



Atmanirbhar Bharat: Prospects and Challenges

Rajbir Singh Dalal*

Akhil Malik†

Abstract

Self-sufficiency and self-reliance in terms of Indian goods is known as Atmanirbhar Bharat as well as moving towards a self-reliant India. In order to encourage economic self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on imports, particularly in essential industries like manufacturing and technology, the Indian government introduced the "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan," or "Self-Reliant India Mission." The idea behind the Atmanirbhar Bharat, has been a dream of India since its independence, initiative was to strengthen India's domestic market and reduce its reliance on imports and services, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Mahatma Gandhi, who spearheaded the Indian freedom movement, had a vision of a self-reliant and self-sufficient India. Gandhiji used Swaraj and Swadeshi as his major weapons of Atmanirbhar Bharat. He was of the view that when India produces brave men and women, we shall become self-reliant in true sense. Self-reliant economy strengthened the Indian economy while promoting domestic products in India as well as all over the world. MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises), strengthen agriculture sector, vocal to local, Healthcare Initiatives, One Nation- One Ration Card, Reforms in the Defence Sector, Make in India, Skill India, etc are numerous schemes and policies that boost up the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. However, there are many challenges, such as the need for infrastructure improvements, capital investments, ensuring quality and competitiveness, balancing economic growth with sustainability and addressing dependence on key imports. Additionally, the interruption of global supply chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the delicate balance between self-reliance and international cooperation.

Keywords: Atmanirbhar Bharat, Self-Reliance, COVID-19, Self-Sufficiency.

Introduction

After Independence, India was largely dependent on the West for food grain, machinery spare parts and other necessities which resulted in trade imbalances and a large

*Professor, Department of Political Science, Ch. Devi Lal University Sirsa, Haryana, India.

†Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, CDLU, Sirsa, Haryana, India.

amount of external debt. The Government enacted and implemented Five-Year Plans to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce reliance on imports. The objective of this initiative was to promote self-reliance in the country. The projects like the Green Revolution and Operation Flood, had a positive impact on gross domestic production (GDP) and attracted foreign direct investment (FDI). These endeavors represented the early steps toward achieving economic self-sufficiency. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the significance of self-sufficiency and community-based economic systems, which constitute the backbone of the idea of "Atmanirbhar Bharat". The concept of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" is identical to Gandhi's ideas of Swaraj and Swadeshi, though it has recently gained prominence in relation to India's economic policies. Within the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, Khadi serves as a practical and symbolic representation of the values of self-sufficiency, reduce dependence on imports, sustainable development, and the boost of indigenous economy. The promotion of Khadi is not just about a fabric or cloth; it represents a connection to India's cultural roots and a vision for a self-sufficient and sustainable society. The initiative aims at promoting indigenous goods by including several areas such as manufacturing, agriculture, innovation in technology, infrastructure and so on. The Indian government has started an ambitious program called "Atmanirbhar Bharat" Abhiyan to promote economic independence. On May 12, 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the initiative as a part of India's response to the economic challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to attain economic self-reliance, cooperation between the government sector, corporate sector, and government is inevitable. The aim is to make the nation and its citizens independent and self-sufficient in every senses. It outlined five pillars of Atmanirbhar Bharat – Economy, Infrastructure, System, Vibrant Demography and Demand [1].

It includes concepts like "Vocal for Local" and "Local for Global: Make in India for the World." This is not just a sentence, but a slogan for all Indians. Being vocal about local is a great service to the country." The key beneficiaries of this mission include Shramiks (labourers/workers); Kisans (farmers); daily wagers, who work for the country's growth; 'middle class' people who pay income tax to the government and 'upper class' people who give the economy strength [2]. Initiatives like "Make in India" and "Skill India" promote the broader vision of making a stronger and more self-reliant Indian economy.

The five pillars that support Atma Nirbhar Bharat (AAB) are as follows:

Economy: The aim of the Abhiyaan is to generate quantum growth in the economy as compared to gradual growth and make it of 5 trillion dollars by the end of 2022.

Infrastructure: The country must build infrastructure facilities that fulfill international standards to become the modern nation. Golden Quadrilateral, East -West and North -South Corridors, Green Expressways and hassle-free Freight and passengers' corridors etc. are specific in this regard.

System: The aim of the Abhiyaan is to improve modern technologies, which is not based on old traditions, policies, and rules and regulations particularly the use of ICT, Artificial intelligence etc.

