

# A Comparative Study of Thematic Corporate Social Responsibility Spending: Analysing Reliance and ONGC

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**Abstract**—This study presents a comparative analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending patterns of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) over three fiscal years (2021–22 to 2023–24). It investigates how these two major corporations—representing the private and public sectors—strategically allocate their CSR funds in alignment with business objectives and national development goals. Reliance adopts a market-oriented strategy, channelling resources into rural transformation, healthcare, education, and sports, while ONGC follows a government-driven approach, prioritizing healthcare and education in compliance with regulatory requirements. The research draws on data from CSR reports and official filings, employing descriptive and comparative analysis to evaluate spending trends and thematic priorities. The findings reveal a steady increase in CSR contributions from both companies, underscoring the contrasting yet complementary nature of their approaches. The study suggests that blending strategic flexibility with regulatory alignment could enhance the overall effectiveness and social impact of CSR initiatives in India.

**Index Terms**—CSR, Reliance, ONGC, Thematic CSR

## I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a fundamental aspect of contemporary corporate governance, underscoring the ethical, social, and environmental obligations that businesses must fulfil beyond mere profit maximization. In the increasingly interconnected and socially conscious global economy, CSR initiatives are considered strategic instruments contributing to sustainable development and enhancing corporate reputation, stakeholder trust, and long-term business viability (Carroll, 1991). This is particularly relevant in developing economies such

as India, where corporate engagement in social welfare plays a pivotal role in addressing critical socio-economic challenges, including poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability.

Recognizing the importance of CSR in national development, the Indian government institutionalized corporate responsibility through the Companies Act 2013. Under this legislation, companies meeting specific financial thresholds must allocate 2% of their average net profits from the preceding three financial years towards CSR activities (Ministry of Corporate Affairs [MCA], 2013). This regulatory intervention has transformed CSR from a discretionary initiative into a statutory obligation, necessitating structured strategies, transparent reporting mechanisms, and measurable impacts across industries. Consequently, CSR has evolved from philanthropic contributions to a more structured approach that aligns corporate efforts with national priorities, global sustainability goals, and stakeholder expectations.

Among the corporate entities actively engaged in CSR in India, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) stands out due to its extensive and sustained efforts. ONGC, as a prominent public sector undertaking (PSU), aligns its CSR initiatives with government-driven social welfare programs, emphasizing rural development, environmental sustainability, education, healthcare, and sanitation (ONGC, 2022). In contrast, as a leading private-sector conglomerate, Reliance adopts a market-oriented approach to CSR, leveraging innovation, digital inclusion, and skill development to drive socio-economic transformation (Reliance Industries, 2023). While both corporations contribute significantly to CSR in India, their thematic focus, fund allocation, and strategic execution vary due to differences in their

organizational structures, governance models, and stakeholder expectations.

Despite the growing emphasis on CSR in India, there remains a paucity of research comparing thematic CSR spending between public and private enterprises. Existing studies have primarily examined CSR spending trends, regulatory compliance, and broad impact assessments (Kansal et al., 2014; Gupta & Sharma, 2020). However, a nuanced understanding of how corporate entities prioritize thematic CSR areas—such as education, healthcare, environmental conservation, and rural development—is critical for assessing the effectiveness of CSR strategies. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of the CSR spending patterns of ONGC over five financial years (2019–2024), focusing on thematic preferences, allocation mechanisms, and overall impact.

The rationale for selecting ONGC as a case study lies in its substantial market presence, financial strength, and long-standing commitment to CSR. As a public sector undertaking (PSU), ONGC is subject to government oversight and formulates its CSR strategies in alignment with national policies such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the National Education Policy, and flagship programs like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (ONGC, 2023). ONGC's CSR initiatives include healthcare infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, rural development, and skill enhancement programs. By examining ONGC's CSR model, this study aims to illuminate the influence of government oversight on CSR priorities, resource allocation, and social impact, thereby providing critical insights into the efficacy of different CSR approaches in India.

Furthermore, the findings of this research will offer significant implications for corporate policymakers, government regulators, and CSR strategists by identifying best practices, potential areas for enhancement, and policy recommendations. The study will contribute to the broader discourse on CSR effectiveness, corporate accountability, and the role of businesses in national development. Given the increasing scrutiny on corporate contributions to social welfare, this research is particularly relevant in India's evolving CSR landscape, where transparency, impact assessment, and strategic alignment with national priorities remain central concerns (Mitra, 2021). A focused analysis of ONGC's CSR strategy will offer

valuable insights into the practical dimensions of CSR implementation, ensuring that corporate social investments translate into meaningful and sustainable social impact.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been extensively examined in business ethics, corporate governance, and sustainable development. Scholars have explored its theoretical underpinnings, regulatory frameworks, thematic allocations, and impact assessments, shedding light on the diverse approaches adopted by corporations. This section synthesizes existing literature to identify gaps and justify the necessity of a comparative study on thematic CSR spending by ONGC and RIL.

