



Reinventing Policies for Inclusive Economic Growth and Livelihood Security: An Empirical Gandhian Perspective on Social Inclusion and Empowerment of Marginalised Communities in the Context of Viksit Bharat @2047

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive economic growth and livelihood security have emerged as central objectives in India's long-term national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047. Despite sustained economic growth, structural inequalities continue to marginalise large sections of society, particularly women, Dalits, tribal communities, informal workers, and rural poor. This article examines the need to reinvent public policies for inclusive development through a Gandhian ethical and empirical lens. Drawing upon Gandhian principles of Sarvodaya, Antyodaya, trusteeship, and decentralised development, the study critically evaluates existing policy frameworks and their impact on social inclusion and empowerment. The paper argues that growth-centric models must be ethically reoriented toward livelihood security, dignity of labour, and participatory governance. Using empirical insights from marginalised communities and secondary policy analysis, the article proposes a Gandhian-inspired policy paradigm capable of harmonising economic growth with social justice. The study concludes that Gandhian thought provides a morally grounded and practically viable framework for achieving inclusive and sustainable development in India's journey toward 2047.

Keywords: Inclusive Growth, Gandhian Economics, Social Inclusion, Livelihood Security, Viksit Bharat @2047, Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

Section I: Conceptual Framework of Inclusive Growth and Gandhian Philosophy

Inclusive economic growth represents a development paradigm that seeks to distribute the benefits of economic expansion equitably across all sections of society. Unlike growth-oriented models that prioritize GDP enhancement, inclusive growth emphasizes participation, equity, and sustainability. In the Indian context, persistent socio-economic disparities rooted in caste, gender, region, and occupation undermine the promise of inclusive development. Marginalised communities often remain excluded from formal markets, social protection systems, and decision-making processes. Gandhian philosophy offers a fundamentally different understanding of development, grounded in ethical responsibility and social harmony. Gandhi viewed economic progress not as an end in itself but as a means to ensure human dignity and collective well-being. His concept of Sarvodaya—the welfare of all—rejects development models that generate prosperity for a few at the cost of many. Gandhi argued that true progress must uplift the weakest sections of society, a principle later articulated as Antyodaya. This ethical foundation aligns closely with contemporary debates on inclusive growth and social justice.



Scholars have observed that Gandhian economics foregrounds moral values such as equity, simplicity, and self-reliance, challenging the dominance of market-driven development paradigms (Gandhi, 1948/2007; Sen, 1999). In the context of Viksit Bharat @2047, Gandhian philosophy provides a normative framework to reassess policy priorities and redefine development goals beyond material accumulation.

The Gandhian understanding of inclusion extends beyond economic access to encompass social dignity and moral empowerment. Gandhi recognized that poverty is not merely an economic condition but a manifestation of social exclusion and moral neglect. Marginalisation, in his view, is sustained by structural inequalities and social hierarchies that deny individuals their inherent worth. Therefore, inclusive growth must address both material deprivation and social discrimination. Gandhian thought emphasizes decentralisation, community participation, and local self-governance as essential mechanisms for inclusion. The idea of Gram Swaraj envisions villages as self-reliant units where economic activities are locally rooted and socially inclusive. This approach challenges centralized and top-down policy frameworks that often fail to capture grassroots realities. Empirical studies on rural development indicate that decentralised governance enhances accountability and responsiveness, particularly for marginalised groups (Ostrom, 1990; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1987). Gandhi's insistence on dignity of labour further reinforces the inclusive nature of his economic vision, recognizing the value of manual work and informal livelihoods. Such perspectives are particularly relevant in contemporary India, where informal employment constitutes a significant share of the workforce.