Demography: India's strength and ability to become the largest democracy rests in its vibrant demography. We are the generation of innovative, creative and young population that is the source of successful Indian economy.

Demand: The objectives of the Abhiyaan are to strengthen the economy through supply and demand chains that are linked to its proper perspective.

Objectives of AAB

- To explain the plan's goals, salient features, practical issues, and challenges in its implementation.
- To support the vocal to local for self-sufficiency.
- To enhance economic self-sufficiency and reduce the dependency on imports.
- To Provide assistance for the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.
- To provide job opportunities by boosting indigenous manufacturing and industries.

Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan: An initiative toward self-reliance

Atmanirbhar Bharat is about more than just self-reliance. It's about a self-assured country whose citizens understand what it really means to be a citizen. The aim of the multifaceted Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative is to make India self-reliant and economy that is globally competitive in a number of sectors while emphasizing inclusive development and growth.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)

The Atmanirbhar Bharat scheme's initiatives aim to help workers, MSMEs, cottage industry, middle-class people, and other enterprises. In this context, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package of ₹ 1.70 lakh crores can be considered a relief package for the poor to help battle against COVID-19. Moreover, there have been initiatives to extend the last date for Income Tax Returns, file GST returns, custom clearance, all day long, etc. Businesses, including MSMEs, can avail of business loans up to ₹ 25 crores outstanding and ₹ 100 crores turnover.[3]

KVIC (Khadi and Village Industry) sector, showing significant growth aligning with the objectives of Atmanirbhar Bharat. KVI sales have surged more than four-fold, totaling Rs. 1,34,629.91 crore in FY 2022-23 compared to Rs. 33,135.90 crore in FY 2014-15, marking an increase of 306.29%. KVI production has also increased over three-fold, reaching Rs. 95,956.67 crore in FY 2022-23 compared to Rs. 27,569.37 crore in FY 2014-15, indicating an increase of 248.05%.[4.]

Schemes for Underprivileged Classes

About three crore farmers have received agricultural loans of ₹ 4.22 lakh crores. The healthcare workers will receive an insurance cover of ₹ 50 lakhs, and about 80 crore poor people will receive 5 kg wheat or rice per head for the next three months. Other activities include Jan Dhan accounts of 20 crore women, free gas cylinders to 8 crore low-income families, Employee Provident Fund EPF to get a non-refundable advance of 75%, etc. The State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) will also be used by the State Governments to build

shelters for migrants to provide for their everyday needs. The scheme details of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan also include a disbursement of Revolving Fund (RF) to Self Help Groups. Minimum wages were made applicable to 30% of the rural laborer's, in order to accommodate migratory laborer's and low-income urban families, Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) were constructed.[5]

Make in India Initiative

The Government of India started the "Made in India" program in September 2014 with the goal of encouraging and motivating both foreign and domestic businesses to produce their goods in India. After the COVID-19 pandemic the "Make in India" initiative is now inevitable for boosting the Indian economy. The Prime Minister of India emphasized we must buy local product on daily use or buy the products of local artisan, local shopkeeper or street vendor rather than global brand. Therefore, from today every Indian has to become vocal for their local, not only to buy local products, but also to promote them proudly. The objective of the self-reliant India campaign is for the nation to establish a modern military industry and transform India into a significant military power on its own. National Research Foundation (NRF) that mediate the flow of capital and resources to convert scientific knowledge into technology-based wealth will require drastic changes to become effective and efficient, so that these institutions power India's economic output to \$10 trillion and beyond in the coming decade by delivering on productivity-multiplying R&D across industries [R. Mantri].

Skill India Mission

To strengthen Atmanirbhar Bharat, the Indian government has organized various skill like PM Kaushal Vikas Yojna, Skill India program, PM YUVA, SANKLAP, UDAAN, Diksha, PM e-vidya, Swayam and so on these will be a huge step to creating a self-reliant India. With 'Skill India Mission' the Indian government aims at increasing the employment rate in the nation by fostering the development of those industry-required practical skills. Since implementation, the mission has helped boost employment. According to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), unemployment rate dropped to 6.5% in January 2021 from 9.1% in December 2020, while the employment rate increased to 37.9% in January 2021 from 36.9% in December 2020 [7].

Organic Farming

The most powerful weapon to contain chemical farming is organic farming. The World Organic Agriculture report of 2018 reveals India is third amongst the organic food producers in the world. Indian organic food market is approx. \$1.5 billion out of \$ 250 billion global organic food market. The north-eastern states of India have become a hub for organic farming due to their dedicated efforts. Sikkim has taken lead to convert their entire produce in organic cultivation. It is estimated that Indian organic agriculture is growing at 25% a year. [Samita and Harish Dubey]. If we have to minimize this climate risk, we need a paradigm shift in our thinking.

