

# Social Inclusion through Affirmative Action Programs under Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study of TATA Steel Limited

Utpal Kumar Chakraborty

Assistant Professor (Contractual), Department of Sociology, Abdul Bari Memorial College, Jamshedpur, E-mail: chakraborty.u007@gmail.com

Vinamrta

Senior Research Fellow, University Department of Sociology, Ranchi University, Ranchi

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## Abstract

The Indian economy is benefitted through the huge working age demographic dividend of India but this group of population also became the prime responsibility area for the Indian Government. Indian development is also subjected to criticism for widening the inequalities range. It has been said that to bring long term change in reducing inequality a country must worked upon its employment structure. For reducing the inequality many steps have been taken Indian government in order to boost up the social inclusion scenario. The Indian economy system is incomplete without its private sector and change in employment structure cannot be achieved without the help of the private sector companies. The private sector companies have also taken responsibility and working through affirmative actions in order to strengthen social cohesion and to bring social equity and economic development in India. Many Indian private sector companies have been working on special programmes focused on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Communities youth's skill development and entrepreneurship development through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes. This article is developed on the basis of secondary data sources and taken the case of TATA Steel Affirmative Action (AA) Policy and their CSR projects to show some of the best practices in India and its impact on social inclusion of the target groups on the chosen four heads of Employment, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Education under the affirmative action programme of TATA Steel. Although there is an increasing trend for the number of beneficiaries belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) community in TATA Steel CSR projects but their share in the workforce of TATA Steel is still not even one percent increase per year in last five financial year.

**Key Words:** Affirmative Actions, Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Inclusion

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**Corresponding Author:** Utpal Kumar Chakraborty, Assistant Professor (Contractual), Department of Sociology, Abdul Bari Memorial College, Jamshedpur, E-mail: chakraborty.u007@gmail.com

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## Introduction:

India is known for its 'unity in diversity' with its varied range of community and geographical area.

However, the growing economic and regional disparity is affecting the overall growth of the country. For example, with 102 billionaires, India has scored 4th position in Forbes 2020 list (Forbes,

2020) and on another hand it is on 129th position in Human Development Index (HDI) of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (The Economic Times, 2019). The rapid development and growth of India has been criticized for its 'socially excluded' group's status (Panda, 2016). Socially excluded groups represent those particular groups of people who are systematically denied of the available resources and recognitions essential for ensuring full participation in social life due to existence of various institutional resource allocation mechanisms in the society (Kabeer, 2000). The exclusion can happen due to the actions of government (state), markets and social actors (IER, 2014). These excluded groups include Women, Dalits (Scheduled Caste (SC) and Other Backward Caste), Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes (ST)), Minorities (e.g. Muslims) and persons with disabilities (Mander & Prasad, 2014). In this article the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe community of these excluded groups are also referred as the underrepresented community or Affirmative Action (AA) Community. The development, empowerment and social inclusion of these groups are significant for a sustainable and inclusive society. The idea of inclusive growth and sustainable development can be achieved through SDGs by having the partnership of government, private sector, civil society and citizens (UNDP, 2020). Pace and pattern both are the prime focus areas of the inclusive growth (Elena & Susanna, 2009). The word inclusive put emphasis on policies and programs formation that it should focus on covering as much country's labour force as it can and also ensure the provision of equal opportunities in terms of access to resources, markets and unbiased regulatory environment for businesses and individuals (Reddy, 2015).

In year 2004, Dr. Manmohan Singh, then Indian Prime Minister himself constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) for examining the issue of reservation and affirmative action in Indian private

sector (GoI, 2004). In Rajya Sabha, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry stated that the voluntary action by the private sector industry itself has been recommended by the coordination committee for affirmative action for SC & ST (GoI, 2019). In this response CII, ASSOCHAM and Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry also prepared the Voluntary Code of Conduct (VCC) for their member companies (CII, 2009). The Company Act, 2013 came into effect in year 2014 and with section (135) and schedule VII, CSR became mandatory for certain industries (GoI, 2019).

Upon finding the provision of formal equality insufficient to get the desired situation of "equality of status and of opportunity", the Indian law makers added the preferential treatment programmes to overcome the effects of past practices, present policies or others barriers. These 'preferential treatment programmes' are also known as 'affirmative action', 'protective discrimination', 'reverse discrimination' and 'special measures' in international law. The Indian preferential programs is a policy of reservations where 'reservations' means a defined quota or seats for recognised minorities in hiring for public service positions and in educational institutions.

