

# The Self-reliant India and Development Trajectory Process: Emerging Regional Strategies in Sustainability Paradigm

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## Abstract

Development means to bring a kind of change and improvement in lives of humans and societies inhabiting settlements, areas and regions. The process has never been uniform in practice as humans live in varied places and manifest complex socio-cultural geographies. To improve life conditions is to provide for basic amenities and necessities. This requires coherence and integrated management of environmental conditions which are subject to unprecedented changes and effects. However, to a majority of people improvement in living status still persists as the bigger challenge in countries of the Global South. In India, the new economic policy-led economic reforms and subsequent increase in economic activities has had a greater pressure on the natural environment. In this backdrop, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a blended policy and strategy since it has bundle of targets to be achieved in order to address basic necessities of human population and maintaining society-nature relations. The performance of regions in the country in delivering SDGs has been a geographically variable phenomenon. The regional inequalities including social, economic, infrastructural, and environmental aspects are the emerging geographies of the post-liberalized India which need to be tackled under newer development policy. To check further exaggeration of environment and society-nature relations, and upholding position of a vibrant economy, the Self-reliant (*Aatmanirbhar Bharat*) approach of India is to strengthen planning, governance and management of sustainable development process more in an integrated regional development framework and utilization of indigenous resources. Study is based on secondary sources of data and information, this provides a constructive perspective in understanding regional performance of sustainable development and the role that self-reliant strategy is to play strengthening process of development in the country.

**Keywords:** Development, environment, sustainable development, self-reliant, society-nature

## Introduction

A human society thrives further only if basic needs of individuals, households and groups are fulfilled. Since societies are diverse in social organization and culture, their needs and requirements are also a varied phenomenon. Within a larger society different social and cultural groups exist which are at different contours of standards of living. This is very much influenced by wealth, comfort, access to goods and services and availability of facilities and infrastructure to human population, groups and households. As of today, the total population of the world is around 8.01 billion people. The first billion was reached around 1800 and in just 200 years we reached 7 billion. World population is expected to

reach 8 billion people in 2023 according to the estimates. All this will have huge economic, social and environmental pressures. To enhance and improve peoples' standards of living and quality of life, the process of development plays an active role in the modern democratic political system. *Development* itself is subject to interpretation and conceptualization in terms of what it means and it should contribute to for human population and societies. This meant that “[D]uring the second half of the 20th century there were growing concerns about the tyranny of gross domestic product (GDP). Many decision-makers seemed to believe that economic growth and wellbeing were synonymous” (Conceicao, 2019). Thus, development has been understood and practiced as to grow economy or just *economic growth* and overall wealth of the country or nation as the prime motto of development.

Although this conceptualization was need of time, this limited development to *economic development*- a process by which wealth of a nation increases and so income levels of population. This was very much a by product of “First World” way of imagination and process of development and resource exploitation. This has been a dominant practice since the time of *colonial expansion*. Grove (1995) noted that great expansion of European maritime travel and settlements which took place after about 1400 stimulated the emergence of a new and much more complex way of viewing the relationship between man and nature. The backwardness of Global South has been a direct product of such an imperialism and exploitation of resources and people. Grovogu (2011) noted that Global South is applied “to regions and countries whose differences extent to the colonial past, cultural traditions, economic trajectories, and administrative or organizational structures” (175). The modern *development* processes have severely affected society and environment in the vast geographical regions of Global South. In the Western world itself, the focus on economic development and industrialization have unprecedented implications on the environmental quality and ecological structure. The environmental quality combines of local air quality, access to drinking water and sanitation, biodiversity, soil erosion, deforestation and other pollutants. The global environmental changes significantly contribute to climate change phenomenon. Basiago once noted that “Traditionally, economists have been concerned with the efficiency of resource use. They have been slow in developing economic models that adequately account for resource scarcity and pollution”(146, 1999). For long conventional development model- that focused on economic growth, industrialization and higher standard of living- has had huge environmental costs and ecological implications. Elliott stated that such “development processes are characterized by the loss or degradation of primary environmental resources” (1: 2006). This has triggered a debate in the Western world about the *alternative* of development which brings environment and ecology side- by-side of development process. However, as known Global South, the society-nature relationship has been of co-optation, and environment was given outmost regard. Mies and Shiva (1993) have deeply worked on subcontinent India in terms of transition from the pre-capitalist Asian society to the colonial society. These authors in their *Ecofeminism* noted that traditionally in India, nature was venerated as sacred, and evolution was measured in terms of the human capacity to interact in harmony with nature’s rhythms and patterns.

