
BUILDING SELF-RELIANT INDIA FOR ALL: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The vision of *Atma Nirbhar Bharat*, a self-reliant India must be inclusive and equitable, encompassing all sections of society, including persons with disabilities (PwDs). This paper explores the critical importance of integrating PwDs into the mainstream economic framework through targeted reforms, skill development, accessible infrastructure, and inclusive policies. Despite legal safeguards and progressive legislation like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the economic participation of PwDs in India remains significantly limited due to systemic barriers, attitudinal biases, and lack of accessibility in education, employment, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the gaps in current implementation frameworks and suggests strategies to create a more enabling environment for PwDs. It emphasizes the need for inter-sectoral coordination, inclusive digital tools, and government-private sector collaboration to foster meaningful livelihood opportunities. Case studies of successful disabled entrepreneurs and inclusive workplace models are examined to illustrate the transformative potential of inclusive economic policies. The Sustainable Development Goal 2030 has also taken pledge 'To leave no one behind'. However, one of the challenges facing the Indian economy is the lack of economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. This group is often excluded from the labor market and faces significant barriers to education, healthcare, and other essential services. Achieving true self-reliance is only possible when all citizens are empowered to contribute. Therefore, this paper advocates for a rights-based and capability driven approach that ensures persons with disabilities are not only beneficiaries but active participants in India's journey toward holistic self-reliance.

Keywords: Self-reliant, Economic inclusion, disabled persons, Sustainable Development Goals 2030.

Introduction

Covid 19 has broken down the economy of every nation. India which is still a developing country, due to lockdown has met with varied financial crises. People became unemployed and lots of people lost their way of earning resulting in fall of GDP. To overcome this situation and with a vision to make India fight the economic crises, Prime Minister Modi, launched a plan which is known as Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan with the hope of creating employment and opportunities for all. The challenge and impact of pandemic was upon all but most severe was upon the disabled persons as they became more helpless to understand and tackle the situation perhaps due to their dependency on others. Although there are several schemes and policies implemented for the protection and welfare of this section of society but there is requirement to enact plans, strategies and schemes which will not only provide food, clothing, shelter etc but which can make them capable and independent to deal with such situation if arises in future. As Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan's main goal is to make India Self-reliant which is only possible when all group of persons can be included and made part of this Abhiyaan including persons with disabilities.

Methodology

The research for the paper is based mainly on secondary sources like articles, books and online sources. Facts, judgments, interpretations, opinions, and ideas have been discussed based on articles and books.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to highlight the challenge faced by the persons with disabilities especially due to the breakdown of Covid 19 pandemic. Government announced the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan to grant economic support for making people self independent but to what extent the schemes under the plan will help the disabled sections in making them self reliant is the concern of the researcher. With this object the details of the abhiyaan in empowering the disabled persons is discussed in the present study.

A glimpse upon Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan

Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan or **Self-reliant India** campaign is the vision of new India envisaged by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. On 12 May 2020, he announced

this scheme. The main object of this scheme was to make India 'self-reliant India' so that we can minimize the import of at least small things. This scheme will run under the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Electronics & IT. These ministries will directly be involved in this policy. A further announcement of the Special economic and comprehensive package of INR 20 lakh crores - equivalent to 10% of India's GDP, to fight COVID-19 pandemic in India was made.

Due to spread of COVID-19, the entire world is facing huge trouble. Even the United States couldn't stop this virus and as a result, it has directly affected our markets and various industries. Moreover, many industries were running in loss and the employees were losing jobs. So, to improve the performance of industries which will automatically improve our economy the Government of India started this scheme. The aim is to make the country and its citizens independent and self-reliant in all senses.

It is a new government policy for encouraging local talent and generates new employment for people because many people and labourers lost their job in this epidemic. So, this scheme was launched to encourage people to develop their own business and contribute to the development of the nation.

Atmanirbhar Bharat is assembled on 5 pillars which are as follows:-

- **Economy:** - The abhiyaan intends to create quantum increase in the economy rather than step by step changes.
- **Infrastructure:** - we need infrastructure facilities, which stand at par with global standards will be initiated in the country that assists to become the identity of modern India.
- **System:** - The abhiyaan wishes to enhance modern technology that is not based on previous customs, policies and rules and regulations.
- **Demography:** - Vibrant demography is India's strength and to become the biggest democracy. We are the grouping of innovative and young population that is the source of strengthening for self-reliant India.
- **Demand:** - The abhiyaan has goals to strengthen the economy by demand and supply

chain that would be connected to its rightful perspective and give it the ability to achieve its full potential.

