

Rejuvenating the Concept of CSR through the Lens of Ancient Indian Wisdom

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Abstract

Corporations function as legal entities within society and hold a social responsibility toward both business and the community. The accountability for the outcome of their operations is being recognized. Organizations now acknowledge that conducting business ethically is essential for long-term social and economic sustainability. This has underpinnings in ancient Indian philosophy, that emphasizes universal peace and well-being since long. The deep-rooted spiritual foundations reinforce the commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, commonly known CSR and the preservation of our environment for future generations. This article seeks to examine the nature of CSR from a global perspective while tracing its origins in ancient Indian wisdom. It explores the integration of spiritual principles from Indian traditions into the modern framework of corporate responsibility. The primary objective is to gain insights from ancient teachings that establish a spiritual connection with CSR theories. Given this focus, the study adopts an exploratory approach to investigate the philosophical underpinnings of CSR through the lens of Indian heritage. This paper deals with Carroll's philosophy of CSR which is the foundation of Indian framework of CSR and relate the ancient lessons related to social responsibility of business from all ancient wisdom and found that current CSR framework is nothing but rejuvenated form of our ancient thoughts. Based on the literature review, it was observed that many scholars have attempted to search the linkage of ancient Indian wisdom with management theories, models, & leadership style but rare studies written on CSR and its historical background. Consequently, this article addresses a gap in the existing literature and offers valuable insights into the subject. In summary, it can be inferred that ancient wisdom promotes an inside-out approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which plays a vital role in fostering ethical conduct, effective governance, and transparency—key elements in fulfilling the ultimate objectives of CSR.

Keywords: Ancient Indian Wisdom; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); CSR framework

Management Insight (2026). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21844/mijia.22.1.4>

Introduction:

For many centuries, a number of management theories and models that originated in the West dominated the world. We occasionally wonder why the majority of theories and definitions come from other countries. Why not a hypothesis from India? In the past, when the Vedic Raj rishis were in power, India—one of the world's oldest civilizations and richest countries—did not face unemployment or starvation. We frequently use Rama Rajya (Ramayan) as an example when discussing effective governance (Desai, 2009). However, a thorough examination of western management models shows that the majority of management ideas and methods are derived from centuries-old Asian customs (Muniapan & Dass, 2008). One

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How to cite this article: Jaiswal A., Kumar S., Kumar A., Singh G.K. (2026). Rejuvenating the Concept of CSR through the Lens of Ancient Indian Wisdom, Management Insight, 22 (1) 39-48

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

Received: 24.12.2025; **Accepted:** 07.04.2026; **Published:** 30.06.2026

must be ingrained in the nation's culture to be regarded as successful and effective (Sharma & Talwar, 2005). Many studies on CSR have been carried out in recent past from a variety of angles. A survey of CSR literature covers everything from spiritual and religious viewpoints to the Bible (Christianity), the Quran (Islam), and the Bhagavad Gita, which were compiled by many experts. However, there exists a gap in the context of CSR to

gather literature from all ancient wisdom sources in one location. Thus, this paper addresses a vacuum in the CSR literature and is timely.

The saying "an organisation should work like a tree" helps explain the corporate social responsibility fundamentally. They ought to use environmental resources to fortify themselves, and in exchange, they ought to produce benefits in the form of CSR that benefit the environment. CSR can be interpreted as an effort by companies to adhere to the principles of Dharma. As is well known, ancient Hindu philosophy upholding the idea of the four Purusharthas, or the fundamental goals of human existence: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. CSR is an expression of Dharma, or the obligation that people have to society, which is what organisations (CEOs and leaders) adhere to achieve this goal. The idea of CSR is also seen as an extension of the old tradition of *daan* (charity), which is a crucial component of daily routine for those who wish to be financially secure. The significance of philanthropy in ancient Indian thought is demonstrated by well-known figures such as *Danveer Karna* of *Dwapar Yuga* and *Raja Bali* in *Satyuga*.

