

EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE VISION OF VIKSIT BHARAT @2047

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Abstract:

India's ambitious vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 aims to transform the nation into a developed, inclusive, and equitable society by the centenary of its independence. At the core of this vision lie the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice, which are essential to ensuring that development reaches the most marginalized sections of society. This paper examines how these principles are currently reflected in national development strategies, using a secondary data-based approach. Drawing upon official government sources such as the Census of India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), UDISE+, the SDG India Index, and reports from NITI Aayog and the Ministry of Social Justice, the study assesses progress across key sectors—education, healthcare, livelihood, and welfare. Data is analyzed through comparative tables and thematic frameworks to identify gaps, disparities, and successful interventions. The research highlights persistent inequalities in access to resources for SC/ST communities, women, persons with disabilities, and economically weaker sections. It also evaluates the policy mechanisms that promote affirmative action and inclusive growth. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening data-driven policymaking and ensuring that the path to a developed India is grounded in justice, dignity, and equal opportunity for all.

Keywords: *Viksit Bharat @2047, Social Justice, Inclusion, Equity, Government Policy*

INTRODUCTION

“The soul of India lives in its villages, but the spirit of India thrives in its diversity.” – Adapted from Mahatma Gandhi

As India charts its course toward becoming a developed nation by 2047, it must ensure that the journey is not just about economic growth but also about inclusion, equity, and justice. A truly *Viksit Bharat* cannot be achieved if large sections of the population remain excluded from progress. Development must be rooted in dignity, fairness, and opportunity for all—especially for those who have historically been marginalized. India's visionary initiative, Viksit Bharat @2047, aspires to transform the country into a fully developed, inclusive, and equitable nation by the centenary of its independence in 2047. This long-term developmental blueprint envisions a nation where prosperity is shared, governance is participatory, and every citizen, irrespective of their background, enjoys equal opportunities. Central to this vision are the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice, which serve as both moral imperatives and practical necessities in a diverse democracy like India (NITI Aayog, 2023). Equity emphasizes fair access to resources and opportunities, while inclusion calls for proactive measures to integrate marginalized and disadvantaged groups into the mainstream. Social justice, as a broader framework, ensures that societal structures and policies correct historical injustices and reduce disparities in power, wealth, and access (Sen, 2009).

India's socio-economic landscape, marked by persistent inequalities related to caste, gender, disability, and region, demands a development model that addresses systemic exclusion and empowers vulnerable communities (Damodar, 2022). In this context, Viksit Bharat @2047 is not just a developmental goal but a transformative commitment to uphold the constitutional values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The alignment of this vision with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further strengthens its global relevance, particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) (UNDP India, 2021). A nation can only truly be developed when development reaches the last mile—those who are historically left behind.

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The purpose of this paper is to critically examine how the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice are embedded within India’s developmental vision of Viksit Bharat @2047. It seeks to evaluate the extent to which current government policies and programs address the needs of marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, persons with disabilities, and economically weaker sections. The study employs a secondary data-based approach to assess progress across key sectors—education, healthcare, livelihood, and welfare—using sources such as the Census of India, NFHS-5, UDISE+, and NITI Aayog reports. The scope of the paper includes identifying structural gaps, measuring the effectiveness of affirmative action, and suggesting data-driven strategies to ensure inclusive growth aligned with constitutional and Sustainable Development Goals.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a secondary data-based approach to analyze the integration of equity, inclusion, and social justice into the developmental framework of Viksit Bharat @2047. By using authoritative national datasets and policy reports, the paper evaluates disparities across key social indicators and the effectiveness of interventions aimed at marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, persons with disabilities, and economically weaker sections.

The following national-level sources form the backbone of the analysis:

1. **Census of India (2011)** – Offers disaggregated data on caste, disability, literacy, and housing conditions.
2. **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21)** – Provides health, nutrition, sanitation, and gender-specific data.
3. **UDISE+ (2021–22)** – Reports educational infrastructure, enrollment, and dropout statistics.
4. **SDG India Index (2023)** – Tracks national and state-wise progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including indicators related to equality and justice.
5. **Policy Reports from NITI Aayog and Ministry of Social Justice** – Provide updates on targeted government schemes and inclusive policy frameworks.