The centuries-long colonial development processes have left their enduring imprints on the *postcolonial* development practices and they had influenced the development trail of several countries concerned especially low developed countries. Chakrabarty noted that “the British were admittedly influenced by their own ‘theories of liberalism and self-government. Through a mixture of motives that included ‘self interests and ideological commitments’, the colonial government introduced principles of representation,

appropriate for its rule, into the colonial legislature” (2008:2). However, economic and social transformations remained at the core of development policies in India and the varieties of environmentalism (state, market and community) has emerged at times, however the dominant development model does not give enough space to engage with issues of inter and intra generational environmental sustainability (Sharma, 2020). India has done less well on addressing poverty and health including its infrastructure and accessibility. Despite decades of poverty eradication efforts, about 30 percent of Indians live on less than \$3 per day, and more than 20 percent get by on less than \$2 per day. The country’s infant mortality rate – 50 deaths for every 1,000 live births- has hardly budged in seventy years (see, Kamdar, 2018). Though rural development and to an extent *rural renewal* gained huge attention of national development agenda, the basic challenges still remain to be addressed effectively. Fact is that “agriculture may benefit industrial development through the supply of fertilizers and mechanical equipment, but industrialization is no substitute for agricultural prosperity and development” (Pounds, 1970:104). It demands a holistic approach bringing together key issue areas- rural development, finance, transport, market and technology.

Noteworthy is that “there is no doubt that colonialism distorted the evolution of the India, which followed neither “the pure” capitalist path of development not any routes that do not draw on capitalism. Yet, colonialism, inter alia, contributes to ‘a critical space’ for forces that area opposed to colonialism and inspired by nationalism ad democratization” (Chakrabarty, 2008:14). Since independence, India has achieved a good measure of self-sufficiency in manufacturing a variety of basic and capital goods. There were two main focal areas of early *development* in post independence India: (i) all-round development and (ii) generation of large-scale job opportunities. Overall economic development strategies were to have these twin objectives at the core. Economic restructuring in 1990s meant to bring-in *reforms* with “a human face”. It stated that the reforms must stimulate growth, investment and employment in India. The Panchayati Raj now enjoys constitutional status with built-in mechanism for regular elections and minimum representation of women and member of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

The induction of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* approach in the first quarter of twenty-first century in India’s development principles has enormous potential to ponder upon inclusive sustainable development practices. The newly launched campaign has its resemblance to a similar scheme launched way back during the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974) which aimed at *the goods should be prepared in our own country rather than imported from other countries and to increase our economic growth in every aspect*. This can be stretched to focus on various social, economic, ecological concerns including preservation of biodiversity through integrating actions related to conservation and promoting the sustainable use of biodiversity in cross-sectional policies (Bhattacharya and Tangri, 2017). As per estimates, India is likely to have a GDP of USD 4 trillion and a population of 1.5 billion by 2030. At the current rate of growth, urban population in India is estimated to reach a staggering 60 crores by 2030 (see, World Urbanization Prospects, 2018). However, this rapid pace of urbanization would pose significant challenges to basic infrastructure and services and requires efforts towards improvement in issues including water supply, sanitation, solid waste and wastewater management. Most of the urban poor will be affected by lack of such amenities and facilities. This requires integration of Sustainable Development process and the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat*.

In this context, the present study attempts to address the following major objectives: i) to examine India's status of SDGs and its regional patterns; ii) to discuss about commonalities of SDGs and Aatmanirbhar Bharat approach towards a more integrated and inclusive development practices; and iii) to explore factors which contribute to further enhance integrated sustainable development and to reduce socio-economic, environmental and regional inequalities. A mixed methods research approach is applied here which combines elements of quantitative research and qualitative research in order to address the objectives of the study. Study applies political economy approach in general and urban political economy in particular with a focus on role of state and institutions in sustainable development process, its localized-implementation, and address of urban challenges towards strengthening of economic development of the country.