Organisations nowadays are constantly under pressure "to achieve" or "to excel." They are under pressure to use every strategy that could guarantee the accomplishment of corporate objectives due to the competitive climate. At this stage, ethics and values lose their significance or become inconsequential. Examples of rivals' attempts to become superpowers include hazardous industrial working conditions, child abuse in the glass and cracker industries, and exorbitant pharmaceutical prices. Of course, all businesses are not created equal, and many have stepped up to improve society. Therefore, it is impossible to overlook the importance of CSR, as its influence on a company's brand image is visible in its rankings. Accepting social responsibility is not that hard in the Indian context, though; all we need to do is recommit to

our ancient literature and the highly valued business principles of our forefathers.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to examine the Corporate Social Responsibility principles emerged from our ancient Indian wisdom and raise awareness among management scholars about the wealth of knowledge found in historical scriptures like *Arthashastra*, *Upanishads*, *Vedas*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. These scriptures offer invaluable lessons crucial for effective and efficient corporate management. Researcher draw the followings objectives on the basis of previous study:

- To study the conceptual linkages between Carroll's CSR Pyramid and ancient Indian wisdom.
- To discover the principles related to CSR embedded in Indian scriptures like the *Upanishads*, *Vedas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Artha Shashtra*.
- To examine the ancient Indian ethical philosophy significance in modern corporate management and sustainability practices.
- To examine how modern Indian corporations, integrate CSR practices rooted in traditional Indian values.
- To offer suggestions for amalgamating ancient Indian wisdom with modern CSR frameworks and business ethics.

Research Methodology

The research follows a qualitative methodology, involving an extensive literature review to critically analyze and infer ancient texts, religious scriptures, and their fitment in the contemporary corporate landscape. The study has been conducted with **Carroll's theory** "CSR Pyramid" in the backdrop and connects its existence with ancient wisdom. Indian CSR Section 135 of the Companies

Act 2013 support the Carroll's CSR pyramid. As indicated by CSR provisions, organizations whose normal net profit before tax of preceding three years is in excess of 5 crores are at risk to contribute their 2% of normal net profit in CSR activities. This implies only profit organizations are included as qualified organizations.

A systematic review of existing literature was done to understand how Carroll's CSR Pyramid relates to Indian wisdom. The study looks at research papers from the 10 years that is, from 2015 to 2025 to make sure the findings are relevant today and

academically sound. This review includes Carroll's CSR Pyramid and its connection, to Indian wisdom.

Conceptual linkage of CSR theory through Ancient Indian Wisdom: An Exploratory Review:

Carroll (1991) initially presented his CSR model as a pyramid in 1991, as seen in Figure 1: The Four Obligations of Business. The pyramid's different levels assist management in comprehending the societal expectations for organisations. According to the pyramid, the four duties are:

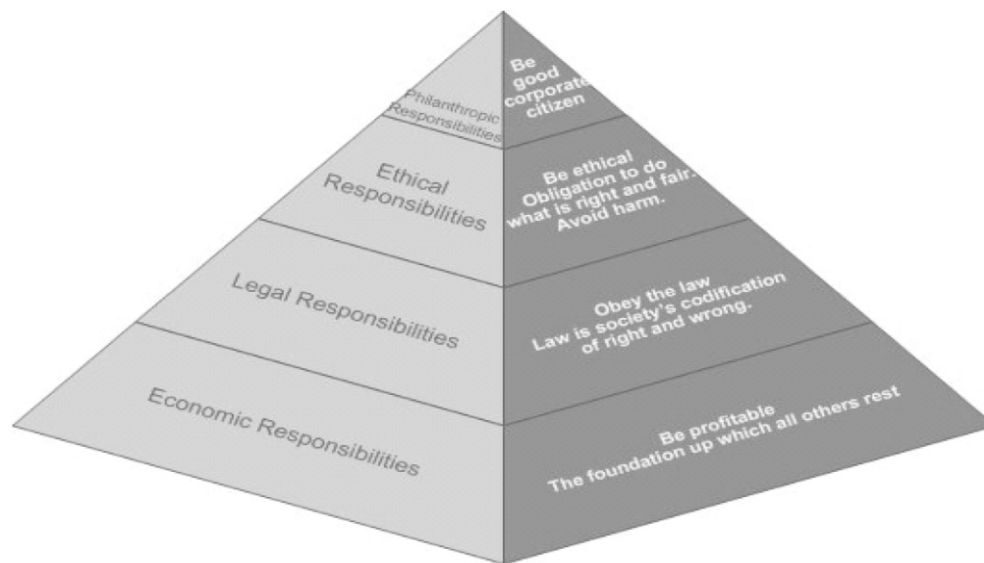


Fig 1 : Carroll's CSR Pyramid

Economic responsibility in Carroll's CSR Pyramid:

Carroll's primary goal is given to making Profit in Business. It concerns the duty of business of creating goods and service required by society and selling them making a benefit. Organizations have investors who request a sensible return from the investment they have made. They also have workers who need safe and genuinely paid positions, and they have customer who request great quality items at a reasonable cost. Thus, here comes the principal obligation of the business for what it's worth to be an appropriately working financial unit and stay in business. And, this is the foundation of the pyramid, where various layers of

pyramid lay on.