### Literature Review

The extraordinary growth rate in developing countries have lifted millions out of poverty, but it also poses a new threat for social cohesion due to the widening inequalities (OECD, 2011). A cohesive society which fights exclusion, get rid of marginalization process and works towards the well-being of all its members while promoting trust and sense of belongingness and also offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility (OECD, 2020).

Economic growth of India is criticized for being

not inclusive and having high unemployment and poverty in a particular segment of population. The creation of economic opportunities with equal access to them has been recommended as a way for inclusive economic growth in India (Shinde, 2012). The multiple forms of exclusion exist in Indian society and exclusion associated with social identities like ethnicity, gender, religion and caste are in more rigid form (Thorat, 2008). Many social groups find there is a rigidity of exclusion actors and the Indian economic development is not fairly shared by all members of the society and therefore they demand group – specific policies (Mahakul, 2014).

The Indian constitution already has articles making provisions of equality before law and no discrimination based on caste, religion, race and gender. However, to empower the socially disadvantaged communities in India many positive discriminatory policies and programmes have been implemented by Indian Government as a part of affirmative action. Social inclusion programmes are a top –down process which have elements to change the opportunity structures, incentives and the capacity of institutions within which people can act and institutions can equitably respond to their demands. At the same time empowerment which is a complimentary process should focus on enhancing the capabilities of people (Rao & Kelleher, 2005).

The goal of 'affirmative action' and 'equal opportunity' is same but 'affirmative action' is 'proactive' (Burstein, 1994). 'Equal opportunity' policy is a passive type policy where it focuses on ensuring no tolerance after detection of discrimination however 'affirmative action' policy is used by organizations with the help of established practices to subvert and avert the discrimination (Crosby & Cordova 1996).

Private industry in India voluntarily initiated the

affirmative action programmes since 2007. They also come with the voluntary code of conduct to keep them on the right path and work together with government and civil societies for inclusive growth of Indian economy. The Company Act, 2013 came into effect in year 2014 and with section (135) and schedule VII CSR became mandatory for company, its holding company, its subsidiary company and foreign company having in the preceding financial year: Net Worth > 500 Crore, Turnover > 1000 Crore or Net Profit > 5 Crore.

### Research Gap

The private companies are set up by individuals or group of individuals. The growth of a private company benefits its shareholders. The shareholder theory focuses on long – term maximization of shareholder wealth by a corporation (Jensen, 2002 & Schaefer, 2008). The spending of shareholder money should be towards increasing the profit and making more money. At the end this money is given back to the society in terms of tax and more wages to the workers and managers. Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, Steve Milloy all are the supporter of the argument that the spending the corporation money for unprofitable social cause is unwise and it distract the corporation from its sole purposes of making money (Friedman, 1970 & Smith, 2003).

Many economists support the social contract theory and many also argued in line with the inept custodian argument. However, the supporter of shareholder theory states that a corporation can hire social responsibility experts to spend the money for social cause (Schaefer, 2008) to solve the inept custodian argument because corporations really lack the knowledge of proper way to invest money in a social cause (Friedman, 2002). It has also been said that using of organizational resources against the social responsibility is detrimental to firms because it may decrease a

firm's profitability or increase prices or both (Pikston & Carroll, 1996).

These theories and arguments regarding the shareholder theory, social responsibility, social contract theory and the company act of India and the corporate social responsibility (CSR) rules and provisions makes it very necessary to discuss about the CSR spending and its role in making society more inclusive.

TATA Steel is one of the oldest private companies in India and well known for its social wings. The analysis of programmes and activities initiated by TATA Steel can become a torch for other private companies to take up those activities in their area and contribute towards the social inclusion of Affirmative Actions (AA) community in India.

### Research Objectives

- To know about the steps taken by TATA Steel Limited for enhancing the employability and employment scenario of underrepresented community.
- To understand the programmes started by TATA Steel to improve the educational status of underrepresented community and their impact on social inclusion.
- To present the activities initiated by TATA Steel to improve the entrepreneurial activities amongst the underrepresented community.

### Research Methodology

To know about the various Affirmative Action Programmes of TATA Steel Limited's for socio-economic inclusion of the underrepresented community the present article is developed on the basis of content analysis of secondary sources such as annual reports of TATA Steel Limited and other

government and private institutions, books, articles, web pages and other open access e-resources available.

### Analysis & Discussion

The enhancement in the social equity with the current socio-economic position of India demands a more constructive role by industry which can complement the steps taken up by Government and civil society (CII, 2008). With the voluntary code of conduct four heads as Employability, Entrepreneurship, Education and Employment chosen by Indian private sector for Affirmative Action programmes for SC/ST youths.