### **Development: Idea and Practices**

There has been a drastic shift in conception of *development* in terms of what it should be and how it be delivered to the people. It also has draw attention of political commitments and promises in democratic and welfare systems. Further, with growing environmental concerns and increasing impacts of human activity on the planet Earth and her resources, the idea of a balanced development-environment relation became a new phrase during the sixties and the early seventies in the world. Key works that highlighted this thinking included Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Garret Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), the *Blueprint for Survival* by the Ecologist magazine (1972) and the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report (1972). Further, a historic shift took place towards sustainable practices and process of development world over. The relationship between mankind and the environment became a matter of great concern for the international community at the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972) and was given a concrete form in the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development, created in 1985. The Commission Report, entitled *Our Common Future*, was presented by G. H. Brundtland in 1987 and provided the first accepted (and often quoted) definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The concept of sustainable development gained it prominence in development thinking during the Earth Summit on Environment and Sustainable Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. There are three broad aims of sustainable development: i) economic- to attain balanced growth; ii) ecological- to preserve the ecosystem; and iii) social- guarantying equal access to resources to all human communities. Orboi, et al. (2010) stated that “the central principles behind sustainable development are equity and fairness among countries and generations, the long-term vision on the development process, systemic thinking and interconnection between economy, society and the environment” (749).

Next to it has been the Human Development which is conceptualized and reflected in terms of average conditions of health, education, and of course standard of living- the income. Neumayer noted that “What is more, income is not privileged as *primus inter pares*, i.e. it is not given a higher weight than the two other factors” (101: 2001). As per HDI 2018, India ranked 130 among the 189 countries. This depicted that certain close by countries including Vietnam and Nicaragua had a higher HDI values which is supported by better life expectancy and schooling. Paul and Sridhar noted that “among Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) nations too, India is at the bottom with respect to HDI. It is clear that faster economic growth by itself does not cause human development indicators to rise,

though China has managed to achieve a higher rank in human development alongside faster economic growth” (2015: 3). Additions to this shift in alternative evaluation of development are emergence of the Multidimensional Poverty Index and now Social Progress Indicator. But still here are geographical and societal variations in the human development measured across the regions of the world. In the larger context, Rao and Min argued that “Generally, the focus of these indicators is on measuring outcomes of human wellbeing, rather than on specifying the requirements for achieving these outcomes” (225: 2018). This way they emphasize on a set of *material* requirements that are essential for human wellbeing. Disparities between and within countries continue to stifle progress. There are studies which stated that “resource exploitation and environmental degradation should be integrated into the HDI” (Neumayer Ibid, 2001). This concern is raised in the context that human development measurements which still has less focus on environment and sustainability challenges.

### **Environmental Concerns**

There has been environment-sensitive policy transformation from the middle of the nineteen seventies worldover. With the rising concerns about loss of environment and ecological degradation, the “green pressure” has become powerful in drawing attention of policy makers and bureaucrats. With this environmental and biodiversity conservation has become an imperative for the countries. Such collective and mutual resolutions have also emphasized on the conservation of environment resources and biodiversity with the active involvement of local communities. The UN Habitat’s 2030 Agenda adopted in the year 2015, is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. This is structured into Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators which were announced demonstrate the scale and ambition of the new universal Agenda. To connect Human Development to the SDGs, “there are many links between the human development approach and the 2030 Agenda. But it is worth noting up front that the two are fundamentally different things. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a globally agreed tool for assessing development progress. Human development, meanwhile, is a philosophy – or lens – for considering almost any development issue one can think of” (Conceicao, 2019). Many of the SDGs relate directly to the HDI: poverty, health, education and work, for example. Others – such as peace and hunger – relate indirectly. These Goals are meant to build on the Millennium Development Goals and work towards what has not been achieved through them. The shift from MDGs to SDGs can largely be termed as strategic move which includes conclusiveness, comprehensiveness, universality, and inclusiveness. it also means to make clearer that hunger is distinct from poverty, it’s for peace building, its more about resourcing and focuses on measurability.

The Sustainable Development Goals and underlying targets meant to stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet. The SDGs 2030 include no poverty; zero hunger; good health and wellbeing; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals. There has been progress further in this direction and now the Sustainable Development Index (SDI) is also designed to measure the ecological efficiency of human development. The SDI starts with each nation’s human development score (life expectancy, education and income)

and divides it by their ecological overshoot: the extent to which consumption-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and material footprint exceed fair shares of planetary boundaries. Countries that achieve relatively high human development while remaining within or near planetary boundaries rise to the top. SDI results for 2019 can be found in the map and table below. While some countries score reasonably well, none reach over 0.9. India's Sustainable Development Index scored 0.696 which relatively better than most of advanced countries of the world located in the Global North. A report highlighted that the country continues to face major challenges in achieving 11 of the 17 SDGs, which has pushed down its global ranking on SDG preparedness (Pandey, 2022). However, India's rank in overall global SDI is not very satisfactory as it remains behind several of developing countries. The global development priorities are the result of widespread discussions and consultations. What is an interesting move India has made is that it has begun Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the SDGs. It aims to facilitate the sharing of experiences including successes, challenges and lessons learned and first VNR India submitted in 2018. This is a trail-breaking move since it makes public and public agencies well aware of and localization of sustainable development process in the country.