Legal responsibility in Carroll's CSR Pyramid:

The legal responsibility of organisations asks businesses to be abide by law.

Ethical Responsibility in Carroll's CSR Pyramid:

The fundamental idea of ethical obligation as characterized and communicated via Carroll (1991) is that the ethical duty comprises of what is generally anticipated by society far beyond financial and legal expectations. Ethical obligations are not really forced by law, but it is

expected from public and government.

Philanthropic duty in Carroll's CSR Pyramid:

As it is apex of the pyramid, it centers around working on the personal satisfaction of employee, communities and eventually society overall.

India possesses a rich repository of ancient knowledge, including the *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, *Itihasa*, *Bhagavad Gita*, the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, *Manusmriti*, Buddhist teachings, and the *Vedas*—comprising the *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharva* Vedas. These texts serve as significant sources of wisdom and philosophical thought. All of these include concepts and information about management principles and practices. India's illustrious history with its wisdom books cannot be denied. It is an approach to life or a philosophy that inspires us to pursue enrichment. The management issues in India can benefit from the application and extension of the wisdom discovered in this ocean. We can solve the issues of contemporary management with the aid of our traditional Indian knowledge and wisdom (Singh, 2017). It can be used to improve managerial effectiveness (Jaiswal, 2018). CSR is a well-known phrase in contemporary management literature and is generally accepted as a Western idea. However, in actuality, the core idea of CSR originated in our ancient literature; only western management theorists came up with the acronym. Ancient Indian wisdom has always recognized the importance of social issues and social sensitivity, which are components of corporate social responsibility (Parna, 2020). CSR consists of wide issues, including societal well-being, business ethics, awareness, respect, and safeguarding the built and natural environments. Government initiatives to address societal issues are referred to as corporate social responsibility popularly known as CSR. This study seeks to unveil the roots of CSR within ancient wisdom and strengthen its conceptual

framework through insights derived from Indian literary traditions. The notion of CSR has existed in various forms for over 4,000 years. In Islam, the practice of *zakat*—a wealth tax—fulfills the legal obligations of a structured economic system, while ancient Hindu and Buddhist *Vedic* and *Sutra* scriptures caution against usury, or the imposition of excessive interest (Visser & McIntosh, 1998).

Since no one should become wealthy at the expense of others, a fair distribution of income among stakeholders is must. As it is believed that wealth that is distributed to the general population multiplies and aids in the economy's growth more rapidly. Kautilya highlighted the value of happiness in *Arthashastra*. He said that in addition to having money and earning money, doing the right thing might lead to "Sukhasya Moolam Dharma," or bliss. The pyramid's charitable, ethical, and economic aspects are connected by Kautilya's addition of "Darmasya Moolam Artha," which states that wealth is useless without dharma and dharma is toothless without prosperity. This illustrates the significance of social welfare ideas even in ancient times and the necessity for businesses to involve all parties involved. Muniapan and Dass (2008) discovered in their study of Kautilya's *arthshastra* that a king's (CEO's) happiness should come from the welfare of his subjects rather than from selfish interests. Even when it came to issues pertaining to state administration, the rulers were counselled to safeguard and promote environmental welfare. Kautilya encourages the creation of *Abhayāranya* or *Abhayavana*, or Forest and Animal Sanctuaries, in *The Arthashastra* so that animals and trees can live together without worrying about being killed. Additionally, Kautilya enforced the legal obligation of pyramid against individuals who engage in poaching and destruction to forests, particularly productive ones. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which translates to "the entire world is a single family," is a hidden concept that the

Maha Upanishada presents as CSR. The government assigns business entities the duty of caring for society as a family, with a particular emphasis on the ethical and legal aspects of the current CSR framework.