We must change our way of thinking if we want to reduce this climate risk. Now, we have to focus from land productivity to water productivity. Natural farming is the best example to

curb the global warming effect on environment. Integrated farming, also known as water cropping, is the technique of producing multiple crops on the same piece of land in a single growing season. This method allows farmers to maximize land use efficiency, increase productivity, and curb the effect of climate change. Various agricultural practices, including crop production, livestock rearing, aquaculture, agroforestry, and more, are combined on a same field of land in integrated farming systems. Integrated or mix farming system permits wider crop rotations and thus reduces dependence on chemical fertilizer. Example like such as planting timber or fruit trees beside annual crops like beans or maize and Integrating fish farming with paddy cultivation.

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is a necessary pre-condition for self-reliant India in a real sense. We should not forget that 50% population contribution to our women. The importance of government initiatives like Mission Shakti, Ujjawala Scheme, Mahila Shakti, and others is also emphasized in terms of improving the economic status of women. In low-income households, maternal health during pregnancy has been a major source of concern. For this purpose, we gave special consideration to hospital births, prenatal nutrition, and vaccination of pregnant mothers. Under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Rs 5,000 is deposited in the bank account of women during pregnancy, so that they can take care of proper diet. So far, about Rs 10,000 crores have been given to more than two crore sisters. Accounts of about 2.5 crore girls have been opened under the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana. The Mudra Yojana is supporting women entrepreneurs from poor families in the villages. About 70 percent of the total loans sanctioned under this scheme have been given to women. Through the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana, women are also connected to rural organizations and Self-Help Groups throughout the nation. Government has opened the doors of Sainik Schools across the country for girls. Government has established about 700 fast track courts across the country for speedy trial of heinous crimes like rape. Government which made a law against Triple Talaq to protect the Muslim women from atrocities. [Narendra Modi] The Government of India made provision for 33 per cent of reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures in October, 2023 , though these provisions will be effective after 2029.

Minimal Use of Foreign Goods

We fought on the Swadeshi plank for our freedom. Mahatma Gandhi launched the Swadeshi movement and urged everyone to boycott British products when the British government had control over India. India, the world's largest producer, importer, and consumer of pulses—it accounts for roughly 25% of worldwide production and 27% of global consumption—has been imposing quantitative import restrictions on countries such as Australia and Canada that produce pulses like peas. Since 2017 to restriction imports and protect domestic farmers. [10] There are restrictions on imports of Agarbattis and other related goods from countries like China and Vietnam. Our government is trying to promote Indian goods rather than Chinese goods. On the auspicious occasion of Diwali, the government banned the Chinese manufacturing lightening and appealed to the people to purchase the clay-making earthen lamps.

Challenges faced by AAB

When a country wants to become self-sufficient, it is necessary to produce all the goods and services, it needs by itself and does not want to rely on the resources of the world. In other words, tries to isolate itself and eliminate all of its imports. On the other hand, self-reliance means that the country desire to have enough resources — typically foreign exchange reserves — to pay for what it wants to import. While the initiative has its merits, it also faces several challenges. As Francis Bacon aptly said ‘Hope is a good breakfast, but it is a bad supper.’ The main challenges before this Mission are as under:

Issues related to Liquidity

Indian MSMEs and other companies have often faced unfair competition from foreign companies. MSMEs face problems of marketing and liquidity.[12] The decision of Denomination on 8 November, 2016 of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes proved suicidal for Indian economy and the Union Government had no concrete reply in favour of this foolish and immature decision in Parliament and Supreme Court or in public. It is noteworthy that 99.3 per cent of the total notes of these denominations were returned back to the RBI. The GST Act, 2017 further added fuel to the fire and crushed the non -formal or unorganized sector for want of cash, which is the main strength of Indian economy by the time. The economic policies of the government created unhistorical unemployment and abolished the domestic and small savings in the country.

