



# Empowering Tribal Communities: The Economic Contributions of CSR Tourism in Odisha.

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) tourism in supporting tribal communities in Odisha, India. The aim is to examine how CSR tourism promotes sustainable economic development and cultural heritage preservation. According to the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC), there was a 20% increase in tourist numbers in 2023, partially due to CSR-funded projects. One notable example is Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism project in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve, which has created employment opportunities for more than 500 tribal members and improved local infrastructure. Another project, supported by the Indian Oil Corporation, has contributed to the development of the Chilika Lake area, benefiting local fisheries, handicrafts, and over 300 families. These CSR initiatives demonstrate how sustainable economic opportunities can be created while preserving tribal culture. The study used qualitative method of data analysis from relevant literature and reports. The analysis involved thematic analysis, focusing on the economic benefits of CSR tourism. The findings emphasize the importance of ongoing corporate engagement and strategic planning to promote inclusive growth in Odisha. These insights can be valuable for decision-makers and community leaders.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage preservation, CSR tourism, Employment opportunities, Inclusive growth, Sustainable economic development.

## Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a critical strategy for businesses to contribute to social and environmental well-being, particularly in areas where businesses have a significant impact. This study explores the role of CSR tourism in supporting tribal communities in Odisha, India, a state known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse tribal population. These communities often face economic challenges such as poverty, limited access to education, and inadequate infrastructure. By integrating CSR into tourism, companies can create sustainable economic opportunities and preserve the cultural identity of tribal communities. Two notable projects, Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism project in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve and Indian Oil Corporation's development project in the Chilika Lake area, have significantly boosted tourism and contributed to local economic growth and infrastructure development. Tata Steel's project has created employment opportunities for over 500 tribal members in Similipal, while Indian Oil Corporation's efforts have supported local fisheries and handicrafts, benefiting over 300 families around Chilika Lake.

The findings emphasize the importance of continued corporate engagement and strategic planning in CSR tourism, as these initiatives can create lasting economic benefits while preserving the cultural heritage of tribal communities.

## Review of Literature

The literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainable tourism underscores the multifaceted roles that businesses play in fostering social, economic, and environmental development across diverse regions. Majumdar and Saini (2016) delve into the complex relationship between businesses and local communities in Goa, India, particularly in the mining and tourism sectors. Their study reveals that community attitudes toward CSR are shaped by the perceived benefits and transparency of these initiatives, highlighting the need for genuine commitment and sustainable engagement from companies to foster positive community relations. This aligns with Markose et al. (2022), who emphasize the potential of responsible tourism in Wayanad, Kerala. Despite existing challenges, such as limited infrastructure and environmental degradation, the study shows that responsible tourism, which integrates economic, social, and environmental responsibilities, can significantly contribute to sustainable growth and green development. Another study by Jaysawal and Saha (2015) further explore the broader growth and challenges faced by Indian companies in implementing CSR initiatives. They argue that for CSR to be truly effective, it must align with societal goals and values, promoting sustainable development that balances environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal (2012) add to this discourse by critically examining the concept of "responsible tourism." They argue that the term lacks a precise definition and overlaps with other sustainable tourism practices like eco-tourism and community-based tourism, calling for clearer differentiation and more inclusive efforts that extend beyond voluntary sector actions alone. In a more localized context, Kiran et al. (2024) discuss how the Chenchu tribe in the Nallamalla Forest of Telangana has successfully integrated entrepreneurship with cultural preservation by leveraging sustainable practices such as honey collection and forest product harvesting. The government's recognition of indigenous knowledge and support through policy initiatives has further strengthened these efforts, illustrating a model where economic development and cultural preservation go hand-in-hand.

CSR also offers significant benefits for businesses themselves, as illustrated by Uma and Uma (2021). They highlight the case of Tata's philanthropic efforts, such as the JN Tata Endowment, which supports global educational initiatives. CSR not only enhances corporate reputation but also fosters employee loyalty and strengthens investor relations. However, they point out the discrepancies that still exist in CSR reporting, suggesting a need for greater transparency and consistency in how these activities are communicated and measured. In this light, ecotourism is another area where CSR intersects with sustainable practices, as explored by Das and Chatterjee (2023) in their study of the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary in Odisha. They find that while ecotourism has the potential to provide financial benefits and promote biodiversity conservation, its impact on the socio-cultural aspects of local communities remains minimal. This highlights a gap where more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches could be integrated into CSR tourism strategies. Kanungo et al. (2021) shed light on the socio-economic conditions of pattachitra artisans in the Puri district of Odisha, revealing the challenges they face, including insufficient capital, limited decision-making power, and competition from machine-made products. The study calls for targeted policy interventions to address these issues, suggesting that CSR initiatives could play a significant role in supporting traditional crafts and improving the livelihoods of local artisans.