### 1. Theoretical Foundations of CSR

CSR is anchored in multiple theoretical perspectives, including Carroll's Pyramid of CSR, stakeholder theory, and shared value theory. Carroll (1991) introduced a hierarchical framework where corporations are expected to fulfil economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory posits that businesses must engage with diverse stakeholders—employees, customers, communities, and governments—to achieve sustainable growth. Similarly, Porter and Kramer's (2011) Creating Shared Value (CSV) theory emphasizes the integration of CSR with corporate strategy, ensuring mutual benefits for businesses and society.

Several studies have explored the practical applications of these theories in CSR strategies across Indian firms (Gupta & Sharma, 2020; Mitra, 2021). Kansal and Singh (2018) highlighted how Indian companies align their CSR initiatives with stakeholder expectations, while Chatterjee and Mitra (2017) examined how CSR theories influence corporate decision-making. However, there is a paucity of research on how public and private enterprises incorporate these theories into their CSR frameworks. Given the unique governance models of ONGC and Reliance, an in-depth analysis is required to understand their theoretical approaches to thematic CSR allocations.

### 2. Regulatory Framework of CSR in India

The Companies Act 2013 introduced a landmark provision under Section 135, making India the first

country to mandate CSR spending. Companies exceeding a net worth of ₹500 crores, a turnover of ₹1,000 crores, or a net profit of ₹5 crores must allocate at least 2% of their average net profits from the preceding three years toward CSR initiatives (MCA 2013). Additionally, the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (NGRBC) emphasize the alignment of corporate social responsibility with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (MCA, 2019).

Research suggests that public-sector enterprises (PSEs) and private corporations interpret CSR obligations differently. Kansal et al. (2014) found that PSEs generally align CSR spending with government-mandated themes, whereas private enterprises exercise more flexibility in selecting CSR areas. Rana and Kumari (2020) argue that PSEs prioritize compliance with regulatory norms, while private corporations, such as Reliance, integrate CSR with their strategic business objectives. However, there is limited comparative research assessing whether PSEs like ONGC strictly adhere to prescribed themes or whether private firms like Reliance adopt a more autonomous and innovative approach in CSR execution.

### 3. Thematic Trends in CSR Spending

CSR spending in India is broadly classified into key sectors such as healthcare, education, rural development, environmental sustainability, livelihood enhancement, gender equality, and sports promotion (Chakraborty et al., 2021). Studies indicate that Indian corporations predominantly focus on education and healthcare, aligning with national development priorities (Mishra & Suar, 2010; Garg & Singh, 2018).

- **Public-Sector CSR Trends:** Public-sector units (PSUs), including ONGC, prioritize projects related to rural infrastructure, skill development, healthcare, and environmental conservation (ONGC, 2022). According to Kumar and Verma (2019), PSUs often align CSR spending with government policies such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the National Skill Development Mission.
- **Private-Sector CSR Trends:** Private enterprises like Reliance emphasize digital literacy, women's empowerment, innovation-driven projects, and social entrepreneurship (Reliance Foundation, 2023). Singh and Tandon (2021) found that private firms exhibit greater agility in

implementing CSR initiatives that leverage technology and sustainable business models.

Comparative studies by Patnaik and Sahoo (2022) suggest that private enterprises demonstrate higher efficiency and innovation in CSR execution, while PSUs operate within bureaucratic frameworks that may impede flexibility. Nonetheless, a gap remains in the quantitative assessment of thematic CSR expenditure over multiple years. This study seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing CSR spending trends in ONGC and Reliance from 2019 to 2024.

### 4. CSR Effectiveness and Impact Assessment

The effectiveness of CSR spending is evaluated through impact measurement frameworks, stakeholder satisfaction, and sustainability outcomes (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Research indicates that private enterprises adopt impact-driven CSR models that ensure tangible and measurable benefits, while PSUs focus on compliance-based CSR with broader societal benefits (Rana & Kumari, 2020).

Mehta and Sharma (2019) examined CSR impact assessment frameworks and concluded that private firms employ data-driven approaches to measure social returns on investment (SROI). In contrast, public-sector enterprises primarily focus on regulatory compliance and large-scale infrastructure projects (Bansal & Kumar, 2021). However, there is limited empirical evidence comparing the effectiveness of CSR initiatives in ONGC and Reliance regarding long-term societal impact. By analyzing thematic CSR expenditures over five financial years, this research aims to assess the strategic effectiveness of CSR implementation in both public and private sectors.

