

Challenges of New Regime (GST): A Case of MSMEs in India

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Abstract

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are vital for Indian economic growth, contributing about 30% to GDP, 45% to exports, and employing over 110 million people. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was implemented on July 1, 2017, bringing considerable challenges, particularly for the MSME sector, despite its intention to create a unified tax regime. GST is a well-known tax system initiated by the Government of India after 70 years of independence. It subsumed almost all the taxes that were part of the old tax framework. So far GST has been put in place in more than 160 countries around the world. France was the first country that comply with GST. Despite several benefits, such as simplifying the tax structure, creating a unified market, and improving tax compliance, GST has raised compliance costs, financial burdens, and technological barriers for MSMEs. The objective of this research paper is to emphasize the challenges that MSMEs encounter and the effect of GST on them. Quantitative data has been gathered to provide a comprehensive understanding of these challenges. The findings reveal that MSMEs encounter significant difficulties under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system, including increased compliance complexities, cash flow constraints, and limited technological readiness. To effectively address these issues, the study emphasizes the necessity of simplified compliance procedures, improved access to financial and technological resources, and enhanced awareness programs.

Keywords

CGST, Challenges, GST, IGST, MSME, SGST.

INTRODUCTION

MSME

MSMEs are essential to India's socio-economic advancement. It serves as the foundation of Indian economy. In 2024, approximately 203.9 million job opportunities are being generated by 39 million MSMEs, contributing 36 % to the GDP. [1]. The MSME sector has been essential in promoting innovation and technological advancement in areas where large companies may not excel. They quickly meet market needs and work as an integral part of the supply

chain for bigger companies by acting as suppliers of components, services, and raw materials to support industrial ecosystem. [2].

Table 1 presents the classification of MSMEs in India according to their investment in Plant and Machinery and annual turnover. To accommodate expansion and scaling, the limit was altered in union budget 2025-26. The New investment and turnover restrictions are subsequently higher than the prior ones, which were effective as of July 1, 2020. The main goals of these reforms include enhancing access to government support and making this sector more formal.

Table 1. Definition of MSME's

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Category of	Investment Limit (In Plant and Machinery)	Turnover Limit	Investment Limit (In Plant and Machinery)	Turnover Limit
Enterprises	w.e.f. 1 st July 2020	w.e.f. 1 st July 2020	As per Union Budget 2025-26	As per Union Budget 2025-26
Micro Enterprises	Rs. One Crore or Less	Rs. 5 Crores or Less	Rs. 2.5 Crores or Less	Rs. 10 Crores or Less
Small Enterprises	Rs 10 Crores or Less	Rs. 50 Crores or Less	Rs 25 Crores or Less	Rs. 100 Crores or Less
Medium Enterprises	Rs. 50 Crores or Less	Rs. 250 Crores or Less	Rs. 125 Crores or Less	Rs. 500 Crores or Less
Source: Annual report MSME (18-19), [3] [4]				

Table 2. Statistics of MSME in India

Particulars	Value	Reference
Contribution to GDP	Approximately 30.1% of India's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in 2022-23	MSME (2023) retrieved from https://msme.gov. in/msme-annual-report-2022-23
Share in Exports	45.73% of total exports in 2023-24 (up to May 2024)	[5]



Particulars	Value	Reference
Employment Generation	Over 237.24 million people employed as of December 12, 2024	Ministry of MSME (2024) retrieved from MSME Dashboard
Number of Registered MSMEs	56.09 million enterprises registered as of December 12, 2024	MSME Dashboard, Government of India (2024) retrieved from MSME Dashboard
Sectoral Distribution	 Manufacturing: 11.06 million enterprises Services: 19.69 million enterprises Trading: 25.43 million enterprises as of December 12, 2024 	MSME Dashboard, Government of India (2024) retrieved from MSME Dashboard
Ownership Demographics	 Male Entrepreneurs: 33.61 million Female Entrepreneurs: 22.35 million as of December 12, 2024 	MSME Dashboard, Government of India (2024) retrieved from MSME Dashboard

Table 2 presents the MSME sector's contribution to India's economy, accounting for approximately 30.1% of GDP in 2022-23 and 45.73% of total exports in 2023-24 (up to May). Employing over 237.24 million people as of Dec. 2024, the sector comprises 56.09 million registered enterprises, with a diverse distribution across manufacturing (11.06 million), services (19.69 million), and trading (25.43 million). Ownership demographics reveal a substantial presence of male entrepreneurs (33.61 million) and a growing number of female entrepreneurs (22.35 million), reflecting their vital role in fostering economic growth, employment, and inclusivity.