### **India's Position in Sustainable Development**

Simultaneously, on the trail of Sustainable Development Goals, India has been making efforts and initiated various policy-changes in meeting thresholds of standards targets. The progress on SDGs across States and Union Territories is measured and monitored by the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. Methodologically, overall State and UT's scores are generated from goal-wise scores to measure aggregate performance of the sub-national unit based on its performance across SDGs. These score range between 0-100, with State/UTs being categorized as Aspirant (score 0-49), Performer (score 50-64), Front Runner (score 65-99) and Achiever (score 100). The *SDG India Index 2020–21* is more robust than the previous editions on account of wider coverage of targets and indicators with greater alignment with the National Indicator Framework (NIF) as shown in Figure 1. The 115 indicators incorporate 16 out of 17 SDGs, with a qualitative assessment on Goal 17, and cover 70 SDG targets. Performance as measured by the NITI Aayog in the India Index and Dashboard indicates towards an impressive improvement to 66 in 2020-21 from 60 in 2019-20 and 57 in 2018-21. This reflection depicts an acceleration of progress in achieving the SDGs. The Report analysis stated that this positive stride towards achieving the targets is largely driven by exemplary country-wide performance in Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), where the composite Goal scores are 83 and 92, respectively.

**Figure 1. Goal-wise Performance in India, 2019–20 & 2020–21**



Source: NITI Aayog, Government of India, 2021

If one looks at regional performance of SDGs in India, while in 2019, ten States/UTs belonged to the category of Front-Runners (score in the range 65–99, including both), twelve more States/UTs find themselves in this category in 2020–21. Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Punjab, Haryana, Tripura, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh graduated to the category of Front-Runners (scores between 65 and 99, including both). Among the top-performing states and UTs are Kerala (score 75), Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (score 74), Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Uttarakhand (score 72), Sikkim (score 71), and Maharashtra (score 70). The worst-performing states and UTs, on the other hand, include: Chhattisgarh, Nagaland, and Odisha (score 61), Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (score 60), Assam (score 57), Jharkhand (score 56), and Bihar (score 52). The existing regional gaps in SDGs raises a serious concerns that its not only responsibility of the Centre, rather States have to equally take them into their development agenda and local practices. Chatterjee noted that “while obviously achieving the SDGs are the collective responsibilities of both the centre and the states, each have major roles to play” (2022). A majority of worst performing states in SDGs include Empowered Action Group (EAG) states. In developmental debate these states always draw attention of policy makers and researchers as they lag behind in social and economic indicators of development. On account of the unacceptably high fertility and mortality indicators, the eight Empowered Action Group (EAG) states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Assam), which accounts for about 48% of India’s population, are designated as “High Focus States” by the Government of India (see, Kumar and Sahu, 2019).

Precisely, the sustainable urban development specifically means achieving a balance between the development of the urban areas and protection of the environment with an eye to equity in employment, shelter, basic services, social infrastructure and transportation in the urban areas (see, Saroha, 2016). This broadly aims to minimize environmental costs of urbanization. For the purpose sustainable urban planning can play a vital role in achieving social and environmental equality as well as improvement in lives of urban population. This requires a consistent focus on management of safe water supply, waste,

clean energy, and reduction in inequality and urban poverty. As per Census of India 2011, about 65 million people live in slums which are often juxtaposed with the multi-storied buildings and commercial structures in most of large cities. They all together account for 17.4% of the urban population of India. Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal states have highest proportion of their urban households living slums account for 35.7, 31.9, 28.3, and 21.9 percent respectively. The distribution and access to basic civic amenities across the slum households in India manifests inequality across the town size classes (see, Howlader, Laha, and Modak, 2019). The consequences of global environmental changes are felt across the regions and affects people differently. Singh et al. noted that “this summer, the impact of climate change has become more evident for India, and so does the scale of the challenges ahead”(2022). Not only that, this reported that the International Labour Organization warned that millions of jobs can be lost due to heat stress. This is something of grave concern as socio-economic and livelihoods of people living on the margins are subject to such huge impacts. Thus, ensuring *thermal comfort* in new buildings stocks is can help in mitigating warming climate and also in tackling energy crisis.

