



Developmental Paradox: Rights, Resources, and the Road to 2047

***DSSR Krishna** Lecturer in English Government Degree College, Ibrahimpatnam, Ranga Reddy District
TELANGANA.

****Gundala Hudayaraju**, Assistant Professor of English, Government Degree College, Ibrahimpatnam,
Ranga Reddy District
TELANGANA.

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Abstract:

This paper examines two recent policy and judicial developments. One is the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission Gramin Bill of 2025, or VB–G RAM G. This bill seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, or MGNREGA. The second matter concerns the Supreme Court's controversial adoption of a definition for the Aravalli Hills, which was based on a narrow elevation concept. This adoption was later kept in abeyance after much criticism about the matter. It is argued that these interventions are not isolated reforms. Rather, they are a part of a consistent political economy. This economy subordinates rural livelihoods and ecological commons to a capital-intensive infrastructure-led growth model that is branded as the Viksit Bharat at 2047 vision. Using these topics as case studies, the paper makes a strong critique of the present regime's approach to development. We contend that the rhetoric of achieving a USD 30 to 40 trillion economy and of having zero poverty is incompatible with policies that dilute the legal right to work and shift fiscal burdens onto state governments and open ecologically fragile areas to mining and real estate speculation activities

Viksit Bharat@2047: Vision and Ideology of Economy

The official narrative concerning Viksit Bharat projects that India will become a USD 30 to 40 trillion economy by 2047. It is expected that per capita income will be in the range of USD 15000 to 18000 and that there will be zero poverty through high economic growth and expansion of infrastructure. This macro vision relies significantly on capital-intensive growth, large-scale infrastructure and private investment. This is done even while chronic issues of unemployment, informality and inequality persist. Unemployment is staying above seven percent and urban youth unemployment is crossing twenty per cent in recent years.

The critics argue that this vision privileges headline GDP targets and confidence of the investor over justice in distribution, intensity of employment and sustainability of ecology. This consequently deepens structural inequalities. The celebration of rapid growth thus coexists with the reality of stagnant real wages at the bottom, inadequate public investment in health and education and a worsening nexus between climate and livelihood in rural India.

Case Study One: VB–G RAM G Bill and the Political Economy concerning Rural Labour

The VB–G RAM G Bill of 2025 seeks to repeal the two-decade-old MGNREGA. It will replace it with a new framework that is allegedly aligned with the Viksit Bharat 2047 agenda. MGNREGA had provided a legal right to one hundred days of wage employment per rural household. The Centre was bearing one hundred per cent of wage costs. The design responded to demand from workers that was coming from the bottom up.

Under VB–G RAM G, the employment will be routed through plans that are pre-approved. These are the Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans. These plans will be integrated upwards into a national infrastructure framework. The states are now required to bear about forty per cent of the scheme's costs. This makes it a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

Regressive Shifts:

From an economic perspective, at least three regressive shifts are clearly visible. One point is the move from a demand-driven rights-based program to a scheme that is supply driven and plan driven and bureaucracy-driven. This undermines the bargaining power of labour, and it converts an instrument of social protection into an appendage for infrastructure.

The second point is that the new formula for cost sharing imposes substantial fiscal stress on the states, especially those that are poorer. This constrains their ability to make use of employment programs as tools that are counter-cyclical during economic downturns.

The third is that the emphasis on efficient asset creation and digital monitoring shows a technocratic bias. Success is measured through project outputs instead of income security, timeliness of wage payment, and participation of women in the labour force.

The VB–G RAM G converts what was effectively a largely centrally funded guarantee for employment into a capped scheme where costs are shared. This substantially increases the fiscal burden at the state level while reducing the open-ended obligation of the Union government.

Funding Pattern and Liability:

Under MGNREGA, the Centre funded one hundred percent of unskilled wage costs and seventy five percent of material costs and up to about six percent of administrative costs. The states mainly were bearing twenty five percent of the material costs and the unemployment allowance.

Under VB–G RAM G, the scheme becomes a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with a sharing ratio of 60:40 for the Centre and State for all components. This includes wages, materials, and administration in the general category states. For the North Eastern states and the Himalayan states, the ratio is ninety to ten. Union Territories without legislatures continue to receive one hundred percent central funding.

Impact on the States' Budgets:

An analysis that was performed by the Indian Express using data from the fiscal year 2024 to 2025 estimates that states' expenditure concerning MGNREGA was about ten thousand one hundred twenty crore rupees. This was largely because their role was limited to a share of material costs.

If applying the VB–G RAM G sixty to forty rules to this same year, the estimated burden for the state on wages and materials alone would have increased to around forty-one thousand four hundred ninety-four crore rupees. Some states like Kerala, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu would face the steepest increases in this regard.