The working age group of 15 to 59 years constitutes almost 50 percent of Indian population and it can be a beneficial key source for Indian human capital development (Tamanna, 2017). The investment in human capital helps a nation in having a strong resilience power (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2013) and the continuous learning process of human capital formation build employability for youths also (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). The decent work options along with empowering the youths also have long term impact in bringing social and community change (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

The development of any group, community, or country revolves around the economic development affecting the industrial growth in the region. For economic development and to get rid of quasi – permanent state of poverty as well as unemployment situation, skill enhancement and self – employment are among the effective ways.

CII in its preamble of 'Affirmative action report' talked about the importance of equality of access of opportunities for all individuals for their personal growth. This is also helpful in promotion of the inclusive development and economic growth along

with enhancement in the competitiveness (CII, 2008).

The literacy status of socially excluded groups in India is poor in comparison to others (IER, 2014). The education programme Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also have a small fund to address the equity issue. But many researchers have reported this separate provision of SSA for Dalit, Adivasi and minority children is of low-quality and low-funded (CES, 2014).

The affirmative actions in India in access to education have been successful in alleviating poverty in disadvantages castes through creation of a new middle class among them (Gomez & Premdas 2013 & Yang et al. 2006). But the steps like imposition in hiring and special reserved quotas in educational sector in India is neither a total failure nor it ignited a social revolution (Lee 2016) and due to this it has become a compulsory integral part of party politics and the intended term limit of AA has been long exceeded in India (Lee, 2021).

### Research Findings: Case of TATA Steel

This section of the article presents the steps taken by TATA Steel under four heads: Employability, Entrepreneurship, Employment and Education as the adopted Affirmative Action agendas for SC/ST youths. The beneficiaries of affirmative action program are termed as 'affirmative action (AA) Community' in TATA Steel annual reports.

For widening the opportunities umbrella for the youths TATA Steel has implemented many skill development projects. It has strategized the training courses keeping in view the recent trend of employment opportunity, diversity in academic qualification of the aspirants and their area of interest (TATA, 2016).

Some of the skill development initiatives taken by TATA Steel for underrepresented community are as follows:

- TEJASWINI', project is initiated for unskilled women employees. These women are having the facility to get trained in operating Heavy Earth Moving Equipment, Locomotives, Driving, Welding etc. It has been reported that 80 percent of this project's beneficiary belong to the ST/SC community (Misra, 2013).
- Residential coaching facility has been provided to the ST/SC community youths for nursing entrances, Govt Services examinations, professional courses and examinations of polytechnics.
- For skills enhancement vocational training programme like IT based training for BPOs and Computer Software; Technical training at institutes of repute; Site Safety Supervisor, Construction skill training, Security Guard training, Motor driving, Welding, AC and TV Mechanics, etc.

The procurement division of TATA Steel follow the policy of positive discrimination where it favors the vendors from ST/SC community having 50 percent or more ownership by ST/SC if a partnership firm or work- force having 75 percent or more from ST/SC community (Misra, 2013). In year 2018-19, approximately 25 percent of TATA Steel supply chain partners were local and out of which 70 are ST/SC (TATA, 2019). It increased to 71 in year 2021-22 with a share of 33 percent in the supply chain partners of TATA Steel (TATA, 2022). TATA Steel also run entrepreneurship development program along with micro – enterprises development for Self Help Groups (SHGs) and farmers of the underrepresented community. In the state of Odisha and Jharkhand, TATA Steel has promoted the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)