**The New Initiatives: Policy Shift and Broad Vision**

The *Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform* acknowledges that country’s sincere commitment to the SDGs is very well placed in the contemporary national development agenda as reflected in the motto of *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas* (Collective Efforts for Inclusive Growth). The several national programs and schemes have added a momentum to the implementation of SDGs in the country. Some of them include: Sashakt Bharat - Sabal Bharat (Empowered and Resilient India); Swachh Bharat - Swasth Bharat (Clean and Healthy India); Samagra Bharat - Saksham Bharat (Inclusive and Entrepreneurial India; Satat Bharat – Sanatan Bharat (Sustainable India); and Sampanna Bharat-Samriddh Bharat (Prosperous and Vibrant India). The major initiatives take in this direction are highlighted in Table1.

**Table 1 Recently Launched National Programs**

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Major Initiatives</b>
<b>Digital India</b>	Digital India aimed at transforming India into a digital economy as well as an inclusive knowledge society. Landmark initiatives include MyGov, DigiLocker, eSign, e-Hospital, BharatNet etc.
<b>Sashakt Bharat - Sabal Bharat</b> (Empowered and Resilient India)	India has successfully lifted more than 271 million people out of multidimensional poverty through economic growth and empowerment
<b>Swachh Bharat - Swasth Bharat</b> (Clean and Healthy India)	Through a nationwide initiative triggered by the Clean India Campaign and the National Nutrition Mission, India achieved 100% rural sanitation and sharp reduction in stunting and child and maternal mortality rates
<b>Samagra Bharat - Saksham Bharat</b> (Inclusive and Entrepreneurial India)	Social inclusion is pursued through universalizing access to nutrition, health, education, social protection, and developing capabilities for entrepreneurship and



	employment.
<b>Satat Bharat – Sanatan Bharat</b> (Sustainable India)	India’s climate action strategies call for clean and efficient energy systems, disaster resilient infrastructure, and planned eco-restoration.
<b>Sampanna Bharat- Samriddh Bharat</b> (Prosperous and Vibrant India)	India is one of the fastest growing emerging market economies with a young population and burgeoning innovation and business ecosystem.

Source: Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform 2020

The policy makers at the Centre have been active in last past decade in recognizing epitome of urbanization and the challenges associated with it in the country. Several policies, schemes and mission-led development campaigns are launched to address urban problems in basic infrastructure, services, livelihoods and environmental considerations. The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Urban Livelihoods Mission is being implemented in all the statutory towns to address the social and occupational vulnerabilities of the urban poor. By 2020, some 9.9 lakh beneficiaries have been skill-trained and certified to enhance their employability. Under another scheme- the Prime Minister Street Vendor’s Atmanirbhar Nidhi (Pm SVANidhi) is to cover 50 lakh street vendors in urban areas.

**Tackling Persistent Challenges: Urban and Regional**

Alongwith the process of development, there have been ubiquitous challenge of urban and regional inequalities in the developing countries including India. Urbanization is both an important and irreversible process. There are wide regional variations in level and pace of urbanization and standards of urban livings. India’s cities- cultural centers and hubs of connection to the world beyond- were expected to generate 75 percent of India’s GDP by 2020. Most of cities are starkly divided between the rich and the poor. Overall, 38.9 percent of slum population is reported in metro cities of India. 34.7 percent slums are found in non-metropolitan Class I cities in the country. Another 73.5 percent of slum population is reported in Class I cities alone in 2011. This offers a grim picture of urban poverty. The NITI Aayog and Asian Development bank have recognized that *India’s cities will have to play a crucial role for the country to become a global economic powerhouse* (2022). Thus, “cities as engines of growth” is reiterated so as to strengthening States and Union Territories for broad based urban development- cities’ infrastructure, services, amenities, green ambiance and make them economically vibrant. Under this campaign primarily twelve cities across seven states are selected for detailed study on urban governance, planning and stakeholders. These cities are Dewas, Gangtok, Guwahati, Hisar, Indore, Machlipatnam, Navasari, Nalgonda, Sonipat, Vadodara, Vijayawada and Warangal. In 2018, the Government of India, AFD and the European Union have launched the City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS) program. Some twelve cities are indentified based on competition to become country’s next smart cities. These are Agartala, Amritsar, Bhubaneswar, Hubballi-Dharwad, Ujjain, Dehradun, Surat, Amaravati, Kochi, Chennai, Pondicherry, and Vishakhapatnam.

