



Viksit Bharat: How Nationalist Sentiments are Shaping India's Development Trajectory

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Abstract

The concept of "Viksit Bharat" or "Developed India" has become a central theme in India's national discourse, reflecting the country's aspirations to emerge as a global powerhouse by the centenary of its independence in 2047. This paper explores how nationalist sentiments are influencing India's development trajectory, focusing on economic, social, and political dimensions. By analyzing recent policies, public opinion, and socio-economic data, this study aims to understand the role of nationalism in shaping India's path towards becoming a developed nation. The paper also examines the challenges and opportunities that arise from this nationalist-driven development model, providing a comprehensive overview of India's current and future prospects.

Keywords: India, Bharat, Development, Digital India, Make in India, COVID-19, National Education Policy (NEP), Ayushman Bharat.

Introduction

India, with a population of more than 1.4 billion, stands at a crossroads in its history. The concept of "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) has become one of the pivotal themes in India's national thought, mirroring its ambitions of becoming a future economic superpower, a leading technological nation, and a welfare society by its independence centenary in 2047. Such a vision strongly intersects with renewed nationalist impulses urging self-reliance, national pride, and economic independence. Viksit Bharat is more than just a political buzzword; it's a full-bodied development agenda to address the time-honoured issues of India but maximize the nation's innate advantages in the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased the relevance of nationalist attitudes in determining the direction of India's development path. The pandemic revealed the frailties of global supply chains and underscored the necessity of being self-reliant in the key sectors like healthcare, pharma, and electronics. For this purpose, the Indian government initiated the Atmanirbhar Bharat program, focusing on minimizing dependence on imports and increasing domestic output. It has been coupled with a series of economic reforms, such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which offers fiscal incentives to manufacturers in select sectors for boosting domestic production. The development model based on nationalism has also deeply influenced India's social and cultural environment. The government's push for the conservation and promotion of culture, exemplified through programmes such as "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" (One India, Great India) and

yoga and Ayurveda promotion, is an indicator of a more general attempt at reviving and celebrating India's rich cultural past. Simultaneously, the government has also tried to tackle social issues like poverty, malnutrition, and gender disparity through initiatives like the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) campaign. With India hosting the G20 summit in 2023, the country's role in global governance has also increased. Under the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future," the summit covered issues including global health, sustainable development, and climate change. India's growing global impact and commitment to multilateralism are demonstrated by its leadership in several areas. However, tensions with China over border disputes and the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on global supply chains pose a challenge to the nation's foreign policy. There has long been a rise in nationalist sentiment in India. It is based on the fight for national independence, in which millions of people were inspired by the vision of an independent and sovereign nation by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose. However, the focus on economic independence, technological advancement, and cultural rebirth distinguishes the contemporary kind of nationalism, sometimes referred to as "New India" nationalism. This new nationalism aims to become a global leader in a variety of fields, from technology and space exploration to digital innovation and renewable energy, in addition to political independence.

Objective

This paper seeks to explore how these nationalist sentiments are shaping India's development trajectory, focusing on key areas such as economic policy, social development, and political governance. The paper also examines the challenges and opportunities that arise from this nationalist-driven development model, providing a comprehensive overview of India's current and future prospects.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the intricate relationship between nationalist sentiments and India's development trajectory. Qualitative research is particularly suited for this investigation as it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena, capturing the nuances of how nationalist ideologies influence various sectors such as economic policy, social development, and political governance. A case study approach will be utilized, focusing on specific instances where nationalist sentiments have visibly impacted policy decisions and development initiatives.

Data Collection Methods

Data will be collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis.

- i). **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Key informants, including policymakers, academics, social activists, and representatives from civil society organizations, will be interviewed to gather diverse perspectives on how nationalism is shaping development. Approximately 15-20 interviews will be conducted, allowing for flexibility in the questions while ensuring that core themes are addressed.
- ii). **Focus Group Discussions:** To further explore the collective sentiments and experiences related to nationalism, two to three focus group discussions will be organized, each comprising 6-8 participants drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds. This will provide insight into how nationalist sentiments are perceived and enacted at the grassroots level.
- iii). **Document Analysis:** Relevant policy documents, government reports, and media articles will be analysed to contextualize the findings from interviews and focus groups. This will help to triangulate data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nationalist-driven development model.

Analysis Approach

Thematic analysis will be employed to analyse the qualitative data collected. This involves coding the data into themes that emerge from the interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The analysis will focus on identifying patterns that illustrate how nationalist sentiments influence economic policies, social development initiatives, and governance structures. NVivo software may be used to assist in organizing and analysing the data, ensuring a systematic approach to identifying and interpreting themes.