## III. RESEARCH GAP

This study addresses three key research gaps: the lack of comparative studies on thematic CSR spending, limited understanding of strategic CSR prioritization, and the absence of multi-year analyses. Existing research examines public and private CSR strategies separately (Kansal et al., 2014; Patnaik & Sahoo, 2022) without comparing their effectiveness (Rana & Kumari, 2020). Additionally, CSR priorities shift due to economic and regulatory changes, yet most studies focus on a single financial year rather than long-term trends (Chakraborty et al., 2021). By analyzing CSR spending from 2021-22 to 2023-24, this study will assess how ONGC and Reliance adapt their CSR

focus, offering insights to enhance CSR effectiveness in India.

#### IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To compare the thematic CSR spending patterns of Reliance Industries Limited and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited

#### V. METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** This study employed a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyze the comparative CSR spending patterns of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) and Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) from 2021-22 to 2023-24. A descriptive and comparative research design was adopted, with a longitudinal perspective to track thematic CSR allocations over five financial years. Descriptive analysis categorized CSR expenditures into defined thematic areas, while comparative analysis examined strategic differences between the CSR approaches of a public-sector enterprise (ONGC) and a private-sector corporation (Reliance).

**Data Collection:** The study relied on secondary data sources, including annual CSR reports, sustainability reports, mandatory CSR disclosures under the

Companies Act, stock exchange filings, and academic research. Data was extracted from official reports such as ONGC and Reliance annual reports (2021-22 to 2023-24), the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) CSR portal, and research publications from institutions like NITI Aayog and the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA). CSR expenditures were categorized based on MCA guidelines and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) alignment into key areas such as education, healthcare, rural development, environmental sustainability, women's empowerment, and cultural preservation.

**Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistics, comparative analysis, and statistical testing were employed for data analysis. Mean, median, and percentage distributions provided insights into CSR spending patterns, while year-wise comparisons and cross-tabulation highlighted differences in thematic allocations. A trend analysis assessed changes over time, and a statistical t-test determined the significance of differences in spending patterns between ONGC and Reliance. Additionally, correlation analysis examined the alignment of CSR spending trends with national policies and financial performance. This methodological approach comprehensively evaluated CSR strategies and their impact across the selected years.

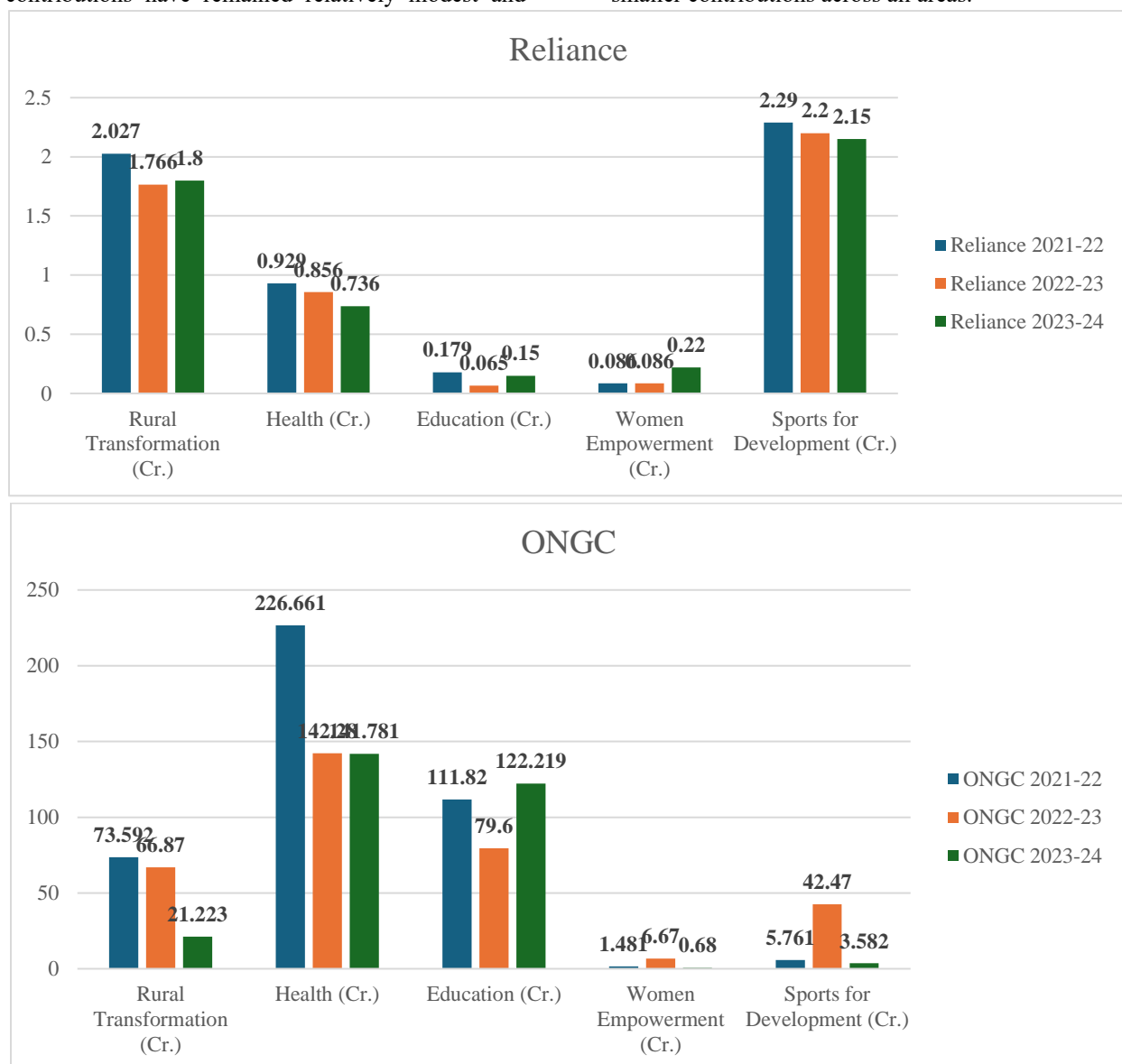
#### VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: CSR Spendings of Reliance and ONGC for 2021-22 to 2023-24