The *Bhagavad Gita* suggests that CSR should ideally start with Individual Social Responsibility (ISR), which encompasses Personal Social Responsibility. From there, it should progress to Global Social Responsibility (GSR), aligning with the nonprofit aspect of the modern CSR framework and focusing on the overall well-being of stakeholders. Business executives view these responsibilities as their basic karma and dharma. Leaders are crucial to sustaining transparency, ethical conduct, and efficient governance in order to accomplish CSR (Muniapan & Satpathy, 2013). The proverb "*Irai kakkum vayyakam ellam avanai murai kakkum muttacheyin*" (translated as *dharma rakshati rakshitaha*) emphasizes that a ruler must protect the world and uphold justice (*dharma*), as justice, in turn, safeguards them. This principle is exemplified in the *Ramayana*, where King Sri Rama faced the difficult decision of renouncing Queen Sita of Ayodhya to uphold the honor and integrity of his dynasty. He provided a model for the next generation to follow, demonstrating that the king's initial responsibility to his people comes before all other factors, at times, at the cost of, on his own enjoyment (Muniapan and Shaikh, 2007). Similar incidents from Mahabharat, such as Shantipura, demonstrated that the interests of the people come before those of the ruler. Therefore, even if it somewhat impacts their revenue or their own interests, organisations should prioritise serving society.

The significance of ancient Indian texts in addressing contemporary corporate and sustainability-related challenges is gaining increasing recognition. Among these texts, the *Bhagavad Gita* has been lauded by numerous scholars for its guidelines regarding ethical

leadership, selfless action, and sustainable management. Agarwal and Bhattacharjee (2025) posit that the 'Bhagavad Gita' offers a framework for sustainability by integrating social, environmental, and economic spheres. Their study identifies principles such as 'Nishkama Karma' (selfless action), 'Dharma', and 'Yajna' as foundational tenets for responsible corporate behavior and sustainable business practices.

Similarly, Goyal, Sapra, and Sharma (2025) developed a philosophical and practical implementation model based on the 'Bhagavad Gita' for ESG/CSR. Their study suggests that the philosophy of 'Jnana' (knowledge), 'Karma' (action), and 'Bhakti' (devotion) constitute the bedrock of effective CSR and the sustained success of organizations. The authors argue that Indian philosophical thought provides an ethical and strategic foundation for integrating ESG and CSR into modern organizations.

Recent studies have identified ancient Indian wisdom as an antecedent to ethical leadership and corporate governance. Monika et al. (2025) examined the relevance of the Bhagavad Gita's teachings within the context of modern corporate governance, arguing that the text promotes ethical decision-making, a focus on stakeholders, and transparency in leadership. This study contends that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita remain pertinent in resolving the ethical dilemmas and governance-related challenges facing the modern corporate world.

The 'Bhagavad Gita' is an ancient Indian text containing numerous principles related to management. Shukla and Dwivedi (2024) conducted a study of these principles and concluded that they remain valuable for companies even today. He stated that the Bhagavad Gita can help enhance intellect, leadership skills, work strategies, conflict resolution abilities, and decision-making capabilities. Consequently,

leading to the efficient and harmonious operations.

Hegde and Nayak also conducted a study on the 'Bhagavad Gita' in 2025. They observed that it can assist individuals in becoming better leaders and managers. They found that principles such as self-discipline, mindfulness, and ethical conduct can significantly improve corporate functioning. They emphasized on educate their employees' education regarding these principles.

The Bhagavad Gita is not the only ancient Indian scripture that holds utility for corporations. In 2026, Vijaysingh examined Sanatan Dharma. He discovered that it shares numerous similarities with modern concepts of diversity and inclusion. Sanatan Dharma encompasses principles such as 'Samatva'—meaning treating everyone with equality—and 'Raja Dharma'—signifying the qualities of an effective leader. These principles can empower companies to become more inclusive and equitable.

In 2025, Rawal also undertook a study of Indian scriptures, specifically the Vedas and the Upanishads. He identified within them numerous values—such as sustainability, ethical conduct and a deep concern for customers. These values can guide companies toward becoming more sustainable and socially responsible entities.

In India, statutory regulations mandate that companies fulfill certain social obligations. Numerous Indian corporations—including Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Wipro, and Reliance Industries Limited—are actively engaged in various initiatives, such as environmental conservation and community welfare. Through such activities, they exhibit that age-old Indian values such as caring for society and striving for collective prosperity remain just as relevant and vital today.

Furthermore, several academics are currently

exploring how Indian spirituality can benefit the corporate sector. They posit that the integration of Yoga practice and spiritual values can foster a workforce that is happier, more resilient, and more ethically grounded. They further highlight these values can assist companies in functioning more effectively.

Despite significant research has been conducted on this subject, there remains much to be learned. A handful of studies dealt with how ancient Indian principles could be practically applied within corporate settings. Most studies focus solely on leadership and spirituality, rather than on how to make companies more responsible and sustainable. Therefore, this study endeavors to address this gap; it explores how the wisdom from ancient Indian scriptures can help companies become more sustainable and responsible.