The reforms and stimulus measures under Rs 20 lakh crore packages were subsequently elaborated by the Finance Minister in five tranches:

Tranches	Areas	Stimulus in Cr (Rs)
I	MSME, EPF, Gareeb Kalyan, RERA, Credit	5,94,550
II	Farmers, Migrants	3,10,000
III	Agriculture & Allied Sectors	1,50,000
IV	Coal, Minerals, Aviation, Defense, Space, Atomic Energy	48,100
V	Ease of doing business, Health, Education Earlier measures like PMGKP	1,92,800
	RBI measures	8,01,603
	Total	20,97,053

Various short term and long-term measures for supporting the poor, including migrants, farmers, tiny businesses and street vendors have been announced.

- **Free food grains supply to migrants for 2 months.**
- **Technology system to be used enabling Migrants to access PDS (Ration) from any Fair Price Shops in India by March, 2021-One Nation one Ration Card.**
- **Scheme for Affordable Rental Housing Complexes for Migrant Workers and Urban Poor to be launched.**

- **2% Interest Subvention for 12 months for Shishu MUDRA loanees- Relief of Rs. 1,500 crore.**
- **Rs 5,000 crore Credit facility for Street Vendors.**
- **Rs 70,000 crore boost to housing sector and middle income group through extension of Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme for MIG under PMAY (Urban)**
- **Rs 30,000 crore Additional Emergency Working Capital for farmers through NABARD**
- **Rs 2 lakh crore credit boost to 2.5 crore farmers under Kisan Credit Card Scheme.**

The following measures to strengthen Infrastructure Logistics and Capacity Building for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Processing Sectors:

- **Rs 1 lakh crore Agri Infrastructure Fund for farm-gate infrastructure for farmers**
- **Rs 10,000 crore scheme for formalization of Micro Food Enterprises (MFE)**
- **Rs 20,000 crore for fisherman through Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**
- **Promotion of Herbal Cultivation: Outlay of Rs. 4,000 crore**

Some measures are also taken for providing employment, support to businesses, Ease of Doing Business, and State Governments as well sectors such as Education and Health are also initiated by the government like allocating **Rs 40,000 crore increase in allocation for MGNREGS to provide employment boost and increasing the** Public Expenditure on Health will be increased by investing in grass root health institutions and ramping up Health and Wellness Centres in rural and urban areas.

In Education sector some important steps are taken which are as follows:

- **PM e-VIDYA will be launched which unifies all efforts related to digital/online/on-air**

education. This will enable multi-mode access to education, and includes: DIKSHA (one nation-one digital platform) which will now become the nation's digital infrastructure for providing quality e-content in school education for all the states/UTs; TV (one class-one channel) where one dedicated channel per grade for each of the classes 1 to 12 will provide access to quality educational material

- The **Manodarpan initiative** is being launched to provide such support through a website, a toll-free helpline, national directory of counselors, interactive chat platform, etc. This initiative will benefit all school going children in the country, along with their parents, teachers and the community of stakeholders in school education.
- By liberalizing open, distance and online education regulatory framework. Top 100 universities will start online courses. Also, online component in conventional Universities and ODL programmes will also be raised from present 20% to 40%. This will provide enhanced learning opportunities to nearly 7 crore students across different colleges and Universities.
- There is a need to promote critical thinking, creative and communication skills, along with experiential and joyful learning for the students focussing on learning outcomes. The curriculum must be rooted in the Indian ethos and integrated with global skill requirements. Therefore, it has been decided to prepare a new National Curriculum and Pedagogical Framework for school education, a teacher education and early childhood stage to prepare students and future teachers as per global benchmarks.

The working of the Abhiyaan is conducted in the following five phases:

Phase-I: Businesses including MSMEs

Phase-II: Poor, including migrants and farmers

Phase-III: Agriculture

Phase-IV: New Horizons of Growth

Phase-V: Government Reforms and Enablers

Looking over the abhiyaan it is crystal clear that if proper implementation is done in all sectors then definitely the economy of country will increase. However, there are some crucial areas which still need to be addressed under the scheme like creating opportunities for self employment and self independent on persons who are suffering from any disabilities. To make India Self Reliant it is necessary that every population be it women, disabled or old aged should be atmanirbhar in the sense of economic independence.

