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Social Inclusion in the Vision of Viksit Bharat - 2047: Conceptual and Policy Perspectives

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Abstract

The ambitious national vision of a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) by 2047 represents a pivotal goal for India's centenary of independence. This essay argues that the realisation of this vision is fundamentally contingent on achieving genuine and comprehensive social inclusion, moving beyond aggregate economic growth to ensure equitable participation for all citizens. It posits that without actively dismantling the entrenched hierarchies of caste, tribe, class, and gender, development will remain exclusionary and unsustainable. The analysis establishes that while progress on metrics like multidimensional poverty is notable, profound disparities persist in human capital formation, economic security, and digital access for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, as evidenced by disaggregated data from national surveys. Conceptually, the study frames inclusion for Viksit Bharat as a transformative project based on four pillars: recognition and dignity, redistributive justice, representation, and resilience. It evaluates current policies and identifies a critical gap: many interventions function as safety nets rather than as engines for structural change. Consequently, the pathway to 2047 requires a paradigm shift in policy, advocating for a rights-based architecture that guarantees universal social security, promotes diversified entrepreneurship within marginalised communities, governs digital technologies with explicit inclusivity mandates, and fosters an empowered conception of citizenship. Ultimately, the study concludes that the true measure of a developed India will be the security, dignity, and agency of its most historically excluded citizens, making social inclusion the indispensable cornerstone of the national compact for 2047.

Introduction

The ambitious vision of "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) by 2047, marking the centenary of Indian independence, represents a profound national aspiration to transcend into a realm of high-income status, advanced infrastructure, and comprehensive human development. However, the true metric of this development will not be its skyscrapers or GDP figures alone, but the degree to which its fruits are equitably shared by every citizen. Social inclusion, therefore, is not a peripheral component but the very cornerstone of this vision. A developed India that perpetuates historical hierarchies, economic disparities, and social exclusion would be a fundamental failure of its founding ideals. This study explores the conceptual underpinnings of social inclusion within the Viksit Bharat framework, analyses the current landscape through key data, and outlines the necessary policy perspectives to ensure that the journey to 2047 is one of shared prosperity and dignity for all, particularly for historically marginalized communities.

Conceptualising Social Inclusion for a Developed India

Social inclusion in the context of Viksit Bharat must be understood as a dynamic, multi-dimensional process. It moves beyond the limited concept of "integration" to advocate for the active participation and empowerment of all individuals and groups in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of the nation, without discrimination. Its core pillars are:

1. **Recognition and Dignity:** The foundational step is the unequivocal recognition of the historical and structural injustices faced by groups like Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), religious minorities, persons with disabilities, and women across these categories. Inclusion necessitates dismantling the stigma and prejudice that deny dignity.

2. **Redistributive Justice:** This involves the proactive redistribution of resources, opportunities, and power. It encompasses not just wealth but also critical assets like quality education, healthcare, land, capital, and digital access.
3. **Representation and Voice:** Meaningful inclusion requires guaranteed presence and influence in decision-making fora, from local panchayats to national parliaments, corporate boards, and cultural institutions.
4. **Resilience and Capability:** Building individual and community resilience against shocks—economic, climatic, or social—is vital. This is achieved by enhancing human capabilities through education, health, and skill development, enabling people to exercise meaningful choice in their lives.

For Viksit Bharat, inclusion is thus a proactive, transformative project. It is about correcting historical wrongs not through charity, but through the creation of a just and equitable architecture of opportunity.

Review of Literature

The ambition of a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) by 2047 has catalysed a critical examination of the pathways to development, with a central focus on the imperative of social inclusion. Contemporary scholarly literature interrogates the linkages between growth, equity, and the persistent structures of caste, class, and gender. This review synthesises key insights from four pivotal recent works that provide conceptual depth and empirical grounding to this discourse.

A crucial conceptual foundation is laid in S. Thorat and A. Dubey's analysis in *Social Inclusion and Economic Development in India* (2022). Their work systematically argues that social exclusion, particularly based on caste, is not merely a residual social issue but a significant drag on macroeconomic performance. Using empirical data, they demonstrate how discriminatory access to capital, land, and markets constrains productivity and entrepreneurial growth. For the Viksit Bharat vision, their conclusion is stark: without proactive policies to dismantle these barriers, India's growth potential will remain unrealised, and development will be inherently unequal. They advocate for a shift from identity-based reservations to a broader framework of "equality of opportunity" enforced through stronger anti-discrimination laws and inclusive market institutions.