Goods and Services Tax (GST):

GST stands as one of the most impactful and transformative indirect tax reforms in India since independence. It was implemented by replacing the host of

the taxes prevailing under the old tax regime. It also streamlined the Indirect tax system and brought a significant shift to the Indian economy. It has been implemented to create a business-friendly environment for entrepreneurs and eliminate the shortfalls of old indirect tax regime. It also allows tax credit paid when purchasing inputs and capital goods, which can later be set off against the output tax liability.

Table 3 outlines the tax structure under the old tax regime in India, detailing the various indirect taxes imposed separately by the central and state governments before the implementation of GST. It highlights the fragmented nature of the system, where the central government levied taxes such as excise duty, service tax, and customs duty, while the state governments imposed taxes like value-added tax (VAT), entertainment tax, entry tax, and others.

Table 3. Tax Structure in Old Tax Regime

Sr. No.	Taxes	Imposed on	Collected By (Central Govt.)	Collected By (States Govt.)
1.	Central Excise Duty	Manufacturing on Goods	Yes	-
2.	Duty of Excise	Medicinal and Toilet Preparation Act	Yes	-
3.	Additional Duty of Excise	On special goods act. 1957	Yes	-
4.	Service Tax	Services of all kinds	Yes	-
5.	Value added Tax	Additional Tax on goods	-	Yes
6.	Centre Sales Tax	Sale of Goods	-	Yes
7.	Entertainment Tax	On Movies, amusement, etc.	-	Yes
8.	Luxury Tax	Luxurious Goods	-	Yes
9.	Taxes on Lottery, Betting, and Gambling	Lottery, Batting and Gambling	-	Yes
10.	Taxes on Advertisements	Advertisements	-	Yes
11.	Entry Tax or Octroi	When Goods crosses the state boundaries	-	Yes
12.	Surcharge and Cess	Special fees apart from the taxes	-	Yes
13.	Purchase Tax	On Purchase of goods		Yes
14.	Special Additional Duties	Imports of goods	Yes	-



Sr. No.	Taxes	Imposed on	Collected By (Central Govt.)	Collected By (States Govt.)
15.	Additional Duty of Excise	On Special Goods Act,1957	Yes	-
16.	Countervailing Duty (CVD)	Goods imported from Outside the country	Yes	-
17. Special Additional Duty (SAD) Goods Imported Outside Country Yes -			-	
	Source: [6] [7] and Compiled by the Author from Review of Literature			

Table 4 provides a concise overview of key milestones in the evolution of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India. It traces the journey from the initial proposal in the year 2000 to the legislative developments leading up to its implementation. The Table highlights the major policy actions and reforms that shaped the rollout of GST in 2017.

Table 4. Evolution of GST in India

Year	Genesis of GST in India		
2000	The Vajpayee government took the initiative to establish GST in India, and a committee was formed under the leadership of Asim Dasgupta ji (Finance Minister, Government of West Bengal at that time). The group has been tasked with developing a GST model and overseeing the IT backend infrastructure for its implementation.		
2004	Kelkar task force strongly recommended implementation of GST for Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 on a national level.		
2007-2008	The proposal of a national-level goods and services tax was first made by Union Finance Minister, Shri P. Chidambaram while addressing the Central budget 2007-08, but due to the involvement of state revenue, it was not implemented at the time, and the task of addressing the road map and design of GST was delegated to an approved committee by the State Finance Minister (EC).		
2014-16	On December 19, 2014, the NDA administration introduced the Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill, 2014, regarding GST in Parliament. After that, on May 6, 2015, Lok Sabha accepted the bill, and on August 3, 2016, it was duly approved by Rajya Sabha, The president's assent was taken on September 8, 2016, and it became the Constitution (101st Amendment) Act, 2016, which confirmed the road for the establishment of GST in India.		
2017	CGST Act,2017, SGST Act, 2017 & IGST Act, 2017 were introduced in Lok Sabha on 27 March 2017 and passed on 29 th March and the President gave their consent on 12 April 2017.		
Roll Out Date	Finally, on 1st July 2017, GST was implemented in India.		
	Source: [7] [8] [9]		

Under the **New Tax Regime**, these taxes are replaced by Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST), State Goods and Services Tax/Union Territory Goods and Services Tax (SGST/UTGST), and Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST). Based on the supply of Goods and Services taxes will be imposed. For detailed analysis, refer to the chart of Supply under GST mentioned below.