The regional inequalities result in a condition of asymmetry in standard of living in different parts of a given area (Kumar, 2019). There are contrast realities of development journey during the post-independence period. This concern has got conceptualization primarily in two ways: the neoclassical theory and dependency theory. Former states that mobility of supply side factors including capital stock,

technical change and labour to play a major part in eventual reduction of disparities at regional scale. Whereas the regional inequalities are the inevitable manifestation of capital accumulation and profit maximization are the main concerns in the later. The reality is that there exist contrasts in development profile of the country. Nayyar stated that “Regions differ enormously in terms of geography, language, demography and social norms. Importantly, there are significant differences in levels of economic development across Indian states”(2008: 60). There are wide regional inequalities in livelihood, physical capital at household level, human capital, natural capital, inequality in education, gender inequality, women empowerment index, health inequality etc. across states of India.

The high incidence of such inequalities is aligned with poor states and those in less accessible regions. The better-off states have unprecedented impacts of increasing urbanization and urban growth which does affect productive capacity of agriculture as witnessed in state of Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka, Telangana and West Bengal (see, Pandey and Gautam, 2020). Kundu and Varghese noted that “India has experienced a positive growth in development. With rates of employment, poverty reduction, positive demographic shifts and economic growth all high, India’s natural growth rate in population and fertility varies between the Northern and Southern states” (2010). With increasing geographic and demographic demands, the pressure on existing public institutions and lack of sufficient public goods have become as challenges and causing social inequalities to widen among the different classes. There are not only inter-regional inequalities and disparities in India, the intra-regional pattern is also an interesting concern in development scenario. In Kerala, “there is ample evidence to suggest significant north-south disparity in the state in almost all dimensions of social and economic development” (Sajif, 2019).

### **Crux of the *Self-reliant India***

During the post-independence, India focused on becoming self-reliant by minimizing imports and manufacturing essentials and goods within its domestic boundaries. While this led to self-sufficiency, it also caused limitations in terms of the availability of financial and intellectual resources. The first version of it in the form *self-reliance* was introduced in India during the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974). Its focus on economic development consisted of two main aspects: (i) economic equality, equity and social justice; and (ii) full employment and economic self-reliance. It has process of modernization at very its core with the objective that nation has to promote economic growth with their resources and the economy has to reduce imports and start manufacturing in India. This all, in the post-independence and social and economic crisis, was meant to overhaul economy and reduce dependency on developed economies and countries. The worst experiences with the countries of help whether in food imports or manufacturing imports made India to think of an *alternative* in development that make effective use of her resources, population, technology and this all would contribute to make country self-sufficient. This can be deduced that self-reliant works as an alternative in development process when a country faces adverse conditions and social and economic challenges are unbearable or may result in unwanted consequences. This reminds of limitations of economic growth and development driven by the *models* of Western origin. On any alternatives to these models, Gosalia reminded us that “greater emphasis is now, therefore, placed on a more effective strategy of development, which should relate directly to the basic human needs” (1979). In a way this transition reflected a necessity one part of Low Developed Countries to get rid of their over-reliance and absolute dependence on the advanced and industrialized countries.

The Gandhian vision of grassroots self-reliance gained importance in many countries of this period as it offered an alternative.

However, this was countered by the economic liberalization of 1991 that selectively opened-up the country to global resources and in time brought India into the world's limelight. In the contemporary times India is connected to advanced economies and has lots of exposure to attract global investment and knowledge-transfer in various sectors of economic, social and technological domains. However, larger dependency on external factors of growth may cause disturbances in the economy in the long run and any crisis in the international trade and finance will affect severely Indian economy. In this way a domestic approach of economic reliance is inevitable. The recently introduced the *self-reliant India* i.e. Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign again had its come-back during a national crisis crippled by the COVID-19- a global health disease infecting and affecting millions of people world-wide. Ghosh highlighted that "Hence, the call for "self-reliant India" should be construed as a means to create a robust domestic economic system through investment and consumption demand. This does not preclude foreign investment. Without a congenial business environment that is not possible"(2022).

