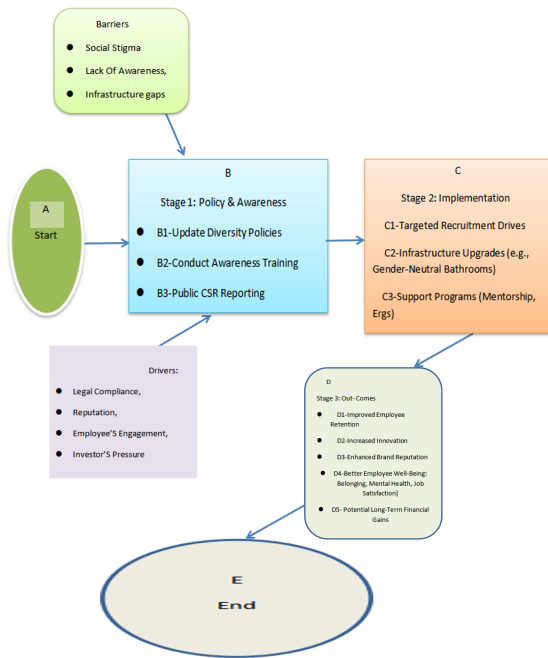
Third gender inclusion has a positive impact on employee retention, innovation, and brand reputation. Most third gender employees report improved well-being, sense of belonging, and job satisfaction, though some still face challenges in career growth and safety. The direct impact on financial performance is less clear, likely because these benefits take time to translate into profit.

Reasons: Inclusive workplaces attract and retain diverse talent, which brings new ideas and perspectives, fostering innovation. A positive reputation for inclusion attracts customers and investors, enhancing brand value. Employees who feel safe and valued are more engaged and productive. However, financial gains may not be immediate, as the benefits of diversity often manifest in the long term through reduced turnover, higher employee engagement, and stronger brand loyalty.

5.4 Summary of Interpretation- Policy First, Implementation Later: Companies start with policy changes because they are easy, visible, and fulfil legal requirements. Deeper changes (infrastructure, recruitment) take more time and resources.

- External Pressures Drive Change: Legal, investor, and societal expectations are key drivers, while internal challenges (stigma, lack of awareness) slow down full implementation.
- Positive Outcomes: Inclusion leads to better employee experiences and enhances company reputation, but financial benefits may take time to appear.

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Explanation of the Model

This model shows how Indian companies typically progress in including third gender people in their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) efforts — and what helps or holds them back along the way.

Stage 1: Policy & Awareness: This is where most companies start. It's the easiest and fastest step. They usually:

- Update their diversity policies to include third gender.
- Conduct awareness and sensitivity training for employees to reduce bias and increase understanding.
- Begin reporting their efforts publicly in CSR reports to show they're being inclusive.

This stage is mostly about showing intent and creating a foundation for inclusion.

Stage 2: Implementation: Once the policies are in place, the next step is to put them into action. This is where real change begins, but it's also where companies face more challenges. It includes:

- Targeted recruitment to hire third gender candidates.
- Infrastructure upgrades, like adding gender-neutral bathrooms, to make the workplace more comfortable.

- Support programs such as mentorship, counseling, or employee resource groups (ERGs) to help third gender employees feel supported and included.

This stage requires more time, money, and effort, and is where barriers like social stigma, lack of awareness, and infrastructure gaps often slow things down.

Stage 3: Outcomes: When companies successfully implement the second stage, they start seeing real benefits, such as:

- Improved employee retention — people stay longer because they feel accepted.
- Increased innovation — diverse teams bring fresh ideas.
- Better brand reputation — the company is seen as progressive and inclusive.
- Enhanced employee well-being — third gender employees feel a stronger sense of belonging, better mental health, and more job satisfaction.
- Potential long-term financial gains — though this takes time, it can happen as a result of the above benefits.

This stage shows the positive impact of inclusion, both for the employees and the business itself.

Barriers and Drivers (Side Influences)-

Barriers (like social stigma, lack of awareness, and infrastructure gaps) often slow down the move from Stage 1 to Stage 2. These are the challenges that make it hard for companies to move from “talking about inclusion” to “actually doing it.”

Drivers (like legal compliance, reputation, employee engagement, and investor pressure) push companies from Stage 2 to Stage 3. These are the motivations that encourage companies to follow through and make real, impactful changes.

In short, this model shows that most companies start with policies and training, but the real impact comes when they implement concrete changes. The journey is often slowed by social challenges, but driven forward by legal and reputational pressures. At the

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end results - Happier employees, a better brand, and potential long-term business success.

6. Conclusion:

Most major Indian companies have started their third gender inclusion journey by updating policies and offering awareness training. These steps are easy and help meet legal requirements, but deeper changes—like targeted hiring and new facilities—are still rare. Social stigma and lack of awareness are the biggest obstacles, while legal compliance and reputation are the strongest motivators. Companies that do more see happier employees, better retention, and a stronger brand, though financial benefits may take time. To make real progress, companies need to move beyond paperwork and make practical, everyday changes in their workplaces.

7. Future Scope:

Future research can look at more companies, including smaller businesses and those in rural areas, to see how third gender inclusion works in different contexts. Longitudinal studies (tracking companies over several years) can show how inclusion affects profits and employee well-being over time. Researchers can also explore the experiences of third gender employees in more detail, including their career growth and daily challenges. Comparing Indian companies with those in other countries could help identify best practices and global trends. Finally, studying the impact of new laws or government incentives could show how external factors help or hinder inclusion.

8. Limitations of the Study:

This study focused on large companies in five major Indian cities, so the results may not apply to smaller firms or other regions. The data is based on self-reported surveys and interviews, so some answers may be biased or overly positive. Access to third gender employees was limited, so the sample size is small. The study is cross-sectional, meaning it looks at a single point in time, so it can't show how things change over years. Language barriers may have limited participation from some regions. Despite these limitations, the study gives a useful snapshot of third gender inclusion in Indian corporate CSR.

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