Babu and Kinkhabwala (2019) discuss the importance of stakeholder engagement in initiatives like Skill India, particularly within the hospitality sector. They emphasize the need for corporations, government bodies, and NGOs to invest in improving training infrastructure and resources to support sustainable growth. Meanwhile, Pandya (2023) explores the dynamics of women's involvement in ecotourism in the Corbett Tiger Reserve. The study challenges the conventional focus on economic incentives by highlighting how social divisions like caste and class significantly influence women's participation, suggesting that CSR programs need to consider these socio-cultural factors more deeply. The regulatory landscape also plays a crucial role in shaping CSR practices in India. Mishra (2021) analyzes the implications of Section 135 of the Companies Act of 2013, which

mandates that corporations allocate 2% of their net profits toward CSR activities. His research assesses the alignment of these corporate initiatives with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, showing varying degrees of effectiveness and commitment among companies.

Naik and Vijaya Babu (2023) explore how commercial enterprises in India leverage CSR to contribute to social and economic progress. They show that businesses are increasingly using technological advancements in their CSR efforts to improve infrastructure, raise educational standards, enhance food production, and support marginalized groups, thereby aligning corporate goals with broader national development agendas. Dash (2022) presents a case study of Lanjigarh in Odisha, which has become a focal point for conflict between Vedanta Aluminium Limited (VAL) and international NGOs over development and environmental conservation goals. This study illustrates the complexities and tensions inherent in balancing corporate interests with community and environmental concerns, suggesting a need for more nuanced approaches in CSR that genuinely address local needs. Ghosh (2021) provides an example of successful community-driven development in the Himalayan region, where eco-smart model towns have been established through the collaboration of local leaders, government, and community members. This model demonstrates how sustainable and inclusive development can be achieved when local stakeholders are actively involved in the planning and implementation of projects. Lastly, Tarai (2022) examines the CSR practices of mining companies in Ghana, noting a tendency to prioritize high-quality CSR data for reporting purposes over genuinely addressing the needs of local communities. The study critiques the current conflict resolution methods, which are often bureaucratic and lack cultural sensitivity, calling for more meaningful community engagement and culturally informed approaches to CSR.

Collectively, these studies highlight the diverse ways CSR can contribute to sustainable development while also underscoring the challenges and gaps that need to be addressed to ensure inclusive and effective outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

Author(s)	Focus Area	Key Findings	Implications
Majumdar & Saini (2016)	CSR in mining and tourism (Goa)	Community attitudes are shaped by transparency and tangible benefits	Genuine and sustained corporate commitment is essential
Markose et al. (2022)	Responsible tourism (Wayanad)	Integration of economic, social, and environmental goals drives growth	Responsible tourism can support green development
Jaysawal & Saha (2015)	Growth of CSR in India	CSR must align with societal values for impact	Strategic alignment improves sustainable outcomes
Chettiparamb & Kokkranikal (2012)	Definition of responsible tourism	Overlap with other tourism types; lacks clarity	Need for definitional clarity and integrated efforts
Kiran et al. (2024)	Tribal entrepreneurship (Telangana)	Chenchu tribe combines cultural preservation with sustainability	Model for integrating indigenous knowledge with CSR
Uma & Uma (2021)	Corporate philanthropy (Tata)	CSR boosts reputation but lacks reporting consistency	Call for transparent and standardized CSR reporting
Das & Chatterjee (2023)	Ecotourism (Odisha)	Financial and environmental gains, but limited cultural impact	Need for more inclusive, culturally sensitive tourism models
Kanungo et al. (2021)	Traditional artisans (Odisha)	Pattachitra artists face economic and market	CSR can support traditional crafts and livelihoods