Table 1: Selected Indicators from NFHS-5, UDISE+, and Census

Indicator	Group/Category	Data Value	Source
Female Literacy Rate (Age 15+)	National Average	71.50%	NFHS-5 (2021)
School Enrollment (Primary)	SC vs. General	SC: 94.2%, General: 97.8%	UDISE+ (2022)
Access to Improved Sanitation Facilities	Scheduled Tribes	36.80%	NFHS-5 (2021)
Disability Prevalence	National (All Age Groups)	2.21% of population	Census (2011)
Institutional Delivery (Health Facilities)	Rural vs. Urban	Rural: 88.5%, Urban: 94.2%	NFHS-5 (2021)
Gender Equality Index Score	National Average (0–100 scale)	48	SDG India Index (2023)
States with >50% SC/ST Welfare Budget Spent	Government Implementation	12 of 28 states	NITI Aayog (2022)

These data points highlight key disparities in educational attainment, health access, and sanitation among disadvantaged communities. For example, the female literacy rate of 71.5% reflects gendered inequities in educational access, especially in rural and tribal regions (IIPS & ICF, 2021). Similarly, only 36.8% of Scheduled Tribe households have access to improved sanitation, indicating infrastructural neglect (NFHS-5, 2021). In education, while gross enrollment is high overall, SC students still lag behind their general category counterparts, underscoring the need for targeted interventions (UDISE+, 2022). The use of multiple validated data sources enables a cross-sectoral, comparative, and policy-relevant analysis aligned with the goals of inclusive development and social justice under Viksit Bharat @2047.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts of equity, inclusion, and social justice are foundational to the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, providing a moral and operational compass for India's developmental journey. Although often used interchangeably, each principle holds a distinct yet interconnected meaning within the broader framework of rights-based and participatory governance. **Equity** refers to the fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities, and support based on the specific needs of individuals or groups. Unlike equality, which treats everyone the same, equity acknowledges structural disadvantages and provides differentiated support to enable similar outcomes (UNESCO, 2017). For instance, educational equity may require additional provisions for tribal or differently-abled children to ensure parity in learning outcomes.

Inclusion entails the proactive effort to bring historically marginalized or excluded groups—such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, persons with disabilities, and religious minorities—into the mainstream of political, economic, and social life (UNDP, 2020). It requires removing physical, institutional, and attitudinal barriers that prevent full participation and belonging.

Social justice represents a broader ethical and legal framework aimed at ensuring the protection of rights, elimination of discrimination, and the dismantling of systemic inequalities. It integrates both equity and inclusion by demanding that institutions and laws actively correct imbalances created by history, culture, and politics (Rawls, 1999; Sen, 2009). These three principles are deeply interconnected. Equity is the operational approach, inclusion is the participatory goal, and social justice is the normative ideal. Together, they form a triadic foundation for democratic governance—where public policies are not only efficient but also fair, representative, and transformative. In a developmental context, their integration ensures that economic growth does not come at the cost of deeper societal divides but instead fosters dignity, opportunity, and voice for all (World Bank, 2013).

SECTORAL ANALYSIS

Table 2: Sectoral Analysis of Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in India

Sector	Key Issues/Indicators	Findings & Disparities	Government Initiatives	Challenges	Sources
a. Education	Literacy rates & enrollment	Female literacy: 71.5%; SC literacy: 66.1%; ST literacy: 59.0%	<i>Samagra Shiksha, NEP 2020</i> promote inclusive and flexible learning pathways	High dropout among SC/ST girls in secondary education; limited access to digital infrastructure	IIPS & ICF (2021); UDISE+ (2022); MoE (2020)
	Gender & caste disparity	Gender Parity Index (GPI) > 1.0 at primary level, but drops in higher secondary	Reservation in higher education (15% SC, 7.5% ST)	Intersectional data on disability and caste is limited	MoE (2022); UGC (2021)