The self-reliance alternative in the name of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' campaign has its origin in *Gandhian Economics* has resurfaced again. It was launched in the course of the COVID-19 storm (May 2020) has focused on making India economically, technologically and infrastructural self-reliance. Furthermore, it aimed to harness the demand potential of India and to match it using domestic supply. It aimed to transform India from a passive market to an active manufacturing hub at the core of global value chains. The Union Government has announced the special economic and comprehensive package of Rs. 20 lakh Crores- equivalent to 10 percent of India's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). The approach is to make country and her citizens independent and self-reliant in all senses. It should be disassociated from the meaning of the *term* which seems to have been related to "the Cold War-era days of import substitution policies and embracing a more insular economic mindset" (Panda, 2020). This time it is different in focus and strategy as it gives more scope to corporates players to act in strengthening business, manufacturing and employment generation. In fact, the "novel coronavirus has also opened doors towards unique opportunities to rebuild economies that recognize and reinforce close links between human wellbeing and a healthy environment"(Alam, et al., 2021). In pandemic, the virus manifested geographical variations while infecting the people and in its severe impacts on economies of regions and countries. The pandemic impacts on economies of developing countries will have long term consequences. Within this context, for a safe living and a stable economy, governments focused on improved government policies in job creation; adapt strategies to go digital; investments related to sustainable (or resilient) infrastructure; encourage long term behavioural changes; regulate the able technologies; and scope and strategic opportunities in agriculture sector. India came up with the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* campaign.

The five pillars of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* will be helpful for the small and medium business establishments to regain business and also to begin new ventures:

- a) **Economy**- an economy that brings quantum jump rather than incremental change.
- b) **Infrastructure**- an infrastructure that became the identity of modern India

- c) **System**- a system that driven by technology which can fulfill the dreams of 21<sup>st</sup> century; a system not based on the policy of the past century
- d) **Vibrant Demography**- a vibrant demography is also strength in the world’s largest demography and source of energy for self-reliant India.
- e) **Demand**- the cycle of demand and supply chain in an economy is the strength that needs to be harnessed to its potential.

To make India self-reliant is not a measure to curb the FDI but it is to develop the domestic manufacturing capacity and to cut down on the imports of the country that is exceeding the exports. India will not be cutting its economic ties with other countries and with open arms foreign investors in various sectors will be welcomed. However, this shift should be understood as *the move to embrace a corporate sector-led investment growth model*. In the larger context of self-reliance model, the market will get strengthened as new model is *to aid corporates to expand capital and accumulate profit*. As many as eight sectors operating under the public system are to go unprecedented *structural reforms*. Becoming self-reliant will be India’s effort to make a strong place on the global economy map. The Ministry of Finance & Corporate Affairs made several announcements which can be put under five tranches: i) Businesses Including MSMEs; ii) Poor Including Migrant and Farmers; iii) Agriculture; iv) New Horizons of Growth; and v) Government Reforms and Enablers. Under the Government Reforms and Enablers the target areas have been employment generation, healthcare sector, education sector, ease of doing business for corporates, public sector enterprises for new Self-reliant India, and support to state governments. Given Table 1 shows stimulus provided to different sectors under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package by the Union Government. It also important to acknowledge the fact that Indian manufacturing sector is the predominated by the tiny and small plants. Parameswaran observed that “so the task ahead is to change the size and structure of the Indian manufacturing industry in such a way that it generates high-quality employment on a large scale and also attains international competitiveness” (2021). The pandemic has hit hard the poor, laborers and migrants during the lockdowns. Studies unfold that “many surveys investigating the COVID-19 impact on vulnerable workers have shown that around 60%-80% of workers (self-employed, casual as well as salaried workers without job security) lost employment during the lockdown in April and May 2020” (Basole, 2021). Its consequences on nutrition, health, education and debt are yet to be understood and analysed. The shift from the current to capital expenditure was need of time as reflected through the budget, *lot more needs to be done compensate families for lost incomes and reduce their debt*. If country to lead on the path of self-reliance, agriculture is one of the major areas which require targeted focus since an adequate and quality food is essential necessity of each citizen. An equally important concern is that pandemic, the climate crisis and existing crisis in agriculture demand timely sustainable solutions. However, agriculture has remained a resilience sector during the pandemic in the country. Mishra noted that “a positive growth in agriculture during the pandemic shows its resilience, but it is intriguing that food inflation remained high and its possible link with the three farm produce laws should not be overlooked” (2021).