Author(s)	Focus Area	Key Findings	Implications
		challenges	
<b>Babu &amp; Kinkhabwala (2019)</b>	Stakeholder engagement in Skill India	Investment in training and infrastructure is vital	Collaborative approach needed for sustainable growth
<b>Pandya (2023)</b>	Women in ecotourism (Corbett)	Social divisions influence women's participation	CSR must address caste, class, and gender dynamics
<b>Mishra (2021)</b>	CSR law & policy (India)	Companies show varied alignment with SDGs	More effective regulation and goal alignment required
<b>Naik &amp; Vijaya Babu (2023)</b>	Tech-driven CSR in development	CSR used to improve education, food, and infrastructure	Tech integration enhances CSR effectiveness
<b>Dash (2022)</b>	CSR conflict (Lanjigarh, Odisha)	Clash between corporate goals and local resistance	CSR needs to balance economic and environmental concerns
<b>Ghosh (2021)</b>	Community-driven development (Himalayas)	Eco-smart towns created through stakeholder collaboration	Local participation key to sustainable outcomes
<b>Tarai (2022)</b>	CSR reporting in mining (Ghana)	Focus on image over community needs	Need for culturally aware, community-centered CSR

Table 1- Summary Table: Literature Review on CSR and Sustainable Tourism

### Research objectives

- To analyze the economic contributions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the tourism industry.
- To assess the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on Indigenous culture in the tourism industry.
- To examine the sustainable practices involved in corporate social responsibility (CSR) within the tourism industry.
- To explore the challenges faced by tribal communities in corporate social responsibility (CSR) tourism.

### Research questions

1. How does corporate social responsibility (CSR) tourism contribute to the economic development of tribal communities in Odisha?
2. How do tourism activities focused on corporate social responsibility (CSR) impact the preservation of tribal culture and traditions in Odisha?
3. What sustainable practices are being implemented in CSR tourism in Odisha to ensure long-term benefits for tribal communities?
4. What are the main challenges that tribal communities in Odisha face when trying to benefit from CSR tourism projects?

### Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach to investigate the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) tourism in supporting tribal communities in Odisha, India. The focus is on examining how CSR tourism initiatives contribute to sustainable economic development and the preservation of cultural heritage within these communities. The case study approach is particularly suitable for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of specific CSR projects and their impacts on local tribal communities.

The research employs a qualitative case study design, focusing on two prominent CSR-funded tourism projects in Odisha:

1. Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism Project in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve.

## 2. Indian Oil Corporation's Development Project in the Chilika Lake Area.

These cases were selected based on their relevance and significant contributions to tribal community development and cultural preservation in the region. The selection of these cases also aligns with the study's objective to explore diverse CSR initiatives that promote sustainable economic opportunities and foster inclusive growth. Data for this study were collected using secondary data sources, including:

1. Published Reports and Documents: The Case study is extracted from two eminent Journals, these are Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism, Vol. 11, Issue 3, and the International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility, Vol. 4, Issue 1. and Tata Steel, Indian Oil Corporation.

2. Academic Literature: Relevant academic articles, books, and papers on CSR, tourism, and tribal community development were examined to provide a theoretical foundation and context for the study.

The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The thematic analysis allowed the researcher to focus on the economic benefits, cultural heritage preservation, and inclusive growth opportunities provided by the CSR tourism projects.

The analysis involved the following steps:

1. Familiarization with Data: All collected data were thoroughly reviewed to become familiar with the content and context of the CSR initiatives. Notes were taken to identify initial impressions and recurring themes.

2. Coding: Data were systematically coded using open coding techniques to identify key themes and patterns. Codes related to employment opportunities, sustainable economic development, cultural heritage preservation, infrastructure development, and inclusive growth were assigned.

3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader themes that aligned with the research objectives. For example, themes such as economic empowerment of tribal communities, CSR's role in preserving cultural heritage, and strategic corporate engagement for sustainable development emerged.

4. Reviewing and Refining Themes: The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the essence of the data and were aligned with the research questions. This process involved rechecking the data and ensuring the themes were coherent and distinct.

5. Synthesis and Interpretation: The themes were synthesized to draw meaningful conclusions about the role of CSR tourism in tribal community development. Interpretations were grounded in the theoretical framework of CSR and sustainable development, providing insights into how CSR initiatives can promote inclusive growth while preserving cultural heritage.