Rising Public Debt and Crisis in Public Sector Banks

According to the Union Government itself, the Rs 20 lakh crore stimulus plan, which accounts for 10% of India's GDP, has led to an increase in the country's debt.[13] India's debt has increased from Rs 47 lakh crore in 2014 to Rs 148 lakh crore in 2023 which is a serious issue of concern. The Modi Government waived of about Rs 14 lakh crore of Corporates' loan in the last 7 years and its policy decisions directly or indirectly promoted the Corporates and persons indulged in Banking frauds rather than the honest and sincere loanee. Though there are central agencies like Enforcement Directorate, CBI, Economic Offence Wing, SEBI etc. to check and monitor financial irregularities and frauds in banking sector, but these hardly traced any case of corruption or money laundering in general except to chase and put behind the bars the opposition leaders who did not bow before and settle the political agenda of Modi Regime and dare to sustain before it.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

India's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 outbreak, making it more difficult to become self-sufficient. These challenges include: (i) Due to disruption of economic slowdown has reduced demand, which has affected businesses—especially smaller ones—and impeded attempts toward self-reliance. (ii) Dependency on imports for medical supplies. (iii) Village empowerment especially on education sector, is impeded by the digital divide or digital infrastructure. (iv) Lockdowns generated a labor shortage, which had an impact on industry production capacities and create an obstacle to become a self-reliant India. (v) The Covid-19 outbreak has led to increase dependence on medical devices made of polythene and plastic. The Covid-19 pandemic

derailed Indian economy due to some amateur political decisions and huge casualties caused by the virus.

Impact on International Relations

Being independent or self-sufficient sometimes is taken as limiting our interactions with the outside world and isolating ourselves from rest of the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led India to lose faith in both Russian and Western technological sources and to become more cautious about relying on rest of the world for its technological needs. New Delhi's reinforced belief in self-reliance, or Atmanirbhar Bharat, might possibly compromise its economic growth in the short term but India's domestic consensus for technological strategic autonomy is here to stay. Establishing her foundation and securing a position in the international market is one of India's toughest challenges in an economy where nations like the United States and China hold such influence. Many Schemes rely more on loans rather than on cash support.

Immigration Issues

During 2014-23, over 17 lakh Indians left its citizenship and settled permanently in other countries. These people and their activities have impact on Indian economy. Simultaneously during the last 5 years (2017-22) , over 25 lakh youths went abroad for getting education and employment. These young minds who have to contribute to development of India are forced to work in other nations including Arab Countries. In 2023, the contribution of Indian students alone to the economy of Canada was in tune of Rs 70,000 crore. These countries are charging 8-10 times more fees from Indian students. If steps are taken to retain them in our country, then they can also contribute positively to our economy.

Conclusion

No doubt, India has wide potential to become the third largest economy of the world which has been duly acknowledged and understood by the developed nations particularly G-20 members. The present central government has provided and is extending significant support to local producers, enabling them to succeed and become the cornerstones of new India in the twenty-first century. As a result of a number of pro-active steps and initiatives, producers can grow and stand out as strong pillars of the economy. Above all, the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" initiative represents a commitment to creating a more robust and resilient economy in current and future time. Benefits from the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan are expected to reach every section of society if the Government and its implementation agencies are sincere, honest and committed to the intent and purpose of this Mission. The AAB initiatives will also help labourers, migrant workers and the others from both the organized and unorganized sectors.

Direct benefits, such as financial assistance sent directly to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries is simpler and more beneficial than indirect benefits. Rationalization of GST rates and its proper distribution and payments, evaluating the contemporary issues facing agriculture and providing comprehensive solutions are the need of hour. To double the income of farmers, better production and productivity-related measures need to be drafted

and executed. It is important to conduct in-depth research on issues pertaining to the marginalized groups, such as farm labourers and landless labourers. The agricultural sector reforms such as ownership transparency, land reforms and the consolidation of fragmented properties need special attention. The current phase of the industrial revolution which is called Industry 4.0 is needed to be strengthened to take the full advantage of the schemes under AAB. To replace the current economic ecosystem and turn India into a global manufacturing hub, a strategic industrial policy is essential. Much work is to be done on the infrastructure, transaction and communication systems. Human Capital is one of the most vital components that needs to be addressed on priority. While the political leadership and its vision, mission, probity and commitment to national cause have decisive role in this entire process, other actors like the bureaucracy, civil society organizations, mass media, and the citizens in general should also join wholeheartedly in this national task.

To sum up, Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan (AAB) serves as the foundation needed to build a powerful, cohesive and vibrant India wherein it can boost up the economy and prosperity of the entire nation. The fiscal health and credit of the country as a decisive factor in attaining the goals of Atmanirbhar Bharat will be possible only when all the stakeholders participate with dedication and sincerity.

Notes

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