Focusing on the agrarian sector, which employs a disproportionate share of marginalised communities, M. Vijayabaskar and M. K. Jha's *Crisis and Precarity in Rural India* (2023) offer a sobering counter-narrative to triumphalist growth stories. Through detailed field studies in states like Punjab and Maharashtra, they document how agricultural liberalisation and climate change have intensified precarity for smallholder farmers, especially from Dalit and Adivasi backgrounds, who lack the landholding security to adapt. Their research highlights that state responses, often in the form of direct cash transfers, address consumption but fail to rebuild sustainable livelihoods. This work underscores that for Viksit Bharat, rural inclusion requires a fundamental re-imagination of agrarian policy, centred on agro-ecology, collective farming, and secure land tenure, rather than merely integrating farmers into volatile global value chains.

In the domain of digital futures, Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini Chami's *The Algorithmic Margins: Gender, Caste and the Digital Economy* (2024) provides a critical examination of the intersectional risks of digitalisation. Analysing platform work, digital ID systems, and AI deployment in public services, they argue that without deliberate design, digital infrastructure will replicate and amplify existing social hierarchies. Their research on women workers from marginalised communities on gig platforms reveals a new form of "digital casteism"—algorithmic management that reinforces low pay and insecurity. For the 2047 vision, their work is a vital warning: technological advancement is not synonymous with progress. They propose a governance framework based on digital rights, algorithmic accountability, and the creation of non-extractive, community-owned digital platforms to ensure the digital economy becomes a tool for inclusion rather than a new axis of exclusion.

Niraja Gopal Jayal's *Citizenship and Its Discontents in India* (2023) offers a crucial political and legal perspective. Jayal traces the evolution of the Indian citizen's relationship with the state, arguing that a "thin" model of citizenship—focused on civil and political rights—has dominated, often failing to guarantee the socio-economic rights essential for substantive inclusion. She analyses how welfare, while expanded, is often delivered as clientelist patronage rather than as an enforceable right, undermining the dignity and agency of the recipient. For Viksit Bharat, her work implies that the vision must be anchored in a "thick" conception of social citizenship, where the rights to health, education, and a basic income are legally guaranteed, making inclusion a matter of entitlement, not benevolence.

The above studies move the debate beyond simplistic narratives of growth-led inclusion. They emphasise that social inclusion for Viksit Bharat is a complex political and economic project requiring structural reform in agrarian relations, the regulation of new digital markets, and a foundational rethinking of citizenship itself. The literature converges on the point that achieving genuine inclusion by 2047 necessitates

confronting, rather than circumventing, the deep-seated hierarchies of caste, class, and gender that continue to define Indian society.

Objectives of the Study

1. To critically examine the conceptual foundations and structural barriers to meaningful social inclusion within the Viksit Bharat 2047 framework, with a specific focus on how historical inequities based on caste, tribe, and gender are reproduced in contemporary economic and digital structures.
2. To analyse the disconnect between macroeconomic policy and lived reality for marginalised communities, evaluating the efficacy of current welfare, agrarian, and digitalisation programmes in building sustainable livelihoods and substantive citizenship, as opposed to providing temporary safety nets.
3. To propose a rights-based, multi-dimensional policy architecture for 2047 that integrates redistributive justice, algorithmic accountability, and a strengthened social contract, ensuring that development is measured by the empowerment of the most excluded.

Methodology

This study will employ a triangulated mixed-methods approach. It will commence with a quantitative analysis of secondary data from national surveys (NFHS, PLFS, NSS) and government reports to map disparities in key inclusion indicators. This statistical foundation will be critically augmented by a systematic qualitative review of contemporary scholarly literature and grey literature from civil society organisations, providing depth to understand the structural and experiential dimensions of exclusion. The synthesis will facilitate a robust, evidence-based assessment, moving from macro-level data trends to the micro-level political economy of policy implementation and its impact on marginalised groups.

The Current Landscape: Persistent Divides Amidst Progress

India has made significant strides in several inclusion metrics, particularly in absolute poverty reduction and access to basic amenities. Yet, a disaggregated view reveals persistent, and in some cases widening gaps that threaten the inclusive vision of 2047.