Historical Context of Nationalism in India

The Independence Movement and Early Nationalism:

Indian nationalism took its origin in the fight for independence from British imperialism. Nationalist movement was spearheaded by the Indian National Congress, established in 1885, which emerged as the main force behind

the movement for independence, calling for self-governance and an end to colonial exploitation. Eminent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose rallied millions of Indians on the slogan of a free and independent state.

Gandhi's vision of non-violent resistance and Nehru's idea of a modern industrialized India set the stage for the nation's post-independence growth. India's Constitution, which was adopted in 1950, established the ideals of democracy, secularism, and social justice and mirrored the nationalist spirit of the day.

Post-Independence Nationalism and Economic Development:

During the decades after independence, India had followed a model of mixed economy, with an overwhelming focus on state-directed industrialization and self-reliance. The Nehruvian dream of a socialist, secular, and democratic India shaped the nation's development strategy, including the creation of public sector units, the Green Revolution, and the encouragement of scientific research.

However, the economic stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s led to a re-evaluation of this model. The economic liberalization of 1991, initiated by then Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, marked a significant shift towards market-oriented reforms, opening up the Indian economy to global trade and investment. This period also saw the rise of regional parties and the fragmentation of the national political landscape, leading to a more complex and pluralistic form of nationalism.

Modern Nationalism and the Emergence of "Viksit Bharat":

Over the last few years, there has been a revival of nationalist feelings in India, prompted by a mix of economic, social, and political reasons. The 2014 election of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with Prime Minister Narendra Modi was a watershed moment in Indian politics. The BJP's focus on cultural nationalism, economic independence, and assertive leadership has appealed to a large section of the Indian voter base.

The idea of "Viksit Bharat" has emerged as a core theme in the BJP's agenda for development, spelling out the party's vision of a developed and self-sufficient India by 2047. This vision is supported by a chain of flagship programs such as "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Atmanirbhar Bharat," which seek to induce domestic manufacturing, technological innovation, and international competitiveness in India.

Economic Dimensions of Viksit Bharat

Make in India: Boosting Domestic Manufacturing:

Launched in 2014, the "Make in India" initiative aims to transform India into a global manufacturing hub by attracting foreign investment, fostering innovation, and creating jobs. The initiative focuses on 25 sectors, including automobiles, textiles, electronics, and pharmaceuticals, with the goal of increasing the share of manufacturing in India's real GDP growth is estimated at 6.4% for FY25 and projected to be 6.3-6.8% for FY26 (2025-26) ^[1].

India's manufacturing sector has shown steady growth in recent years, with the Gross Value Added (GVA) in manufacturing expected to rise from the current 14 per cent (USD 459 billion) to 21 per cent (USD 1,557 billion) by 2032 ^[2].

However, the sector still faces significant challenges, including infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory hurdles, and a lack of skilled labor.

The "Make in India" initiative has also been criticized for its limited impact on job creation. While the initiative has

attracted significant foreign investment, with FDI inflows reaching \$64 billion in 2020^[3], the employment elasticity of growth in the manufacturing sector remains low. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the share of manufacturing in total employment has remained stagnant at around 12% over the past decade^[4].

Atmanirbhar Bharat: Towards Self-Reliance: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of India's economy, particularly its dependence on global supply chains for critical goods such as pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and electronics. In response, Prime Minister Modi launched the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) initiative in May 2020, with the aim of reducing India's dependence on imports and boosting domestic production.

The initiative includes a series of economic stimulus measures, totalling \$266 billion, aimed at supporting businesses, farmers, and workers affected by the pandemic^[5]. Key components of the initiative include the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which provides financial incentives to companies in sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, and textiles to boost domestic manufacturing.

The PLI scheme has shown promising results, with several global companies, including Apple, Samsung, and Foxconn, announcing plans to expand their manufacturing operations in India. According to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the PLI scheme for electronics manufacturing is expected to generate Rs 10,213 crore in production and create over 1.37 lakh direct jobs by 2025^[6].

However, the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative has also faced criticism for its protectionist tendencies, with some economists arguing that it could lead to inefficiencies and reduce India's competitiveness in the global market. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has raised concerns about India's increasing use of trade barriers, including tariffs and import restrictions, which could hinder the country's integration into global value chains.

Digital India: Harnessing Technology for Development:

The "Digital India" initiative, launched in 2015, aims to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The initiative focuses on three key areas: digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and digital services. Key achievements of the initiative include the expansion of broadband connectivity, the promotion of digital payments, and the development of e-governance platforms.