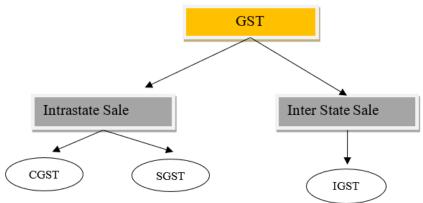


Figure 1. Supply under GST (New Tax Regime) Sources: [8]



Figure 1 presents the classification of GST into two types of sales: intra-state and inter-state. Intra-state sales are subject to CGST and SGST, while inter-state sales attract IGST, reflecting the dual GST structure in India.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the difficulties encountered by MSMEs in adjusting to the new GST framework. By focusing on the experiences of MSMEs, this research will provide insights into the complexities that have emerged, assess the effectiveness of GST provisions, and highlight the implications of these challenges on the growth and sustainability of MSMEs in India and will contribute to understanding the broader ramification of GST on small businesses and provide recommendations for policy enhancements to better uphold the MSME sector in navigating the new tax landscape.

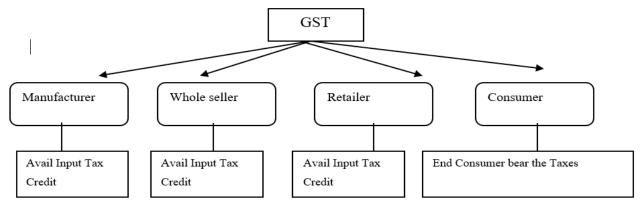


Figure 2. New Indirect Tax Regime (Goods and Services Tax) Source: [8]

The diagram in Figure 2 depicts the supply chain flow from manufacturer to end user, illustrating how GST is managed at each stage. It demonstrates that the producer, wholesaler, and retailer may claim an Input Tax Credit (ITC) for taxes paid throughout the transfer of goods. Ultimately, the end consumer faces the entire tax responsibility because they do not qualify for ITC and must pay the ultimate tax amount included in the price of products or services.

Table 5 presents a structured classification of taxes under the new indirect tax regime. It has four major components CGST, SGST, IGST, and UTGST. It further outlines the respective administrative authorities who are responsible for their collection and the revenue-sharing mechanism. Particularly in the case of IGST, per destination-based taxation principle.

Table 5. Classification of Taxes Under the New Indirect Tax Regime

Tax	Stands for	Collected By
CGST	Central GST	Central Government
SGST	State GST	State Government
IGST	Integrated GST	Collected by Central Government and Settle the Half amount to State Government (Based on Destination Principle)
UTGST	Union Territory GST	Union Territory
Source: Compiled by Author from Literature Review		

Tables 6 and 7 provide a simplified overview of GST rates applicable to various goods and services in India, categorized

by tax percentage slabs. These tables illustrate how essential items are taxed at lower or nil rates, while luxury goods and services attract higher GST rates.

Table 6. GST Rates on Goods

Rate (in Percentage)	Item (Inclusive List)	
Nil	On Everyday Items Like Food Grains, Milk, Vegetables, etc.	
0.25	Diamonds, Precious Stones, Synthetic or reconstructed Precision stones.	
3	Precious stones other than diamonds, Dust and Powder of natural or synthetic precious stones, Coins, etc.	
5	Mass Production like Spices and Mastered Oil	
12	Processed Foods	
18	Soap Oil, Toothpaste, Electronic items, etc.	
28	Luxury Items like Luxury Cars and Tobacco Products	
Source: https://gstcouncil.gov.in/(2018)		