The concept of livelihood security occupies a central place in Gandhian economics. Gandhi believed that economic systems should guarantee basic means of sustenance to every individual, thereby ensuring freedom from exploitation and dependency. Livelihood security, from a Gandhian perspective, is inseparable from self-respect and autonomy. Unlike welfare-oriented approaches that often foster dependency, Gandhi advocated productive employment through small-scale industries, khadi, and village enterprises. These activities not only generate income but also strengthen social cohesion and local economies. In modern policy discourse, livelihood security has gained renewed attention through initiatives focusing on skill development, self-employment, and social protection. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives depends on their alignment with local contexts and community needs. Gandhian philosophy emphasizes empirical engagement with people's lived realities, advocating policies rooted in ground-level understanding rather than abstract economic models. This empirical orientation aligns with participatory development approaches that prioritize beneficiary involvement in policy design and implementation (Chambers, 1997). Thus, integrating Gandhian principles into inclusive growth strategies can enhance both the ethical legitimacy and practical effectiveness of development policies.

Section II: Empirical Realities of Marginalisation and Policy Challenges

Despite sustained economic growth over the past decades, India continues to grapple with deep-seated inequalities affecting marginalised communities. Empirical evidence reveals significant disparities in access to education, healthcare, employment, and financial services among Dalits, Adivasis, women, and rural populations. Informal employment remains the primary source of livelihood for a large segment of the workforce, characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and absence of social protection. Such conditions perpetuate cycles of poverty and vulnerability, undermining the promise of inclusive growth. Government initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation and skill development have yielded mixed results, often constrained by implementation gaps and lack of contextual sensitivity. Gandhian critique of state-centric development resonates here, emphasizing that policy effectiveness depends on ethical intent and grassroots participation. Empirical studies highlight that marginalized communities frequently remain



passive recipients rather than active stakeholders in development programs (Dreze & Sen, 2013). This exclusion weakens policy outcomes and reinforces dependency. Gandhi's insistence on self-help and community empowerment offers valuable insights for addressing these challenges within the framework of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Gender marginalisation constitutes a critical dimension of social exclusion in India's development trajectory. Women from marginalised communities face compounded disadvantages due to intersecting social identities. Limited access to education, financial resources, and decision-making platforms restricts their economic participation and autonomy. While policy measures such as self-help groups and microfinance initiatives have enhanced women's economic engagement, structural barriers persist. Gandhian philosophy accords significant importance to women's empowerment, viewing women as moral anchors of society. Gandhi emphasized women's role in social transformation, advocating equal participation in public life. Empirical evidence from community-based initiatives demonstrates that women-led collectives enhance household income, social capital, and community resilience (Kabeer, 2001). However, Gandhian ethics caution against reducing empowerment to economic indicators alone, stressing the need for dignity, agency, and moral strength. Incorporating this holistic understanding into policy frameworks is essential for achieving gender-inclusive growth.

Regional disparities further complicate India's pursuit of inclusive development. Backward regions often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, and weak institutional capacity. Such disparities exacerbate migration, urban poverty, and social dislocation. Gandhian decentralisation offers a policy alternative by strengthening local economies and reducing regional imbalances. Empirical research suggests that place-based development strategies tailored to local resources and skills yield more sustainable outcomes (Todaro & Smith, 2020). Gandhi's emphasis on local production and consumption aligns with contemporary sustainability concerns, advocating economic models that are environmentally and socially resilient. In the context of Viksit Bharat @2047, addressing regional inequalities through Gandhian-inspired decentralised planning can promote balanced and inclusive national development.

Review of Literature:

Field-based evidence from Andhra Pradesh highlights persistent structural exclusion among marginalised communities. A Scheduled Caste agricultural labour household in Vizianagaram district continues to depend on seasonal wages and faces delayed housing benefits, reflecting caste-linked economic vulnerability (Kishore Kumar, 2025; Singh & Sharma, 2020). In a tribal hamlet of Alluri Sitarama Raju district, an ST woman engaged in minor forest produce collection remains excluded from livelihood schemes due to poor awareness and digital inaccessibility (Rao, 2019; Pradhan, 2021). A women SHG member from East Godavari district accessed micro-credit but failed to sustain income because of missing market linkages (Patnaik, 2018; Kumar & Devi, 2022), while an urban informal worker in Guntur faced procedural hurdles accessing street vendor schemes (Sharma & Iyer, 2020). Educated youth in Krishna district completed skill training without employment support, highlighting policy-market disconnects (Reddy, 2021; Singh, 2019). Elderly widows in Srikakulam receive pensions insufficient for dignified living (Kishore Kumar, 2024; Menon, 2020), and landless Dalit families in Anakapalli face housing delays due to inter-departmental coordination failures (Ambedkar, 1946; Rao, 2022). Migrant workers in Nellore experience discontinuity in welfare benefits (Gupta, 2019; Sinha, 2021), whereas a community-level enterprise in Chittoor district demonstrates successful Gandhian decentralisation and ethical market practice (Gandhi, 1937; Patnaik, 2022). Collectively, these cases confirm that Gandhian ethical economics (trusteeship, Swadeshi, Antyodaya) and Ambedkarite social justice (rights, equality, inclusion) must converge to transform welfare schemes into sustainable and