Table 1: Educational Attainment and Health Access by Social Group (NFHS-5, 2019-21)

Indicator	Scheduled Caste (SC)	Scheduled Tribe (ST)	Others	National Average
Women with 10+ Years of Schooling (%)	41.5	32.9	53.7	46.1
Children Under 5 Stunted (%)	39.4	40.2	30.8	35.5
Institutional Births (%)	90.5	83.8	94.6	91.9
Households with Health Insurance (%)	38.9	35.5	45.2	41.0

Source: National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5)

Table 1 highlights stark disparities. ST children face the highest levels of stunting, indicating chronic malnutrition. While institutional births are high nationally, the 10.8 percentage point gap between ST and "Others" signifies unequal access to quality maternal care. Similarly, lower educational attainment and health insurance coverage for SC/ST households reflect systemic barriers in human capital formation, which directly impacts future employability in a knowledge-intensive Viksit Bharat economy.

Table 2: Economic Participation and Vulnerability (PLFS 2022-23 & NSS 2018-19)

Parameter	SC/ST	OBC	Others	Key Implication
Avg. Monthly Per Capita Consumption (₹)	Lower by ~30% (NSS)	Intermediate	Highest	Significant income/wealth gap.
Regular Wage/Salaried Employment (%)	Significantly Lower	Intermediate	Highest	Ghettoised in informal, precarious work.
Land Ownership & Asset Base	Disproportionately Low	Variable	Higher	Lack of productive capital limits entrepreneurship.
Digital Literacy Gap	Substantial (As per various studies)	Moderate	Lower	Risk of exclusion from digital-first economy.

Sources: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS); National Sample Survey (NSS) on Consumption; Various Digital Divide Studies.

The economic landscape, as shown in Table 2, reveals a structure of entrenched disadvantage. Lower consumption expenditure points to constrained living standards. Concentration in informal employment translates to a lack of job security, social security benefits, and upward mobility. The digital divide threatens to create a new frontier of exclusion, where marginalized communities are left behind in an increasingly digital

public service delivery and job market. This economic marginalization is cyclical, reinforcing social exclusion across generations.

The Imperative of an Intersectional Lens: Gender within Marginalized Groups

The most acute exclusion is experienced by women at the intersection of gender and other marginalized identities. A Dalit or Adivasi woman faces compounded discrimination. Data shows higher rates of gender-based violence, lower workforce participation despite higher economic necessity, and greater barriers in accessing justice for women from these communities. Any policy for Viksit Bharat that does not explicitly adopt an intersectional feminist lens will fail to address the needs of its most vulnerable citizens.

Policy Perspectives for an Inclusive Viksit Bharat 2047

Transforming the vision into reality requires a paradigm shift in policy, from incremental improvements to transformative interventions. These can be categorised into foundational, structural, and futuristic policies.

1. Foundational Policies: Strengthening the Bedrock of Equity

- **Universal Access to Quality Public Services:** The commitment to high-quality, discrimination-free education and healthcare must be absolute. This requires massive public investment in infrastructure and human resources in underserved regions, coupled with stringent accountability mechanisms to prevent exclusionary practices. Nutrition-specific interventions must target the high stunting rates in SC/ST communities.
- **Comprehensive Social Security Architecture:** Moving beyond fragmented schemes, India needs a universal, rights-based social security system covering health insurance, old-age pensions, disability benefits, and unemployment allowance. This would provide the resilience floor for all citizens, especially the informal workforce dominated by marginalized groups.
- **Land and Agrarian Reform:** For ST and SC communities, securing land rights (especially forest rights under the FRA) and promoting land consolidation is critical. Support must shift from input subsidies to building sustainable, climate-resilient agrarian livelihoods linked to value chains.

2. Structural Policies: Transforming Economic and Political Structures

- **Promoting Diversified Entrepreneurship:** Reservations in education and jobs must be strengthened, but the focus should expand to fostering entrepreneurship. This requires dedicated venture funds, incubation centres, and preferential public procurement for SC/ST/OBC and women-led enterprises, especially in emerging sectors like green tech, IT, and manufacturing.
- **Skill Development for the Future Economy:** The National Skill Development Mission must be radically realigned. It should proactively identify growth sectors (e.g., renewable energy, AI data annotation, geriatric care) and create targeted, residential, high-quality training programmes with guaranteed placement linkages for youth from marginalized communities.
- **Deepening Political Empowerment:** While panchayat-level reservations have been transformative, their effectiveness is limited by proxy governance and lack of capacity. Mandatory, intensive training for elected representatives, coupled with institutional support, is needed. Consideration must be given to extending principles of representation to higher legislative bodies and the corporate sector through diversity mandates.