Company	Year	Rural Transformation (Cr.)	Health (Cr.)	Education (Cr.)	Women Empowerment (Cr.)	Sports for Development (Cr.)	Total CSR Contribution (Cr.)
Reliance	2023-24	2.027	0.929	0.179	0.086	2.29	1592
	2022-23	1.766	0.856	0.065	0.086	2.2	1271
	2021-22	1.8	0.736	0.15	0.22	2.15	1186
ONGC	2023-24	73.592	226.661	111.82	1.481	5.761	634.574
	2022-23	66.87	142.28	79.6	6.67	42.47	475.89
	2021-22	21.223	141.781	122.219	0.68	3.582	457.997

The table 1 presents the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contributions of Reliance and ONGC over three fiscal years (2021–22 to 2023–24) across five key areas: Rural Transformation, Health, Education, Women Empowerment, and Sports for Development. Reliance's total CSR contribution shows a consistent increase from ₹1186 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹1592 Cr. in 2023–24. Among the specific categories, contributions towards Rural Transformation and Health have shown a steady rise, with Rural Transformation increasing from ₹1.8 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹2.027 Cr. in 2023–24, and Health rising from ₹0.736 Cr. to ₹0.929 Cr. over the same period. In contrast, Education and Women Empowerment contributions have remained relatively modest and

fluctuating. For ONGC, total CSR spending also shows a significant upward trend, increasing from ₹457.997 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹634.574 Cr. in 2023–24. ONGC's largest contributions are towards Health and Education, with Health contributions increasing from ₹141.781 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹226.661 Cr. in 2023–24, while Education saw a decrease from ₹122.219 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹111.82 Cr. in 2023–24. Interestingly, Sports for Development contributions by ONGC dropped significantly from ₹42.47 Cr. in 2022–23 to ₹5.761 Cr. in 2023–24. Overall, both companies have shown a growing commitment to CSR, with ONGC focusing more heavily on Health and Education, whereas Reliance maintains consistent but relatively smaller contributions across all areas.



## VII. CONCLUSION

The comparative study reveals distinct CSR strategies and spending patterns between Reliance and ONGC over the three financial years (2021–22 to 2023–24). Reliance's total CSR contributions grew consistently from ₹1186 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹1592 Cr. in 2023–24, with a balanced distribution across rural transformation, health, education, women empowerment, and sports for development, reflecting a market-driven strategy focused on broad socio-economic impact. ONGC's CSR spending increased from ₹457.997 Cr. in 2021–22 to ₹634.574 Cr. in 2023–24, with significant focus on healthcare and education, consistent with government-driven social welfare priorities, though spending on sports for development dropped sharply from ₹42.47 Cr. in 2022–23 to ₹5.761 Cr. in 2023–24, indicating a shift in strategic focus. Reliance's flexible and innovation-driven CSR approach contrasts with ONGC's compliance-based strategy aligned with national development policies. Despite their differences, both companies demonstrate a growing commitment to CSR, suggesting that a hybrid approach combining strategic flexibility with government alignment could enhance the overall impact and sustainability of CSR initiatives in India.

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