According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the number of internet subscribers in India increased from 350 million in 2015 to 900 million by 2025, with rural areas accounting for 55% of the total subscribers^[7]. The adoption of digital payments has also seen significant growth, with the volume of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions increasing from 69%, increasing from 4,597 crore transactions in FY 2021-22 to 13,116 crore transactions in FY 2023-24^[8].

The "Digital India" initiative has played a crucial role in enabling the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the rapid rollout of digital platforms for vaccine registration, telemedicine, and online education. However, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, with disparities in access to digital infrastructure and literacy between urban and rural areas, as well as across different socio-economic groups.

Social Dimensions of Viksit Bharat

Education and Skill Development: Education and skill

development are critical components of India's development trajectory, with the potential to drive economic growth, reduce poverty, and promote social inclusion. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, launched by the Modi government, aims to transform India's education system by promoting holistic, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning.

The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of early childhood education, vocational training, and the integration of technology in education. The policy also aims to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education by 50% by 2035^[9], with a focus on improving access for marginalized communities.

However, the implementation of the NEP 2020 faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, a lack of trained teachers, and the need for curriculum reform. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated learning gaps, with a significant proportion of children taking paid private tuitions. The largest increase is seen among children who belong to more disadvantaged households. The pandemic has affected the functioning of schools and teaching has been shifted to electronic classrooms. This has made the availability of and access to smartphones critical for education^[10].

Healthcare and Public Health: The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a robust healthcare system in achieving the vision of "Viksit Bharat." The Modi government has launched several initiatives to strengthen India's healthcare infrastructure, including the Ayushman Bharat scheme, which aims to provide health insurance coverage to 500 million vulnerable Indians^[11].

The Ayushman Bharat scheme has made significant progress, with over 36 crore beneficiaries enrolled and 8.39 crore hospital admissions covered as of 2024^[12]. The government has also launched the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), which aims to create a digital health ecosystem by providing every Indian with a unique health ID and enabling the seamless exchange of health information.

However, India's healthcare system continues to face challenges, including inadequate public spending, a shortage of healthcare professionals, and disparities in access to healthcare services. India's public expenditure on healthcare touched 1.9% of GDP in FY24, against 1.6% in FY23, as per the Economic Survey 2023-24^[13].

Cultural Preservation and Promotion: Nationalist sentiments in India are closely tied to the promotion and preservation of the country's cultural heritage. The Modi government has launched several initiatives to promote Indian culture, including the "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" (One India, Great India)^[14] program, which aims to foster cultural exchange and understanding between different states and regions.

The government has also taken steps to promote Indian languages, arts, and traditions, including the establishment of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes the importance of mother tongue-based education. The government's efforts to promote yoga and Ayurveda have also gained international recognition, with the United Nations declaring June 21 as International Yoga Day^[15].

However, the promotion of cultural nationalism has also been a source of controversy, with critics arguing that it could lead to the marginalization of minority communities and the erosion of India's pluralistic traditions. The debate over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, which provides a path to citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from

neighbouring countries, has highlighted the tensions between cultural nationalism and secularism in India.

Political Dimensions of Viksit Bharat

Governance and Policy Implementation: The Modi government's emphasis on "minimum government, maximum governance" ^[16] has led to a series of administrative reforms aimed at improving the efficiency and transparency of government services. Key initiatives include the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), and the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system.

The GST, launched in 2017, has simplified India's complex tax structure by replacing multiple indirect taxes with a single, unified tax. According to the Ministry of Finance, the GST has led to an increase in tax compliance, with the number of registered taxpayers increasing from 6.5 million in 2017 to 14.6 million in 2024 ^[17].

The IBC, enacted in 2016, has improved the resolution of insolvency cases, with the recovery rate increasing from 26% in 2017 to 45% in 2021 ^[18]. The DBT system, which transfers subsidies directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts, has reduced leakages and improved the targeting of social welfare programs.

However, the implementation of these reforms has faced challenges, including bureaucratic resistance, technical glitches, and the need for capacity building. The GST, in particular, has been criticized for its complex structure and compliance burden, which have disproportionately affected small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Foreign Policy and Global Leadership: Nationalist sentiments have also influenced India's foreign policy, with the Modi government emphasizing the importance of strategic autonomy and global leadership. India's foreign policy under Modi has been characterized by a focus on neighbourhood first, with initiatives such as the "Neighbourhood First Policy" and the "Act East Policy" aimed at strengthening ties with neighbouring countries and the Indo-Pacific region.