b. Healthcare	Access to healthcare services	Rural institutional delivery: 88.5%; Urban: 94.2%	<i>Ayushman Bharat, National Health Mission</i>	Regional disparity in maternal care and immunization (e.g., Bihar vs. Kerala)	NFHS-5 (2021); MoHFW (2022)
	Health indicators	ST women: 27.8% undernourished; IMR in SC/ST higher than national avg	Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY); Mission Indradhanush	Lack of SC/ST health workforce representation	NFHS-5 (2021); NITI Aayog (2022)
c. Livelihood & Employment	Labor force participation	Female LFPR: 37.0% (PLFS 2022); SC/ST overrepresented in informal jobs	<i>MGNREGA, Skill India Mission, Stand Up India</i>	Low skilling among rural women; wage disparity persists	NSSO (2022); MoRD (2023); Ministry of Labour (2022)
	Urban vs. rural employment	Urban unemployment higher: ~6.5% vs. rural ~4.4%	Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM)	Informal sector lacks job security and benefits	PLFS (2022); NULM (2023)
d. Social Welfare & Protection	Social security access	83% SC/ST households use PDS; 46% elderly women lack pension	<i>National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), PM Ujjwala Yojana, PM Jan Dhan Yojana</i>	Implementation gaps in remote and tribal areas	NSSO (2022); MoSJ&E (2023)
	Financial inclusion	Jan Dhan accounts: 56% held by women; ~23 crore accounts linked to DBT	Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), PMJDY, PMKISAN	Poor internet/connectivity affects DBT reach	NITI Aayog (2022); RBI (2023)

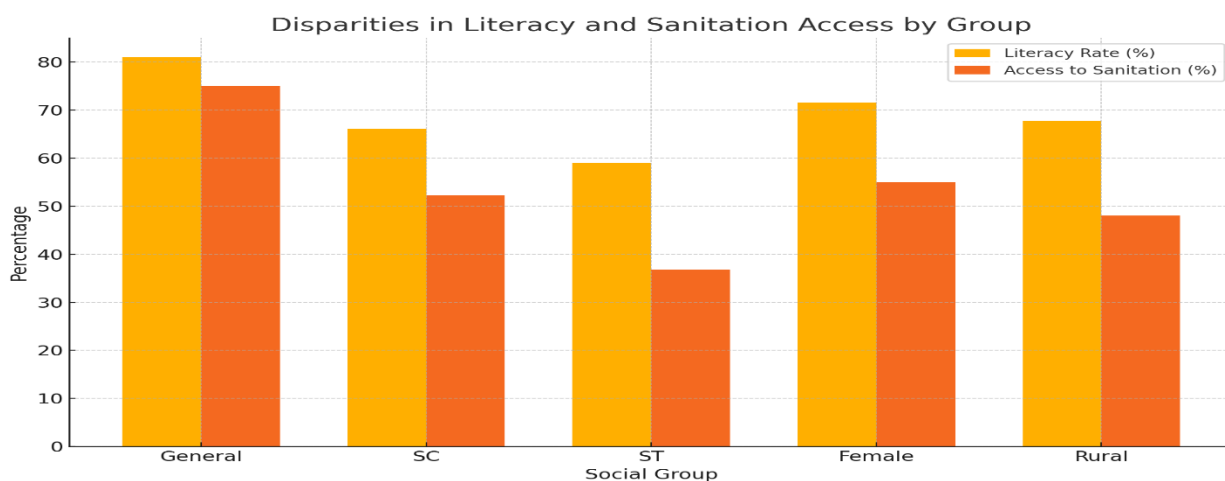


Figure 1. Disparities in literacy rates and access to sanitation facilities by social group.

This bar graph compares literacy rates and access to improved sanitation across different social groups in India, highlighting inequalities faced by Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), females, and rural populations. Data reflects patterns observed in NFHS-5 (2019–21) and Census 2011.

Key Challenges Identified

Despite progressive policies and targeted welfare schemes, persistent inequalities continue to shape access to education, healthcare, livelihood, and social protection in India. Marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, persons with disabilities, and religious minorities often face structural and systemic barriers that limit their ability to benefit fully from development initiatives. For instance, NFHS-5 data indicates that undernutrition and maternal health indicators remain significantly poorer among ST populations compared to the national average (IIPS & ICF, 2021). Similarly, SC and ST students continue to experience higher dropout rates, indicating a gap between access and educational outcomes (UDISE+, 2022).