This case study approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how CSR tourism initiatives can create sustainable economic opportunities while preserving the cultural heritage of tribal communities in Odisha. By examining the two specific cases of Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism project and Indian Oil Corporation's development efforts, this study provides valuable insights for decision-makers, community leaders, and corporate entities on the strategic engagement required to promote inclusive growth in the region.

## Analysis and Result

For this study, the thematic analysis focuses on the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) tourism in supporting tribal communities in Odisha, India. It involves examining the key themes derived from the literature review, case studies of Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism Project in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve and Indian Oil Corporation's Project in the Chilika Lake Area, and the broader context of CSR tourism's impact on economic development, cultural preservation, sustainable practices, and challenges.

Key Themes Identified:

1. Economic Contributions of CSR Tourism
2. Preservation of Tribal Culture and Heritage
3. Sustainable Practices in CSR Tourism
4. Challenges in Implementing CSR Tourism Initiatives

### ***1. Economic Contributions of CSR Tourism***

The economic impact of CSR initiatives in tourism is one of the central themes explored in the study. CSR tourism projects by corporations like Tata Steel and Indian Oil Corporation have demonstrated significant positive effects on the local economy of tribal areas in Odisha.

*Case Study Evidence:*

**Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism Project:** The initiative has created employment opportunities for over 500 tribal members in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve. This has led to a reduction in poverty levels and a boost in local businesses due to increased tourist influx and improved infrastructure, such as roads and water supply systems. The economic benefits extend beyond direct employment, supporting ancillary sectors like hospitality and retail.

**Indian Oil Corporation's Project in Chilika Lake:** Focuses on the development of local fisheries and handicrafts. The CSR project has benefited over 300 households by increasing fish stocks through sustainable practices and supporting local artisans in marketing traditional crafts. The improvement in infrastructure and access to essential services, such as healthcare and education, has also contributed to better economic conditions for the community.

**Theme Summary:** Both CSR projects highlight how corporate involvement in tourism can lead to substantial economic growth by creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and improving infrastructure. These initiatives emphasize the importance of CSR in providing long-term economic benefits to underserved communities.

### ***2. Preservation of Tribal Culture and Heritage***

The preservation of cultural heritage is another key theme identified in the study, as CSR tourism projects aim to maintain and celebrate the unique cultural identities of tribal communities.

*Case Study Evidence:*

**Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism Project:** The project has focused on not just economic development but also cultural preservation by establishing cultural centers and guided nature trails. These efforts aim to provide an authentic cultural experience for tourists while promoting and preserving the traditional knowledge and practices of the tribal communities.

**Indian Oil Corporation's Project in Chilika Lake:** Promotes traditional handicrafts like palm leaf goods and shell work. By creating better market access and providing financial support to artisans, the project has not only

boosted the local economy but also helped in preserving cultural heritage and instilling cultural pride among the local communities.

**Theme Summary:** Both projects underscore the significance of cultural preservation as an integral part of CSR tourism. By supporting traditional crafts, cultural centers, and eco-friendly tourism practices, these initiatives help maintain the cultural identity of tribal communities while simultaneously promoting sustainable tourism.

### 3. Sustainable Practices in CSR Tourism

The study highlights the importance of incorporating sustainable practices within CSR tourism to ensure long-term benefits for tribal communities and environmental conservation.

#### Case Study Evidence:

**Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism Project:** Focuses on sustainable tourism practices that conserve the unique ecosystem of the Similipal Biosphere Reserve. Initiatives like eco-friendly accommodations and guided nature trails minimize environmental impact while promoting tourism. These sustainable practices ensure that tourism growth does not come at the cost of environmental degradation.

**Indian Oil Corporation's Project in Chilika Lake:** Emphasizes sustainable fishing practices and the development of handicrafts using locally available and environmentally friendly materials. The CSR initiative also involves environmental education and awareness programs to promote sustainable livelihoods and conservation practices among the local communities.

**Theme Summary:** The adoption of sustainable practices is essential for the success of CSR tourism projects. The integration of sustainable eco-tourism principles not only helps in conserving the environment but also ensures that economic benefits are sustainable in the long run.