Issues and Challenges of Persons with Disabilities

Disabled is a condition or a state that incapacitates or makes a person incapable of performing activity both physical and mental in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being.

According to World Health Organization “Disability is complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between feature of a person’s body and feature of a society in which he or she lives.”

Disability is a Human Right concern, as people with disability are subjected to multiple violations of their rights including violence, abuse, prejudice and disrespect which intersect with other form of discrimination based on age and gender among several other factors. Persons with disability also face barriers, stigmatization and discrimination while accessing health and health related services.

Traditionally disabled persons are categorized as lesser or incapable human beings who do not deserve to be born. Disabled persons are ignored, illiterate, abandoned and looked as an object of sympathy. They are not only denied with right to education or employment which is a basic essential for survival but they are also deprived to fight for justice due to their ignorance of their right. They face various barrier to access justice like communication and information barrier, physical barrier and economic barrier. The persons with disability were always marginalized by the conservative society. They are economically disadvantages, social segregated and politically excluded. Globally they were regarded as less capable than others. Initially the term handicap was used which literally means “cap in hand” and for survival they have to depend on the mercy of others. The family or guardian has to take care of them unfortunately if the family does not want to take care and think them as burden then they are left in institution as they have no home and no one to take care of.

According to WHO, there are an estimated 1 billion people or 15% of the world's population suffering from disability. Despite of this figure, persons with disability experience multiples discrimination. As per the census 2011 in India out of 121 crore population, 2.68 Crore persons suffer from disability i.e. 2.21%.

The General Assembly has adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Goals in September 2015. It includes 17 Goals. The principle behind the inclusion of these goals is that no one should be left behind. This new Agenda emphasizes on holistic approach to achieve sustainable development for all. Reference of persons with disabilities is made multiple times in the SDGs goals. In matter of education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements provisions and many others Sustainable Development ensures protection for persons with disabilities everywhere.

In developing countries the position of persons with disability is more critical due to economic barrier. Law is a powerful mechanism to protect the interest of disadvantage group of people.

A range of International document highlights that disability is a human right issue like World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled People (1982), Convention on the Rights of Child (1989) and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for people with disability (1993). The recent document is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted in 2006 and entered into force in 2008, indicating a 'paradigm shift' from traditional charity-oriented, medical-based approaches to disability to one based on human rights.

In India, the first legislation was the Persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. However, with passage of time this Act failed to cover many aspects of disabled and in the meantime India being a signatory of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2006 enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016. This new Act has included 21 forms of disability in comparison to 1995 Act which had only seven categories. So, now intellectual, physical, mental and sensory impairments measured in medical terms are included in terms of disability. The Act aims to protect all persons with disabilities from abuse, violence and exploitation and articulate specific measure to be taken by appropriate government officials, executive magistrates and the police personnel.

The “Accessible India” campaign was started by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in 2015 with the objective of making it convenient for persons with disabilities to access administrative buildings and transport facilities, among many others. The campaign has been launched in several Indian states and they take inspiration from other countries and their technologies such as Microsoft’s “Smart Cities for All Toolkit” that contains four tools to help smart cities worldwide to focus on ICT accessibility and the digital accessibility of persons with disabilities. So, international and national laws are there for persons with disabilities but implementation of laws has to face problems due to funding constraint. The situation became worst in pandemic which needs to be specifically addressed.

Economic Inclusion of persons with disabilities under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan

India has amplified towards its expansion efforts to emerge as a five trillion dollar economy by 2025, the country can ill afford to ignore the continued impact on public health, society and the economy caused due to lack of access to affordable and appropriate assistive technology products and services. International Labour Organization have estimated that globally the societies are deprived of an estimated US\$1.37 to 1.94 trillion in annual loss in GDP due to the lack of access to gainful employment for persons with disability.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates around one hundred million people in India and one billion people globally lack access to affordable and appropriate assistive technology products and services and this figure is predicted to double to two billion by 2030.

Perhaps the Sustainable Development Goal 2030 was provided keeping the above figure in mind. The plight and challenged of disabled persons needs special attention was thought by the world as such support and opportunities are more specifically dealt in 2030 Goals. Thus, the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Pledge ‘To leave no one behind’ requires urgent, coordinated and concerted action.