Regional disparities also present a major hurdle. States like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh perform well on health, education, and gender parity metrics, whereas Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh lag significantly behind (NITI Aayog, 2023). This uneven progress complicates the implementation of national schemes and calls for more localized policy adaptations. In addition, the digital divide—especially in rural and tribal areas—limits access to essential services, including digital education, telemedicine, and online banking. According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI, 2022), only about 37% of rural India has regular access to the internet, severely constraining the effectiveness of digital public infrastructure. Further, bureaucratic hurdles, such as delays in benefit disbursement, corruption at the grassroots level, and rigid eligibility norms, reduce the efficacy of social welfare schemes. A significant concern is the lack of intersectional data—disaggregated by gender, caste, disability, and region—which hampers evidence-based policy design and impact evaluation. Most national surveys report aggregate outcomes, leaving gaps in understanding how multiple vulnerabilities interact and compound exclusion (World Bank, 2013; UNDP, 2020). Without resolving these systemic issues, the goal of building a truly inclusive and equitable Viksit Bharat remains aspirational.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

India has implemented a robust set of policy and programmatic interventions to promote equity, inclusion, and social justice, particularly for marginalized communities. Central to these efforts are affirmative action policies, including constitutionally mandated reservations in education, government jobs, and political representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). These measures aim to correct historical injustices and ensure proportional access to opportunities. For example, Article 15 and Article 16 of the Indian Constitution guarantee affirmative protections in public employment and education (Government of India, 1950). Additionally, targeted programs such as the *Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme*, *Stand-Up India*, and *National Overseas Scholarship* provide financial and institutional support to underrepresented groups (Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2023).

A strong legal framework underpins India's commitment to social justice. Laws such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 reinforce the state's obligation to protect vulnerable populations from discrimination, violence, and exclusion. These legal safeguards are critical in institutionalizing justice and enabling legal recourse for the aggrieved. India's development strategy also aligns closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key government missions—such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, National Health Mission, and Skill India Mission—address multiple SDG targets, including gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). The SDG India Index, published by NITI Aayog, tracks progress across states and facilitates outcome-oriented planning (NITI Aayog, 2023). While these interventions reflect a comprehensive approach, their effectiveness depends on timely implementation, cross-sectoral coordination, and the empowerment of local governance institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To realize the inclusive and equitable vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, India must adopt a forward-looking and systemic approach that goes beyond programmatic implementation and addresses the root causes of exclusion. First, there is an urgent need to strengthen data-driven policymaking. Government bodies and institutions should invest in real-time, disaggregated data systems that capture indicators across gender, caste, region, disability, and income. Such data should not only inform national and state policies but also be made publicly accessible for independent monitoring and academic research. Second, promoting intersectional and participatory approaches is essential for ensuring that no community is left behind. Policies must recognize and address the overlapping vulnerabilities that arise when individuals belong to multiple marginalized groups—for example, a rural disabled woman from a Scheduled Tribe. In addition, planning processes should be participatory, allowing local communities, civil society organizations, and grassroots leaders to co-create solutions that reflect lived realities and local needs. Third, enhancing accountability and transparency mechanisms is vital for building public trust and ensuring the efficient delivery of welfare schemes. This can be achieved through decentralized monitoring systems, citizen feedback loops, and digital grievance redressal platforms. Independent social audits and regular evaluations should be institutionalized to assess policy impact and course-correct promptly. Ultimately, inclusive governance requires a shift from top-down policy imposition to bottom-up empowerment and democratic engagement.

CONCLUSION

As India moves toward the ambitious goal of Viksit Bharat @2047, the true measure of progress will lie not merely in economic growth but in how effectively the nation uplifts its most marginalized communities. This paper has examined how the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice are central to this developmental vision, highlighting sectoral disparities, evaluating policy interventions, and identifying structural challenges. While government schemes, legal safeguards, and SDG-aligned missions demonstrate a strong policy intent, persistent inequalities, regional imbalances, and data gaps continue to hinder inclusive progress. Realizing a just and equitable India will require sustained political will, data-informed planning, participatory governance, and robust accountability mechanisms. Only through such holistic and rights-based development can India ensure that every citizen, regardless of caste, gender, ability, or geography, has the opportunity to thrive with dignity and equal opportunity by the centenary of its independence.

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