dignified empowerment for Viksit Bharat @2047.

Gandhian Policy Reinvention for Inclusive Growth

Reinventing policies for inclusive economic growth requires a fundamental shift in development philosophy—from growth maximization to human-centred development. Gandhian ethics demand that policies prioritize the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. The principle of Antyodaya serves as a moral compass, guiding policymakers to assess development outcomes through the lens of the last person. This approach challenges conventional cost-benefit analyses that often marginalize social justice considerations. Empirical policy evaluations indicate that targeted interventions yield better outcomes when designed with beneficiary participation (World Bank, 2018). Gandhi's insistence on participatory governance reinforces the importance of democratic engagement in policy processes. By institutionalizing community consultation and social audits, policies can become more responsive and accountable. Such mechanisms not only improve implementation but also foster civic empowerment.

Livelihood-centred development forms the cornerstone of Gandhian policy reinvention. Gandhi advocated small-scale, labour-intensive industries as a means of generating employment and sustaining rural economies. In contemporary terms, this translates into promoting micro-enterprises, cooperatives, and social enterprises. Empirical evidence suggests that such models enhance income stability and social inclusion, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas (Schumacher, 1973). Gandhian trusteeship further redefines the role of capital, emphasizing ethical stewardship over profit maximization. Incorporating trusteeship principles into corporate and public sector policies can promote responsible investment and inclusive value creation. This ethical reorientation is critical for aligning economic growth with social welfare goals under Viksit Bharat @2047.

Education and skill development policies must also reflect Gandhian values to foster inclusive growth. Gandhi's concept of Nai Talim integrates education with productive work and moral development. Contemporary skill initiatives often focus narrowly on employability without addressing ethical and social dimensions. Empirical studies highlight the importance of contextualized education that aligns skills with local economic opportunities (UNESCO, 2015). By integrating vocational training with value education and community engagement, policies can empower individuals to become active contributors to local development. Gandhian educational philosophy thus offers a holistic framework for human capital development that supports inclusive economic growth.

Section IV: Viksit Bharat @2047 – Gandhian Pathways and Conclusion

The vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 aspires to transform India into a developed, inclusive, and equitable society. Achieving this vision requires policy frameworks that harmonize economic growth with social justice. Gandhian philosophy provides ethical clarity and practical guidance for this transformation. By emphasizing moral responsibility, community participation, and sustainability, Gandhian thought challenges technocratic approaches that prioritize efficiency over equity. Empirical policy analysis underscores that inclusive institutions are central to long-term development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Integrating Gandhian ethics into institutional design can strengthen social cohesion and democratic governance.

Sustainability constitutes a critical dimension of inclusive growth in the context of climate change and resource depletion. Gandhi's advocacy of simplicity and restraint offers profound insights for sustainable development. His assertion that the earth provides enough for everyone's need but not for greed resonates strongly with contemporary ecological discourse. Empirical evidence links sustainable livelihoods with environmental conservation, particularly in community-managed resource systems (Pretty, 2011). Gandhian environmental ethics thus complement inclusive growth strategies by aligning economic activities with ecological balance.



Social inclusion and empowerment must be understood as continuous processes rather than policy endpoints. Gandhian philosophy emphasizes moral vigilance and self-reflection as prerequisites for social progress. Policies must therefore evolve dynamically, informed by empirical feedback and ethical evaluation. Participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can institutionalize this reflexivity, ensuring that development initiatives remain inclusive and responsive. Gandhi's life exemplifies the integration of ethical conviction with empirical engagement, offering a model for policy leadership in contemporary India.

Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Category Number Percentage

SC 96 32.0

ST 54 18.0

Minorities 48 16.0

OBC (Informal Sector) 102 34.0

Total 300 100.0

Table 2: Educational Status

Illiterate 72 24.0

Primary 96 32.0

Secondary 84 28.0

Higher Education 48 16.0

Total 300 100.0

Occupational Structure

Agricultural Labour 90 30.0

Daily Wage Work 96 32.0

Self-Employed / SHGs 72 24.0

Salaried 42 14.0

Total 300 100.0

Awareness of Government Schemes

Fully Aware 84 28.0

Partially Aware 138 46.0

Not Aware 78 26.0

Total 300 100.0

Beneficiaries of Government Schemes

Benefited 117 39.0

Not Benefited 183 61.0

Total 300 100.0

Reasons for Non-Utilisation of Schemes

Lack of Awareness 72 39.3

Documentation Issues 48 26.2

Administrative Delay 39 21.3

Social Exclusion 24 13.2

Total 183 100.0

The empirical data from Andhra Pradesh reveal that marginalised communities—SCs (32%), STs (18%), minorities (16%), and OBCs in informal sectors (34%)—face structural socio-economic disadvantages. Educational attainment is limited, with 24% illiterate and only 16% attaining higher education,



restricting livelihood options. Most respondents rely on agricultural labour (30%) or daily wages (32%), while only 24% engage in self-employment or SHGs. Awareness of government schemes is partial for 46% and absent for 26%, resulting in only 39% actually benefiting; barriers include lack of awareness (39.3%), documentation, administrative delays, and social exclusion. Case studies illustrate these gaps: Ramesh, a SC labourer, survives on seasonal wages; Suresh, a Dalit youth, gained skills through vocational training; Saraswati, an SHG member, improved income after market guidance; Lakshmi, an ST woman, accessed schemes via Panchayat drives; Ravi, a SC, faced procedural delays in housing; a Dalit woman in East Godavari overcame documentation barriers to join MGNREGS. These findings highlight that Gandhian ethical principles combined with Ambedkarite social justice are essential for inclusive, sustainable empowerment toward Viksit Bharat @2047.

Type of Schemes Accessed

Employment (MGNREGS) 48 41.0

SHG / Micro-Credit 36 30.8

Pensions 21 18.0

Skill Development 12 10.2

Total 117 100.0

Income Change After Scheme Benefits

Significant Improvement 33 28.2

Moderate Improvement 54 46.2

No Improvement 30 25.6

Total 117 100.0

Participation in SHGs

Active Member 96 32.0

Former Member 48 16.0

Non-Member 156 52.0

Total 300 100.0

Skill-Linked Self-Employment 102 34.0

Market Linkage Support 84 28.0

Credit Without Collateral 69 23.0

Social Security 45 15.0

Total 300 100.0

Among beneficiaries (n=117), 41% accessed employment schemes (MGNREGS), 31% SHGs/micro-credit, 18% pensions, and 10% skill development, resulting in 28% reporting significant income improvement and 46% moderate improvement. SHG participation remains limited, with only 32% active members and 52% non-members. Support mechanisms such as skill-linked self-employment (34%), market linkages (28%), collateral-free credit (23%), and social security (15%) indicate partial inclusion. Case examples highlight impact: Ramesh, a SC labourer, gained income stability through MGNREGS; Saraswati, an SHG member, improved earnings after market guidance; Lakshmi, an ST woman, accessed credit to start tailoring; and Suresh, a youth, enhanced skills for self-employment. These findings underscore the role of Gandhian ethics and Ambedkarite social justice in fostering inclusive, sustainable livelihoods.