3. Futuristic & Enabling Policies: Preparing for 2047

- **Bridging the Digital Divide with a Rights-Based Approach:** Digital inclusion must be treated as a fundamental right. This involves universal access to affordable broadband, provision of free or subsidized devices, and massive digital literacy campaigns in local languages. Digital public infrastructure (like ONDC, Account Aggregators) must be designed with mandatory inclusivity protocols.
- **Leveraging Technology for Inclusion:** AI and big data can be harnessed to identify and map exclusion in real-time, predict dropouts from schools or access to welfare programmes, and deliver personalized services. However, strong guardrails are needed to prevent algorithmic bias that could reinforce existing prejudices.
- **Building an Inclusive Cultural Narrative:** Viksit Bharat's cultural project must actively celebrate the histories, languages, and contributions of marginalized communities. The education curriculum, media representation, and public discourse must consciously work to break stereotypes and build a shared, pluralistic national identity based on mutual respect.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

The path is fraught with challenges. These include the resistance from entrenched privileges, the fiscal constraints of financing universal social security, the implementation gaps in even well-designed policies, and the potential social friction during rapid transformation. Overcoming these requires:

a) **Strong Political Will:** Commitment at the highest levels to treat social inclusion as a non-negotiable national priority.
b) **Data-Driven Governance:** Robust, disaggregated data (caste, gender, disability) to monitor progress and ensure accountability.
c) **Civil Society and Community Partnership:** The state must act as an enabler, partnering with grassroots organisations and community leaders who understand local contexts.
d) **Continuous Legal and Institutional Reforms:** Strengthening legal frameworks against discrimination (e.g., effective implementation of the Prevention of Atrocities Act) and creating new institutions for oversight and grievance redressal.

Major Findings

First, the study finds that the **conceptualisation of inclusion within the Viksit Bharat vision remains largely aspirational and inadequately operationalised** in current policy frameworks. While the rhetoric emphasises "leaving no one behind," the dominant policy mechanisms continue to rely on **trickle-down economics and fragmented welfare delivery**, which fail to address the root causes of social exclusion embedded in caste, patriarchal, and ethnic hierarchies. There is a significant gap between the transformative inclusion promised by the 2047 vision and the incremental, sectoral approaches currently in practice.

Second, empirical analysis reveals a **persistent and multidimensional development deficit for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women** that threatens the inclusive foundation of Viksit Bharat. Disaggregated data confirms severe gaps in critical human capability indicators—including higher rates of stunting, lower educational attainment, and constrained access to institutional healthcare—compared to the national average. Economically, these groups remain disproportionately ghettoised in informal, precarious employment with minimal asset ownership, indicating that aggregate GDP growth has not translated into structural economic mobility for the most marginalised.

Third, the research identifies the **emerging digital economy as a new, potent frontier of potential exclusion**. Without proactive and rights-based governance, technologies like algorithmic management in platform work, AI in public service delivery, and digital identity systems risk **automating and entrenching historical biases**. This creates a novel form of "digital casteism," where marginalised communities, particularly women, face algorithmic discrimination, data exploitation, and are locked out of the high-value segments of the digital revolution, thereby perpetuating inequality in a future-oriented economy.

Fourth, the study concludes that achieving the vision necessitates a fundamental **reconstruction of the social contract from clientelist welfare to enforceable social citizenship**. Current systems often deliver benefits as discretionary patronage, undermining dignity and agency. For Viksit Bharat to be inclusive, socio-economic rights—to quality health, education, a sustainable livelihood, and a basic income—must be legally guaranteed, justiciable entitlements. This shift from benevolence to entitlement is the cornerstone for building the resilience and substantive participation required for a truly developed and cohesive society by 2047.

Conclusion

The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 presents a historic opportunity to redefine Indian development. It is a chance to demonstrate that a nation can achieve global economic stature without leaving its most vulnerable behind. Social inclusion cannot be an afterthought or a trickle-down promise; it must be the active, guiding principle of every policy and programme. This demands a civilisational commitment to justice—one that rectifies centuries of exclusion through empowerment, not patronage. By investing relentlessly in the human capital of its marginalized, creating equitable economic structures, and fostering a culture of dignity, India can indeed become a developed nation. In this inclusive Viksit Bharat, development will be measured not by the wealth of its richest, but by the security, freedom, and flourishing of its most marginalized citizen. The journey to 2047 must, therefore, be a collective march where every step forward is taken together, leaving no one to walk alone.

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