Objectives	Themes	Tata Steel (Similipal Biosphere Reserve)	Indian Oil Corporation (Chilika Lake Area)	Theme Summary
1. To analyze the economic contributions of CSR in the tourism industry.	Economic Contributions of CSR Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Created employment for 500+ tribal members</li> <li>- Boosted local businesses</li> <li>- Improved infrastructure (roads, water supply)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supported 300+ households</li> <li>- Promoted sustainable fisheries</li> <li>- Enhanced marketing of local handicrafts</li> </ul>	CSR tourism fosters local economic growth by generating jobs, enhancing infrastructure, and supporting ancillary industries.
2. To assess the impact of CSR on Indigenous culture in the tourism industry.	Preservation of Tribal Culture and Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed cultural centers and trails</li> <li>- Promoted traditional knowledge and tribal experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supported traditional crafts (palm leaf, shell work)</li> <li>- Enhanced artisan pride and cultural identity</li> </ul>	CSR initiatives help preserve tribal heritage through cultural promotion and support for traditional crafts and knowledge.
3. To examine the sustainable practices	Sustainable Practices in CSR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoted eco-friendly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Used eco-friendly materials</li> </ul>	Emphasizing sustainability ensures environmental

Objectives	Themes	Tata Steel (Similipal Biosphere Reserve)	Indian Oil Corporation (Chilika Lake Area)	Theme Summary
involved in CSR within the tourism industry.	Tourism	accommodations - Encouraged biodiversity conservation - Guided eco-trails	- Promoted sustainable fishing - Conducted environmental education	protection and long-term viability of economic benefits.
4. To explore the challenges faced by tribal communities in CSR tourism.	Challenges in Implementing CSR Tourism Initiatives	- Limited access to modern infrastructure - Need for continued corporate support and planning	- Environmental concerns (overfishing) - Limited access to tools and markets	Challenges such as infrastructure, resource access, and sustainability must be addressed through continuous support and collaboration.

Table 2- Table representing the summary of the thematic analysis

#### 4. Challenges in Implementing CSR Tourism Initiatives

The study also identifies various challenges faced by tribal communities in benefiting from CSR tourism projects. These challenges include issues related to resource allocation, infrastructure development, and community involvement.

Case Study Evidence:

Tata Steel's Eco-Tourism Project: Although the project has shown positive outcomes, challenges such as limited access to modern amenities and infrastructural facilities still persist. Additionally, there is a need for continuous corporate engagement and strategic planning to address these challenges.

Indian Oil Corporation's Project in Chilika Lake: The project faces challenges like environmental degradation due to overfishing, limited access to modern equipment, and market access issues for local artisans. The need for sustainable practices and comprehensive support mechanisms is crucial to overcoming these obstacles.

Theme Summary: The challenges in implementing CSR tourism are multifaceted, requiring strategic and ongoing engagement from corporations, governments, and local communities. Addressing these challenges is vital for ensuring the success and sustainability of CSR tourism projects.

The thematic analysis of the study reveals that CSR tourism has a profound impact on economic development, cultural preservation, sustainable practices, and community challenges in tribal areas of Odisha, India. By focusing on these key themes, the study provides valuable insights into the role of CSR in promoting inclusive growth, sustainable development, and cultural preservation in underserved communities. These findings can guide policymakers and stakeholders in designing effective CSR initiatives that address both economic and social dimensions, ensuring long-term benefits for tribal communities.

Figure 1: Figure representing word cloud of the thematic analysis



## Findings

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges hinder the full realization of CSR tourism benefits. These include inadequate infrastructure, limited access to modern technology, and market barriers for local products. Environmental pressures, such as overfishing and resource depletion, also pose risks. These findings underscore the need for ongoing corporate engagement, community participation, and government support to overcome structural and logistical hurdles. The study reveals that CSR tourism in Odisha has a profound impact on local economies, the preservation of tribal culture, the promotion of sustainable practices, and the challenges faced during implementation. These initiatives provide long-term advantages to tribal communities through job creation, support for traditional crafts, and environmental conservation. However, it is crucial for both corporations and communities to continue their efforts in order to sustain these benefits.

## Conclusion

The study on the impact of CSR tourism on Odisha's tribal people reveals that there is projected to be a 20% increase in tourists in 2023. This highlights the positive outcomes of CSR-funded projects. The area's infrastructure has been improved, and initiatives such as Indian Oil Corporation's support for Chilika Lake and Tata Steel's eco-tourism in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve have created job opportunities. The findings of the study suggest the need for strategic planning and continuous corporate engagement to ensure inclusive growth.

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