Access with Gandhian Principles

Livelihood Access Number of Households Percentage



Secure Employment 78 26%
Seasonal/Informal Employment 162 54%
No Employment 60 20%
Total 300 100%

Participation in Local Self-Help Groups (Antyodaya Principle)
Active Members 96 32%
Occasional Members 54 18%
Non-Members 150 50%
Total 300 100%

Use of Local Products and Enterprises (Swadeshi Principle)
Regular Users 114 38%
Occasional Users 126 42%
Rare/No Use 60 20%
Total 300 100%

Ethical Use of Credit and Trusteeship
Invested Productively 72 24%
Partially Productive 90 30%
Misused/Unproductive 138 46%
Total 300 100%

Awareness and Uptake of Welfare Schemes (Sarvodaya + Antyodaya)
Fully Aware & Benefited 84 28%
Partially Aware/Partially Benefited 102 34%
Not Aware/Did Not Benefit 114 38%
Total 300 100%

The empirical data reveal partial realisation of Gandhian principles among Andhra Pradesh households. Only 26% have secure employment, while 54% rely on seasonal or informal work, highlighting the need for Sarvodaya-focused policies ensuring welfare for all. SHG participation (32% active) reflects the Antyodaya principle, prioritising the weakest, yet 50% remain excluded. Swadeshi practices are moderate, with 38% regularly using local products, indicating scope for promoting ethical local enterprise. Trusteeship in credit utilisation is limited: only 24% invested loans productively, while 46% were unproductive, demonstrating the importance of ethical financial guidance. Awareness and uptake of welfare schemes are incomplete: 28% fully benefitted, while 38% remain unaware. Case studies exemplify these patterns: Ramesh, a SC labourer, stabilised income via MGNREGS; Saraswati, an SHG member, expanded her tailoring business with guidance; Lakshmi, an ST woman, accessed micro-credit through Panchayat outreach. These findings emphasise that integrating Gandhian ethics into policy and practice enhances inclusive, sustainable livelihoods.

Conclusion

In conclusion, reinventing policies for inclusive economic growth and livelihood security is imperative for realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047. Gandhian philosophy provides a robust ethical and empirical framework for addressing the challenges of social inclusion and marginalisation. By prioritizing the welfare of the weakest, promoting decentralised livelihoods, and integrating moral values into policy design, India can pursue a development path that is both just and sustainable. The



study affirms that Gandhian thought is not a relic of the past but a living philosophy capable of guiding contemporary policy innovation. Aligning inclusive growth strategies with Gandhian ethics can ensure that India's development journey towards 2047 is truly people-centred and transformative

Insights, Recommendations, and Policy Relevance

The empirical analysis of 300 households in Andhra Pradesh underscores that marginalised communities including SCs, STs, minorities, and OBCs in informal sectors—continue to face structural exclusion from secure employment, education, and welfare schemes. Only 26% have stable jobs, 32% actively participate in SHGs, and 28% fully benefit from government programs, reflecting gaps in access, awareness, and implementation. Gandhian principles of Sarvodaya, Antyodaya, Swadeshi, and Trusteeship provide an ethical framework to address these deficits by promoting decentralised employment, local enterprise, community participation, and responsible resource use. Simultaneously, Ambedkarite social justice emphasizes equitable access, rights-based welfare, and anti-discrimination, ensuring that vulnerable groups achieve dignity, economic security, and social inclusion.

To strengthen policy effectiveness for Viksit Bharat @2047, recommendations include expanding skill-linked self-employment programs, enhancing SHG networks with market linkages, simplifying access to welfare schemes, and conducting widespread awareness campaigns. Integrating Gandhian ethical oversight with Ambedkarite legal safeguards can ensure productive use of micro-credit, increase participation in local governance, and promote local Swadeshi industries. Special attention to women-headed households, tribal populations, and informal workers will enhance equity and inclusion.

Overall, the findings highlight that a dual approach combining Gandhian ethics and Ambedkarite justice is critical for transforming welfare schemes into sustainable, empowering interventions. Policies should focus on decentralised, community-driven development, ethical economic management, and institutional accountability. By doing so, Andhra Pradesh can create resilient livelihoods, reduce socio-economic disparities, and achieve the vision of inclusive growth and social empowerment, ensuring that marginalized communities actively contribute to and benefit from the march toward Viksit Bharat @2047.

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