Overall, ancient Indian scriptures such as the Upanishads, the Vedas, and the Bhagavad Gita contain numerous concepts that can prove immensely useful for contemporary companies. These ideas can assist organizations in becoming more humane, ethical, and sustainable. By adopting these principles, companies can improve and offer a more sustainable business landscape. The ancient Indian texts especially Bhagavad Gita remain highly relevant even today; they can aid us in finding solutions to complex modern corporate challenges. The Bhagavad Gita is a pivotal scripture that helps us understand how one can become better leader and manager.

Companies Practicing CSR Activities having Ancient Indian Wisdom roots

In the fiscal year 2020–2021, Godrej Consumer Products Limited introduced a medium- to long-term livelihood recovery initiative aimed at supporting over 9,000 nano businesses as part of its CSR efforts. According to the *Vedas*, those with financial resources have a responsibility to assist

those in need. In line with this principle, Infosys launched its ESG Vision 2030, with a goal of providing digital and life skills training to over 10 million individuals by 2025.

Wipro has contributed to more than 1,561 projects in the past year, focusing on livelihood development, humanitarian aid, and healthcare support, benefiting over 10 million people through its COVID-19 response, aligning with the *Ramayana's* concept of *dharma rakshati rakshitaha*. Similarly, Tata Chemicals has undertaken various environmental conservation initiatives while actively engaging with local communities to foster a sustainable and eco-friendly ecosystem. Meanwhile, ITC Limited allocated ₹353.46 crores to its CSR activities, which include the Social Forestry Programme, Education Programme, and Waste Recycling Programme (Fernandes & Thacker, 2021). All above CSR activities deals with philanthropic and ethical responsibilities of carol CSR Model which again has origin from *Vedic literature* which states that every individual should ensure happiness of all.

During the 2020–2021 financial year, Tata Motors positively impacted the lives of 7.5 lakh individuals by supporting socially disadvantaged Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities in key areas such as healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and environmental sustainability. Similarly, Reliance Industries Limited focuses its CSR initiatives on various sectors, including health education, rural development, sports promotion, women's empowerment, disaster relief, and the preservation of art, culture, and heritage. Tata Consultancy Services strives to enhance the quality of life in communities by leveraging its expertise to develop contextual and collaborative solutions that cater to the needs of the most vulnerable sections of society. According to the 2019–2020 annual report, the State Bank of India (SBI) prioritizes various CSR initiatives, including healthcare, education,

livelihood support, skill development, environmental conservation, preservation of national heritage, and the empowerment of women, youth, and senior citizens. All of the mentioned CSR initiatives carried out by various businesses have their origins in traditional Indian wisdom, which promotes the importance of societal welfare and values the ideas of dharma and karma (vedic literature). The Vedas also emphasise the value of a steady flow of money from those in possession to those in need. The Ramayana and the Bhagawad Gita have previously taught us the importance of global social responsibility, and corporate executives' actions for the good of society are regarded as an integral part of their dharma and karma.

Findings of the Study

This study examined Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through the lens of Indian thought to determine whether it remains relevant within companies today. Based on ancient Indian texts, contemporary CSR concepts, and the recent activities of various companies, the findings of this study are as follows:

- The study revealed that the fundamental principles of CSR are deeply rooted in ancient Indian thought. Concepts such as 'Dharma' (righteous action), 'Karma' (fulfillment of one's duties), 'Seva' (service to others), and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) emphasize doing what is right, aiding society, caring for the environment, and safeguarding the interests of stakeholders—principles that align perfectly with the operational frameworks of CSR.
- The findings demonstrated a clear correlation between Carroll's Pyramid of CSR and ancient Indian philosophy. Its economic dimension corresponds to the concept of 'Artha' (wealth) as described in the 'Arthashastra'; conversely,

its legal and ethical dimensions align with the principles of 'Dharma' and 'righteous conduct' expounded in the Vedas, Upanishads, and "Manusmriti". Similarly, the spirit of philanthropy resonates with the Vedic principles of "Dana" (charity) and 'helping others.'