The VB-G RAM G 60:40 rule significantly increases Telangana's fiscal burden under the rural employment scheme. In FY 2024-25, Telangana's total MGNREGA expenditure reached about Rs 4,344 crore, with the state's share limited to a minimal portion—primarily 25% of material costs—while the Centre covered nearly all wages and most other expenses. Under the new VB-G RAM G 60:40 funding split, where states bear 40% of wages and materials, this state liability would rise sharply, imposing an additional burden of approximately Rs 1,600 crore annually. Although Telangana faces one of the lower relative increases among states compared to places like Kerala or Jharkhand, the added pressure exacerbates existing strains on panchayat finances amid

delayed grants and rising committed expenditures. This shift risks limiting work demand and access in rural areas, challenging the scheme's role in supporting livelihoods for over 1 crore workers holding job cards.

Central Fiscal Exposure and Caps:

MGNREGA operated with a mechanism of an open-ended labour budget. The central allocation could be revised upward if there were increased demand for work and increased wage liabilities. This effectively placed the macro-level employment risk on the Union budget.

VB-G RAM G replaces this with normative allocations decided by the Centre for each state. Any spending that goes beyond this cap must be fully financed by the state. This shifts the responsibility for shock absorption and counter-cyclical measures away from the Union and onto sub-national governments that are fiscally weaker.

Intergovernmental Fiscal and Policy Incentives:

For states that are poorer and have limited fiscal space and borrowing constraints, the requirement for higher co-financing and the caps create incentives to restrict implementation or to underprovide work relative to local demand. This undermines the role of the scheme as a stabiliser.

From a political perspective, the Centre retains design control and naming rights and credit through the Viksit Bharat branding. The states, however, shoulder a larger share of the actual outlays. This has led many commentators to characterize the reform as cost shifting and a de facto dilution of the previous rights-based central obligation that was under MGNREGA.

The political symbolism is also telling. The removal of Mahatma Gandhi from the scheme's name signals an ideological rejection of an approach to rural development that was based on rights and commons. It favours a centralized leader centric Viksit Bharat brand. These activities of rebranding mask a quiet erosion of the legal right to work and a systematic narrowing of the welfare state. This is occurring even as the regime speaks of inclusive growth and zero poverty by 2047.

Case Study 2: Aravalli Hills Redefinition and Extractive Development

On 20th November 2025, the Supreme Court of the nation adopted a uniform and scientific definition concerning the Aravalli Hills and Ranges. This definition was relying on specific elevation criteria, which were recommended by one committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. The stated purpose for this action was to achieve standardisation in the regulation of mining activities and the utilization of land.

Critical analysis of this definitional change highlights that this narrow height-based definition effectively removes legal protection from approximately ninety percent of the total Aravalli system. This is especially true for low-lying ridges and scrub hills and areas of grassland, exposing them to acquisition by corporate groups and real-estate development and mining extraction within this ecologically fragile region. Although the Court spoke at the same time about sustainable mining and mandated a Management Plan for this activity, freezing new mining leases until this plan was prepared, the change to the definition stands as a dismantling of three decades of jurisprudence. This jurisprudence had treated the Aravalli as an integrated ecological unit rather than just a collection of high-elevation peaks that are isolated. Following pushback from expert communities and the public, the Court has now placed its November 20 directions in abeyance. It has flagged a necessity to revisit these criteria to avoid any regulatory gaps that would result in the undermining of the ecological integrity of the region.

From the economic perspective on the matter, the reduction of protected areas within this range—a range that mitigates dust storms and recharges groundwater for the Delhi–NCR region and moderates regional climate stability—amounts to a large hidden subsidy. This subsidy benefits real estate interests and mining companies, but it is at the cost of long-term public health, water security, and climate resilience. The ruling, therefore, maintains an extractive bias, where immediate rents and state revenue take priority over non-market ecosystem services, which are vital for sustainable growth and intergenerational equity.

The Development Paradox:

The overhaul of VB–G RAM G and the redefinition concerning Aravalli are linked together by one common political–economic logic. Both actions involve the conversion of ecological and social safeguards into flexible inputs for a high-growth, capital-intensive project, which is branded as Viksit Bharat@2047.

In relation to the rural labour markets, the weakening of legal employment guarantee increases the precarity of the workers, thus depressing the reservation wages and enhancing the leverage of employers. This supports a low-wage, informalized growth trajectory that is not compatible with the promise of widespread prosperity for all students and citizens. Regarding environmental governance, the narrowing of the legal definition of the Aravalli reallocates the ecological commons to private extraction. This action undermines future productivity, especially in agriculture and in urban economies that are dependent on climate stability and groundwater resources.

The policies of the present regime show an internal contradiction. While invoking the year 2047 to promise a developed India, the regime systematically hollows out those precise institutions that could make development sustainable and inclusive. These institutions include rights-based welfare laws, independent environmental regulation and ecologically sound ceilings which are judicially enforced. Instead of inclusive development, a regime of crony capitalism and centralisation and ecological rollback advances under the feel-good language of Viksit Bharat, privileging political spectacle and corporate profitability over substantive economic justice. Balancing development and the environment is important for the future of the nation.

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