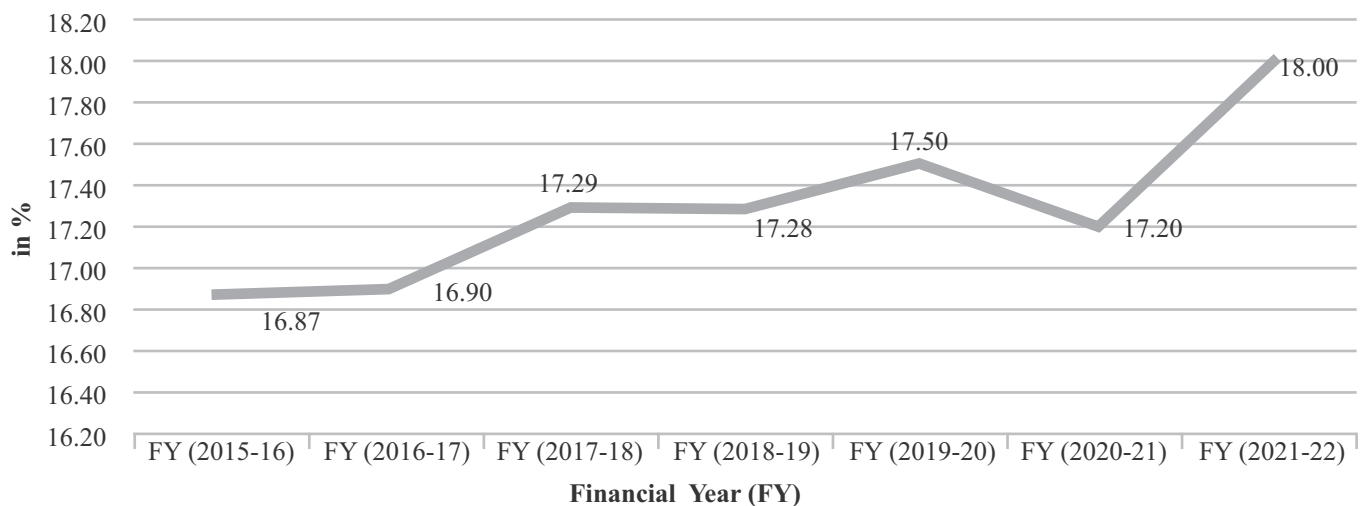
method for improving the paddy cultivation in the area and making it more economical for farmers. Forty percent of beneficiary under this program belong to the ST/SC communities (TATA, 2016).

The TATA Code of Conduct declares itself as an equal opportunity employer and recognizes the positive impact of diversity at workplace on the production and productivity through its AA policy. The positive discrimination norms in terms of minimum prescribed physical standards (Misra, 2013), eligibility relaxation with respect to age by one year and lower cut-off marks in written tests for the engagement of ST/SC applicants in Trade Apprentices (TA) appointment. The relaxation of

three years in terms of age for the applicants of Junior Engineer Trainees (JET) belonging to ST/SC (TATA, 2015).

TATA Steel through its positive discrimination policy and local sourcing of labour during recruitment of junior engineer trainees, trade apprentice and societies for rural development increasing the number of employees from AA community per year which can be easily seen in figure 1. The information given for financial year (FY) 2021-22 is 'diversity mix' including women and divyaang person in TATA Steel annual report. No separate information regarding share in work force of AA community is given for FY 2021-22.

**Figure 1: AA Community in the workforce at TATA Steel**



Source: Annual reports of TATA Steel (2016-2022)

Some educational programmes run by TATA Steel for ST/SC community are as follows:

- Scholarship disbursement program with an objective of financial help for meritorious students belonging to ST/SC communities like Jyoti Scholarship, Moodie Scholarship and Tata Steel Pariwar Scholarship programme.
- The '**Thousand Schools project**' has been

started in year 2015 and implemented in three districts covering six tribal populated blocks of Odisha and two blocks of West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. Through this programme till 2020 cumulatively nearly 2,00,000 children (6-16 years) and 6000 pre-primary children has been directly benefitted and the selected six blocks of Odisha have entirely become Child Labour Free Zones (TATA, 2019).

**Table 1: The budgetary provision of CSR programmes approved by the Board of Directors of TATA Steel**

S. No.	Programmes description		Activities number from Schedule VII of Companies Act, 2013	Amount allocated for financial year (₹ in crore)		
				2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
1	Healthcare promotion including preventive healthcare	via services and civic infrastructure	Item no. (i)	39.32	44.82	69.76
2		via sanitation projects	Item no. (i)	0.95	0.70	0.69
3	Water projects for safe drinking provision including water infrastructure and solar drinking water facilities		Item no. (i)	8.38	8.72	15.78
4	Response to COVID -19 Pandemic		Item no. (i)	107.39	282.92	7.00
5	For quality Education and support for School Infrastructure		Item no. (ii)	52.25	98.81	210.94
6	Livelihood generation programs through promoting agriculture and allied activities, skill development, entrepreneurship, women empowerment and programs on disability		Item no. (ii)	23.39	32.25	68.29
7	Animal welfare, protection of flora and fauna and ecological balance programs		Item no. (iv)	4.85	6.69	14.11
8	Promotion and preservation of tribal art, culture and languages		Item no. (v)	5.69	9.70	31.07
9	Promotion of Sports Academies and grassroot sports		Item no. (vii)	9.89	17.50	26.18
10	Renewable energy, bio-diversity programmes & rural infrastructure		Item no. (x)	6.47	9.91	26.63
11	Holistic development of Communities in Panchayats enroute between Jamshedpur and Kalinganagar		Item no. (x)	0.65	2.48	1.76
12	Assistance to affected communities in times of natural calamities		Item no. (xii)	1.75	0.50	0.25
13	Slum area development		Item no. (xi)	-	-	6.95
14	Overheads		Overheads	9.19	11.00	2.19