Table 7. GST Rates on Services

Table 7. GS1 Rates on Services		
Rate (in Percentage)	Item (Inclusive List)	
Nil	Service delivered by Central Government, State Government, and Local Authority	



Rate (in Percentage)	Item (Inclusive List)	
5	Transportation of Goods and Passengers via Rail, Road, Air, and Ship	
12	Non-AC Restaurant Services, Room Rent tariff value More than 1000 but less than 2500 RS. Per day	
18	AC Restaurant, Outdoor catering, Room Rent Tariff Value More than Rs. two thousand five hundred but less than Rs. seventy-five hundred per day.	
28	Services on entertainment events, Room Rent Tariff Value More than 7500 RS. Per day, Race Club Service, Gambling	
Source: https://gstcouncil.gov.in/(2018)		

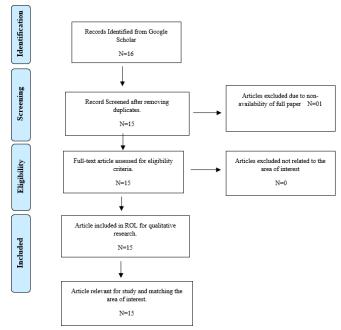


Figure 3. PRISMA model for selection of research papers

The Prisma Model presented in Figure 3 was used for a literature search on "MSME" and "GST Challenges." The Google Scholar database from 2017 to 2024 was considered. Advanced search filters included title, abstract, and full-text queries, focusing on papers available in full-text and English. Out of 16 identified papers, 15 were relevant, while 1 was excluded due to a lack of full paper access.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

GST and demonetization significantly transformed the Indian economy, especially for MSMEs. It requires the business to identify its supply chain and focus on cashless payments [10]. The old indirect tax regime had dominated India's tax system for many years, but GST was implemented

to streamline the Indirect tax regime and reduce complexities that prevailed under the old indirect tax regime despite this, MSMEs have faced compliance burdens and operational hurdles during the transition [11]. Similarly, MSMEs in Punjab state experienced increased compliance costs and difficulties in shifting from Old indirect tax regime to New Indirect Regime [12]. In another study, It was found that due to GST, digitalization of compliances has increased and become a major challenge for Micro Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) [13].

GST has significantly influenced MSMEs by improving liquidity through features like free flow of input tax credits and easing interstate trade [14]. However, it has also introduced challenges such as technological issues, compliance burdens, and increased operational costs for MSME entrepreneurs. Due to limited resources, the shift towards digitalization under GST has been particularly difficult for many small enterprises. Similarly, studies also confirm that MSMEs continue to face various issues including profit disruption, higher compliance costs, and operational difficulties because of GST implementation [15] [16].

The effect of GST on the performance of MSMEs in India has produced varied results. Studies [17], and [18] concluded that while GST improved operational efficiency and profitability, it also imposed greater compliance obligations that negatively affected smaller businesses. The research further highlights that tax awareness, technological advancements, and simplified tax frameworks contributed to enhanced corporate performance; however, compliance complexity remained a significant concern. Another study [19] found that while GST enhanced transparency and efficiency, it also resulted in higher compliance costs for MSMEs.

An empirical study conducted in the Chittoor District of India [20] found that Seventy two percent of MSME respondents were aware of GST and its associated challenges. The study also highlighted that while GST simplified the tax structure and enhanced competitiveness, increased compliance and administrative costs remained significant obstacles for smaller businesses. Another study [21] noted that although MSMEs initially faced difficulties in adapting to GST compliance requirements, the reform is expected to offer long-term benefits through greater tax transparency and the elimination of cascading tax effects.

GST, a comprehensive tax reform in India, subsumed many Indirect taxes into one unified system. It helped ease compliance and reduce costs for sectors like manufacturing, FMCG, IT, and logistics. However, the textile and banking sectors have experienced challenges due to high tax rates. Despite several initial setbacks, GST has resulted in greater transparency, promoted economic growth, and is expected to offer long-term benefits to India's economy [22]. During the initial phase of implementation, operational disruptions were observed, particularly among MSME's. While GST aims to streamline the taxation system, its effectiveness relies on



substantial adoption and integration into regular business operations [23]. In another study [24], it was found that only professionals can well understand the different terminologies or ranges of taxes.