India's role in global governance has also expanded, with the country playing a leading role in international forums such as the G20, BRICS, and the United Nations. India's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2021-2022 term reflects its growing influence on the global stage ^[19].

However, India's foreign policy faces challenges, including tensions with China over border disputes, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global supply chains, and the need to balance its strategic autonomy with its economic interests. The recent withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power have also raised concerns about regional stability and India's role in the region.

Domestic Politics and National Identity: The rise of nationalist sentiments in India has had a profound impact on domestic politics, with the BJP emerging as the dominant political party. The BJP's emphasis on cultural nationalism, economic self-reliance, and strong leadership has resonated with a significant portion of the Indian electorate, leading to the party's victories in the 2014 and 2019 general elections. However, the BJP's dominance has also led to concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and the marginalization of opposition parties. The arrest of political activists, the use of sedition laws, and the targeting of journalists and civil society organizations have raised concerns about the state of democracy in India.

The debate over national identity has also become

increasingly polarized, with the BJP's emphasis on Hindu nationalism leading to tensions with minority communities. The controversy over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has highlighted the challenges of reconciling cultural nationalism with India's pluralistic traditions.

Challenges and Opportunities

Economic Challenges: Despite the progress made under the "Viksit Bharat" initiatives, India's economy faces several challenges, including high levels of unemployment, income inequality, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India's unemployment rate reached a record high of 23.5% in April 2020 ^[20], during the first wave of the pandemic.

The informal sector, which accounts for over 80% of India's workforce, has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, with millions of workers losing their jobs and facing economic hardship. The government's response to the pandemic, including the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative, has focused on providing relief to businesses and workers, but the long-term impact of the pandemic on India's economy remains uncertain.

Social Challenges: India's social development faces several challenges, including poverty, malnutrition, and gender inequality. According to the Global Hunger Index 2024, India ranks 105th out of 127 countries ^[21], with a high prevalence of undernourishment and child stunting. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, with disruptions to healthcare services, education, and social welfare programs.

Gender inequality remains a significant issue, with India ranking 140 out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2021 ^[22]. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women, with increased rates of domestic violence, job losses, and unpaid care work. The government's efforts to promote gender equality, including the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) initiative, have made progress, but significant gaps remain.

Political Challenges: The rise of nationalist sentiments in India has led to concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and the marginalization of minority communities. The BJP's emphasis on cultural nationalism has led to tensions with minority communities, particularly Muslims, who make up around 15% ^[23] of India's population.

The controversy over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has highlighted the challenges of reconciling cultural nationalism with India's pluralistic traditions. The government's response to protests against the CAA, including the use of force and the arrest of activists, has raised concerns about the state of democracy in India.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, India's development trajectory offers several opportunities, including the potential for economic growth, technological innovation, and social progress. The country's young and growing population, with a median age of 28 years, provides a demographic dividend that can drive economic growth and innovation.

India's digital transformation, driven by initiatives such as "Digital India" and the adoption of digital payments, offers opportunities for inclusive growth and financial inclusion. The government's focus on renewable energy, including the

target of achieving 450 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 ^[24], provides opportunities for sustainable development and climate action.

India's role in global governance, including its leadership in international forums such as the G20 and the United Nations, offers opportunities for shaping the global agenda and promoting multilateralism. The country's soft power, including its cultural heritage, yoga, and Ayurveda, provides opportunities for enhancing its global influence and promoting cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, India's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' or 'Developed India' reflects the country's ambitious aspirations to emerge as a global powerhouse by its centenary of independence in 2047. The nationalist sentiments, intertwined with economic, social, and political dimensions, have significantly shaped India's development trajectory. The concept of 'Viksit Bharat' has become a central theme in India's national discourse, reflecting the country's aspirations to become a future economic superpower, a leading technological nation, and a welfare society. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the necessity of self-reliance and led to the initiation of the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' program, focusing on reducing dependence on imports and enhancing domestic production. This initiative, coupled with economic reforms such as the 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' initiatives, has played pivotal roles in boosting domestic manufacturing, technological innovation, and digital empowerment. Additionally, the National Education Policy (NEP) and Ayushman Bharat scheme have underscored the significance of education, skill development, and healthcare in India's development agenda. However, despite these efforts, challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and gender inequality persist, exacerbated by the pandemic. India's role in global governance, commitment to renewable energy, and cultural heritage offer opportunities for sustainable development and global influence. As India continues its journey towards development, the nationalist-driven model presents both opportunities and challenges, shaping the nation's current and future prospects in a complex and dynamic manner.

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