Source: [https://www.tatasteel.com/media/13737/csr-programmes\\_20-21.pdf](https://www.tatasteel.com/media/13737/csr-programmes_20-21.pdf); [https://www.tatasteel.com/media/14592/revised-csr-programmes\\_21-22.pdf](https://www.tatasteel.com/media/14592/revised-csr-programmes_21-22.pdf) & <https://www.tatasteel.com/media/17063/csr-programmes-1.pdf>

The CSR spending of TATA Steel in last five financial year is always more than two percent of their net profit. In year 2019-20 also the CSR expenditure of TATA Steel is 2.22 percent of their net profit which amounted to Rs. 193 crores (Although it is the lowest amount spent on CSR in

last five financial year by TATA Steel) (TATA, 2020).

TATA Steel released annual report regarding CSR Programmes approved by the Board of Directors of the Company every financial year. The data given in report for three FY is presented in table 1. It

shows that TATA Steel CSR spending is directed according to the activities enlisted in schedule VII of Section 135 of the Company Act 2013. It covers health care, sanitation and safe drinking water under point (i), Education, Livelihood Projects under point (ii), Environment protection under point (iv), art and heritage protection under point (v), sports promotion under point (vii), Rural (point (x)) and Slum area development under point (xi). TATA Steel also spend a portion of CSR budget towards disaster management which is mentioned in the report under the point (xii) of schedule VII. However, ministry of corporate affairs has already given instruction to cover it under various heads of health, education, infrastructure development through his General Circular No. 21/2014 dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

It is very important to note that in his CSR report TATA Steel has not mentioned about the point no. (iii) and (viii) of schedule VII of section 135 of Company Act 2013. These two points have special mention about the socially excluded group and minorities. The activities covered under the point (iii) are related to promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and measures for reducing inequalities faced by socially and economically backward groups. The point (viii) also has the special mention about the contribution towards fund set up by government for welfare of Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes, minorities and women.

### Conclusion

Abiding with the affirmative action programme many private sector industries became more focused in approach and diverted their CSR spending towards the development of ST/SC community. TATA Steel has already been working for the upliftment of socially disadvantaged groups with their social arms specially for the empowerment of ST/SC community in their

operational area. They have affirmative action policy and follow the policy of positive discrimination keeping in view the merit and competitiveness of the market. They work on four heads i.e., Employment, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Education under affirmative action programme. The study of last seven years of CSR projects and affirmative action programme taken up by TATA Steel revealed the positive impact of affirmative action projects specially the 'Thousand Schools Project'. There is also an increasing number of ST/SC community beneficiary from the programmes but the increase in the share of affirmative action community in the workforce of TATA Steel is slow (Not even 1% increase in last 5 financial years).

### Recommendations

The share of CSR amount spending on the development of affirmative action community is not mentioned separately in the annual reports of TATA Steel. Therefore, for more focused monitoring of affirmative action projects with separate financial head under CSR spending is recommended.

Similarly, the affirmative action community share in workforce at different level should also be mentioned in the annual report. So that a better employment related AA programme can be designed to increase the share of affirmative action community and make the growth more inclusive.

### Scope for Future Research

The basic concept of affirmative action initiatives and the role of private sector companies towards social inclusion process through affirmative action is presented here with the help of special reference to the steps and programmes started by TATA Steel. The impact of TATA Steel programmes and policy set an example for other private sector companies



to take similar steps under their CSR programmes in their operational areas. A comparative analysis related to the status of social inclusion in the operational areas of public and private sector companies in India can also open many possibilities of discussion and replication of programmes to faster the rate of social inclusion process. It also opens the discussion door for the basic issues related to the affirmative action programmes in India, the existing discrimination in society and social inclusion process.

### Limitations

The article is written on the basis of data gathered from secondary sources which limits the article in order to present the real impact of affirmative action programmes on social inclusion process. The actual impact and case study of beneficiaries of these programmes may highlight the key point of these programmes as well as the missing steps which can strengthen the further development and replication of these projects in other areas.

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