**Table 1 Overall Stimulus Provided by the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Package**

Sl. No.	Tranches	Rs. (Crores)	US\$ billion
1	Businesses Including MSMEs	5,94,550	84.35
2	Poor Including Migrant and Farmers	3,10,100	43.99

3	Agriculture	1,50,000	21.28
4	New Horizons of Growth & Government Reforms and Enablers	48,100	6.28
	Sub-total	11,02,750	156.44
5	Earlier Measures including <i>Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana</i>	1,92,800	27.35
5	RBI Measures (Actual)	8,01,603	113.72
	Sub-total	9,94,403	141.07
Total Budget		20,97,153	297.51

Source: *Self Reliant India Movement IBEF* (India Brand and Equity Foundation) 2022

### Connecting the Dots

It has been talk of town that with increasing industrial development and market-oriented agriculture, the pressures on the natural resources will also increase tremendously. This nexus has more to add in the actually existing social, spatial and regional inequalities. In fact, Indian industrial development will concentrate its resource pressures on the country’s environment. Development and the sustainable development process in the country may be fostered by the *Self-reliant India* approach in certain crucial social and economic areas. There ample opportunity to broaden the scope of this campaign approach and its targets to include major social and economic aspects- health, education, employment, agriculture production, poverty reduction etc. The Self-reliant India approach seems to have a Gandhian philosophy in its formulation in Indian political environment. The newly launched approach is to allow people’s participation and growth of domestic industrial and manufacturing sector which has potential to generate local employment and livelihood opportunities to the mass working population in the country. This strategic move in development can contribute towards a significant reduction in the present disparities of income and wealth and broaden rural development infrastructure- connectivity, education, minimum health facilities, sanitation and safe drinking water. Since urban areas can contribute significantly realization of sustainable development goals, the campaign has potential to direct better management and governance of urban development and infuse sustainable living standards. Within this larger context, the budget (2021-22) promised the Jal Jeevan Mission (urban) aiming at universal water supply in all 4,378 urban local bodies (ULBs) to be implemented over five years. However, its counterpart the *rural* should not be overlooked in the process of integrated development. The fact is that “rural India was able to absorb the shock of lockdown better than urban India primarily due to safety nets such as the MGNREGA and a larger PDS coverage” (Basole, 2021). There is need for integrated urban planning within the context of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* campaign as an approach to complement to the schemes and make them effective. Key initiatives towards slum-free cities, affordable housing, public transport facilities, safe drinking water, waste management, hygiene and sanitation, clean and green environment may be brought under the large locus of the this campaign. Like the MGNREGA, a similar programme in urban areas can play an instrumental role in improving the quality of infrastructure and services, employment generation, rejuvenate urban commons and an increase in the financial and human capacity of the urban local bodies.

## Conclusion

Development means to bring a kind of change and improvement in lives of humans and societies inhabiting settlements, areas and regions. To improve life conditions is to provide for basic amenities and necessities. This requires coherence and integrated management of environmental conditions which are subject to unprecedented changes and effects. Countries in the Global South are overloaded with many responsibilities of developmentalism. In India, the new economic policy-led economic reforms and subsequent increase in economic activities has had a greater pressure on the natural environment. In this backdrop, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) does offer a blended policy and strategy since it has bundle of targets to be achieved in order to address basic necessities of human population and maintaining society-nature relations. The performance of regions in delivering SDGs has been a geographically variable phenomenon in India. The regional inequalities including social, economic, infrastructural, and environmental aspects are the emerging geographies of the post-liberalized India. To check further exaggeration of environment and society-nature relations, and upholding position of a vibrant economy, the Self-reliant (*Aatmanirbhar Bharat*) approach of India is to strengthen planning, governance and management of sustainable development process more in integrated regional development framework and better utilization of indigenous resource-base. There is need for integrated urban planning within the context of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* campaign as an approach to complement to the recently launched schemes and make them effective. Key initiatives towards slum-free cities, affordable housing, public transport facilities, safe drinking water, waste management, hygiene and sanitation, clean and green environment may be brought under the large locus of the this campaign. Like the MGNREGA, a similar programme in urban areas can play an instrumental role in improving the quality of infrastructure and services, employment generation, rejuvenate urban commons and an increase in the financial and human capacity of the urban local bodies.

## Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the ongoing research project of the Institution of Eminence (IoE) Seed Grant-II (No. R/Dev/IoE/Equipment/Seed/Grant-II/2022-23/48748) of Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

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