Economic independence is crucial factor leading to equalization of opportunity and meaningful existence with self-respect and dignity. In developing countries economic independence can be achieved by social security but in developing countries employment with adequate wages is of basic importance. Like abled, disabled also need job but it is very difficult for them to find job. And if they find one, they are made to do compromise on

wages on account of not possessing the skill or ability or potentiality to perform the work in better way.

In most developing countries the education and vocational training facilities are still not appropriate as a result the use of modern technology and equipment which is available for others are unfortunately not helping the persons with disabilities. So, today also they are still trained in traditional crafts and repetitive jobs like basketry, chair-caning, handloom weaving, packing assembly etc. Thus, the opportunities for them are still very limited.

Although it's potential to improve quality of life indicators, promote independence, and enhances individual productivity and participation, assistive technology in India has received very little attention. Unmet need for assistive technology products and services in India is estimated to be as high as 90%.

Progress achieved in adopting a rights-based framework, warrants urgent and effective implementation of individual rights to equal treatment and full participation. This includes ensuring access to high quality, appropriate and affordable assistive technology products and services for persons with disability.

The governments rallying call on Atma Nirbhar Bharat, Start-Up India, and Make-In-India provide an exciting opportunity to mainstream universal design and assistive technology considerations across India's Industrial Strategy and emerge as a global leader and manufacturing hub for the design and development of life-changing products and services. This requires development of an ecosystem for innovation and manufacture of indigenous assistive technology products that are responsive, intuitive, desirable and commercially viable capable of addressing new and unmet needs. Developing such an ecosystem at scale and focus will require leadership and engagement from respective State and National Government, bilateral and multilateral organizations, NGOs, DPOs and INGOs academic, research and manufacturing institutions, funding organizations including corporate business and industry. The emphasis of policy and practice development will need to be on harnessing the country's capabilities across information and communication technology (ICT) and engineering disciplines to produce innovative and more cost effective local solutions to address the diverse needs of its population to aid quality of life improvements based on principles of individual rights, equality, inclusion and sustainability.

In an effort to promote access to assistive technology products and services Disability Entrepreneurship and Leadership Foundation has commenced work to:

1. Undertake needs mapping and availability of appropriate assistive technology products and services for work and daily living.
2. Identify gaps in current provision.
3. Establish a local network of respective stakeholders interested in promoting access to assistive technology products and services.
4. Foster research collaborations to ensure manufacturing, production and distribution of cost-effective, affordable and appropriate assistive technology products and services.

A key part of this work is to ensure effective incorporation of universal design and accessibility principles based on diverse user perspectives and experience in the development and delivery of assistive technology products and services for persons with disability.

Role of NGO in assisting the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan for disabled Persons

Along with the Governmental mechanism NGO's role is very crucial. The effort of NGO has to much extent brought the disabled section to at least claim their right moreover their struggle and agitation has also compelled the government to think, rethink and provide equal status and opportunity for disabled persons. A glaring example is of Maharashtra's Udgir, an NGO named as Salaat Minorities Social and Welfare Society which is famous for its initiative of roti and kapada is accomplishing the dream of Atmanirbhar Bharat. In November 2020 it started Adhar Multiple Disabilities Centre Udgir for providing vocational training for disabled students with hostel facilities and all basic needs. Under them some students are also preparing for competitive exams. Apart from this they started multiple courses for divyangan students like training on making flower pots by using waste material, computer typing for the visually impaired, tailoring and spoken English. The centre is also conducting acupressure training by expert doctor for the students. In 2021 an exhibition was held by the NGO 25 students participated among which 23 were blind girls and 2 were handicapped. The President of the NGO made a clear statement that without the

development of divyangans we cannot convert the dream of Atmanirbhar Bharat into reality.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The contribution which is made and which can be made in future by the persons with disabilities to raise the economy can never be ignored. The government should create opportunities for them like that of abled to make them self independent. The vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat will be achieved if employment and opportunities can be extended to this section of our society inspite of just making them as help seekers or dependent on charity of others. Dignity and individual identity is often lost behind their disability. Therefore, the initiative should be taken to boost their employability through various skills and commitment to make them self independent to earn their livelihood which is their prior demand. Mass awareness among members of civil societies should be created to change the perception that disabled persons are object of pity and they are burden on economy. In spite of that equal opportunities and non discrimination would create economic security for them and will definitely change the perspective of the society. In order to make India in real sense Atmanirbhar it is necessary to take into concern every section of society including disabled persons.

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