- The study found that ancient Indian texts—such as the “Bhagavad Gita”, “Ramayana”, “Mahabharata”, and “Arthashastra”—offer invaluable guidance regarding ethical leadership, stakeholder management, accountability, and sustainable governance. These texts underscore the imperative for leaders to prioritize society above all else and to discharge their duties with absolute integrity and sincerity.
- The findings suggest that modern CSR is not an entirely novel concept, but rather an updated manifestation of ancient ideas. Long before the concept of CSR evolved in the Western world, ancient Indian thought placed significant emphasis on the equitable distribution of wealth, environmental conservation, and the fulfillment of social responsibilities.
- The study also revealed that Indian companies such as Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Wipro, ITC Limited, and Reliance Industries Limited are undertaking CSR initiatives that reflect values such as social service, sustainable development, education, and environmental conservation.
- The findings clarified that adopting Indian perspectives within the field of management can lead to more ethical governance systems, more robust sustainable development efforts, and deeper stakeholder trust. Principles embedded in ancient texts can prove immensely helpful in decision-making, ensuring transparency, and safeguarding

employee welfare.

- The study also observed that, in recent literature, the significance of diverse perspectives in addressing issues related to ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), sustainable development, and ethical leadership is now being widely acknowledged.
- Another significant finding is that CSR should not be viewed merely as a statutory mandate, but rather—in alignment with ancient Indian teachings—as a moral obligation toward society and the environment.
- The study also identified a research gap. Although numerous research papers have discussed subjects such as spirituality, ethics, and management in isolation, very few studies have examined the Indian knowledge tradition in conjunction with Carroll's CSR framework.
- Ultimately, the study concluded that leveraging Indian perspectives can assist organizations in cultivating a more humane and sustainable approach—one that strikes a balance between growth on the one hand, and social welfare and environmental responsibility on the other.

Conclusion

We may learn a lot about every aspect of life from our old literature. The library of ancient wisdom is extensive, and we may learn a lot from our ancestors, especially about protecting the environment. The great defenders of nature's balance were meant to be our ancestors. Though we have forgotten our ancient wisdom that could be used today, modern sustainability ideas were adapted from the ancient period. To keep the ecosystem harmonious and balanced, organisations should work hard to preserve natural energy. In

order to relate the ancient lessons of corporate social responsibility from all ancient wisdom, this paper discusses the Carroll philosophy of CSR, which forms the basis of the Indian framework of CSR. It found that the modern CSR framework is a revitalised version of old ideas. A more thorough investigation of this will reveal numerous new management concepts that are not yet understood or applied to modern management, especially in the area of corporate social responsibility.

In addition to CSR, ancient wisdom addressed a number of issues pertaining to politics, economics, sociology, ethics, and other fields. CSR is just an effort on the part of organisations to follow the four purushartha (dharma, artha, kaam, and moksha)—the obligation of human beings to serve society. Although it has been suggested that the modern perspective on corporate social responsibility (CSR) has shifted from an ethical one in the past to one that is focused on sustainability and reputation, organisations cannot overlook CSR because it can spur innovation and eventually increase revenue. All ancient texts emphasize that businesses must be mindful of ethical considerations in fulfilling their duties, as the absence of ethics would hinder the growth and prosperity of both businesses and society. Unfortunately, many today do not consider corporate social responsibility (CSR) in terms of dharma or rin. As a result, the government made it necessary and implemented a CSR policy on April 1, 2014, because people have lost the morality of working in a corporate culture and giving back to the community. Although it is crucial for the development of individual leaders to follow the path of svadharma and get rid of all pancha rin of fivefold debts (vedantic view) discussed above, organisations that learn from our ancestors and ancient literature should engage in CSR activities voluntarily rather than as a mandate.

Suggestions

- Organizations should utilize principles derived from ancient Indian wisdom to enhance corporate governance. This will help foster greater transparency in their operations. Individuals will be held accountable for their actions.
- Companies should go beyond mere compliance with regulations regarding social responsibility; they must actively seek out ways to contribute positively to the well-being of both people and the planet.
- Educational institutions that provide management and business education should integrate these philosophical concepts into their curricula. This will aid in cultivating leaders who possess a genuine sense of care and commitment toward their work.
- Corporate decision-makers must reflect on how their actions impact not only their own organizations but the broader community as well. They should strive to protect the environment and ensure that benefits are distributed equitably among all stakeholders.
- When formulating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies, companies should focus on how they can contribute to environmental sustainability and demonstrate compassion toward people—in accordance with the ancient Indian adage, *'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'* (The World is One Family). They should also bear in mind the principle of *'Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah'* (Righteousness protects those who protect it).
- Organizations should identify revenue-generating strategies that simultaneously benefit both people and the planet. This entails striking a delicate balance between the pursuit of profitability and the commitment to doing what is right.

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