Objectives

- 1. To study the challenges of GST faced by MSMEs.
- 2. To suggest possible ways to mitigate the challenges.

Research Methodology

The research methodology is based on secondary data, focusing on analyzing the impact of GST on MSMEs in India. Data was compiled from reliable sources like MSME reports, academic Journals, and official government websites, which mainly focus on various aspects of GST-related challenges that MSMEs faced in India.

Challenges Faced by MSMEs

Although MSMEs stand to benefit from the tax neutrality offered by the GST its implementation presents several challenges that they will need to navigate.

GST Exemption Threshold

The implementation of GST has brought a significant reduction in the threshold limit for businesses. Under the earlier excise tax laws, manufacturers with an annual turnover of less than ₹1.50 crores were exempt from paying excise duty. However, with the introduction of GST, this threshold has been lowered to ₹20 lakhs for most states and ₹10 lakhs for businesses in North-Eastern states. As a result, many small businesses that were previously outside the tax ambit are now required to register under GST and pay taxes. This has increased the tax burden for such businesses, as a significant portion of their earnings is now directed toward tax payments. The primary aim of this change is to expand the tax base by bringing a larger number of businesses and traders under the taxation system [25] [26] [27].

High Compliance Costs

The implementation of GST has brought about strict compliance requirements, which have had a significant impact on MSMEs. Not only are businesses required to file returns monthly, including separate filings for operations in multiple states, but this frequency also increases administrative burdens. This system, which demands continuous attention to accounting, tax liability calculations, and input tax credit claims, contrasts sharply with the prior quarterly system. Additionally, MSMEs are faced with the need to upgrade their IT infrastructure and hire skilled personnel to manage mandatory online processes, thus further escalating compliance costs. According to FISME (2020), over 70% of MSMEs report incurring substantial expenses due to these GST compliance demands [25] [12] [19] [28].

Availability of Input Tax Credit

Under GST, claiming Input Tax Credit (ITC) has become more dependent on vendor compliance. Unlike the previous

system, where ITC was based on invoices, It is now allowed only when the vendor has paid the taxes to the government and provided the necessary details, which are then matched with the information submitted by the business on the GST portal. This change makes businesses responsible for ensuring their vendors comply with GST rules to avoid losing tax credit eligibility [25]

Goods Supplied on Sale or Return Basis

Under the earlier tax laws, there was no specified time limit for returning goods sent on a sale or return basis. However, GST has introduced a six-month restriction. If the goods are neither approved nor returned within the above-mentioned period, they are deemed supplied, making the seller liable to pay tax. This change creates challenges for small-scale businesses—like those in the textile sector—where goods are frequently sent on a sale or return basis and customers often return items after the season concludes. The six-month time frame under GST could disrupt these customary practices and negatively affect such businesses.[25] [29].

Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM)

Under Section 9(4) of the GST Act, RCM mandates that a registered person purchasing goods or services from an unregistered supplier must pay the applicable tax directly to the government. This increases the working capital requirements for registered businesses, as they must bear the tax liability upfront. Consequently, registered companies are more likely to avoid transactions with unregistered suppliers. This shift adversely impacts unregistered traders and dealers, forcing them to either register under GST to remain competitive or face the risk of losing business, potentially leading to closures. This provision aims to widen the tax base but poses significant challenges for small, unregistered businesses [25] [30] [31].

Registration and Documentation

Under the GST system, businesses must first register with the GST Network (GSTN), which manages all tax-related processes online. This shift was challenging for small businesses used to informal operations. GST required them to maintain detailed records of their transactions, a practice many were not prepared for. The process of filing was complex and often confusing, leading to delays, particularly for those in rural and semi-urban areas with limited access to expert help [2] [32]

Return Fillings

Under the GST system, businesses are required to file many returns, such as GSTR-1 for outward sales, GSTR-3B for summary returns each month, and GSTR-9 for annual reports. Many MSMEs face difficulties due to the frequency and complexity of these filings, especially those less familiar with digital platforms. A study found that 46.1% of MSMEs had difficulty completing their returns due to challenges in matching invoices with customers and sellers [31].



Additionally, penalties for late submissions further increase costs, making it even harder for these businesses to comply with the regulations [2] [31] [33].

E-Way Bill

The e-way bill system was introduced to monitor the interstate movement of goods, designed to prevent tax evasion and facilitate smoother transportation. However, this new requirement has posed challenges for small and medium-sized businesses. Many of them find the online process for generating e-way bills difficult, leading to frequent delays and logistical problems [2].

Frequent Return Filings

The frequent GST return submissions monthly for most businesses and quarterly for smaller taxpayers impose a significant administrative burden on MSMEs. Additionally, the need for regular invoice reconciliation further complicates their operations. [2] [33]

Delayed Input Tax Credit (ITC)

MSMEs frequently encounter difficulties with accessing Input Tax Credits promptly, which can only be claimed once the supplier has submitted the appropriate returns. This delay often leads to cash flow problems for MSMEs due to hold-ups from larger businesses or technical glitches [34] [2].

Technological Barriers

Many small enterprises, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas, face challenges in adopting digital platforms because of inadequate technological infrastructure. This gap hinders their ability to comply with online GST registration and return submission processes [2] [27] [35].

Suggestions for Mitigating Challenges

To enhance GST compliance, MSMEs are increasingly adopting digital solutions that streamline reporting, payment processing, and billing within the GST framework.

Transition to Digital Platforms

Under GST, the adoption of digital platforms for filing reports, making payments, and issuing bills was emphasized. The move to digital systems led to a reduction in paperwork, as highlighted by [17], who noted an improvement in efficiency during this digital shift. MSMEs quickly adapted to using financial software compatible with the GST framework, such as Tally, QuickBooks, and Zoho Books, which facilitated tasks like tax calculations, invoice creation, and return filings. Initially, however, there was a learning curve associated with the adoption of these digital tools.

Accounting and Compliance Software

Adapting to new technology through financial software tailored to GST operations has been crucial for MSMEs. These applications simplified the process of filing GST reports, generating e-way bills, and reconciling transactions. [36] observed that the use of such tools enhanced legal compliance and operational efficiency for MSMEs. These

technologies not only saved time but also reduced the risk of penalties by ensuring transactions were recorded and reconciled in real-time, allowing businesses to manage their accounting remotely—a stark contrast to traditional paper-based methods.

GST Suvidha Providers (GSPs)

GSPs are third-party service providers offering comprehensive GST compliance solutions. These platforms have been sanctioned by the government to support small businesses in managing their GST obligations more effectively. GSPs provide a unified platform for small enterprises to handle registrations, tax filings, and payments seamlessly, which is particularly beneficial for businesses lacking the resources to establish their digital systems for GST management.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of GST represents a major transformation in India's taxation system, aiming to consolidate and streamline tax processes. However, this transition has brought several challenges for MSMEs, such as strict compliance requirements, higher administrative expenses, and the need for better technological infrastructure, all of which have put a strain on their resources.

This research highlights the difficulties MSMEs encounter with the current GST framework, particularly its impact on their financial and operational activities. The decrease in the GST exemption limit and the complex compliance procedures have intensified financial burdens and forced a shift to more advanced digital solutions. The study points out the necessity for specific support strategies that could lessen these burdens, like improved access to digital resources, financial assistance, and simpler regulatory procedures.

As MSMEs adapt to the GST's complexities, government policymakers must adjust and enhance the tax system and its supporting structures. Simplifying GST compliance and facilitating technological upgrades are essential steps to strengthening MSMEs' growth and sustaining their crucial role in India's economy.

Contribution to the Study

This study provides a clear analysis of how GST affects India's MSMEs, focusing on the challenges they face with compliance, financial pressures, and the need for better technology. It offers practical insights and suggests improvements that could help these businesses manage the impacts of GST more effectively. This research helps policymakers understand what MSMEs need to thrive under the new tax system and supports MSMEs in making the most of the GST framework.

Future Research Scope

In the future, further analysis will be conducted on the long-term impacts of GST on MSMEs, incorporating continuous monitoring and sector-specific assessments. Additionally, the effectiveness of existing support programs



will be evaluated, and the development of new digital tools tailored for MSMEs will be explored. These research efforts are aimed at improving GST-related policies and support systems to foster the growth and stability of MSMEs within the Indian economy.

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