

Beyond Numbers : Understanding The Idea Of Viksit Bharat

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As the historian Simon Schama observes, states may be assembled from concrete, steel, and administrative systems, but nations endure on something far less visible and far more vulnerable. Armies can be mobilised, institutions erected, and economies accelerated, yet the true strength of a nation is revealed not in comfort, but under pressure. It is tested in the endurance of collective belief, the resilience of families, the refusal of truth to disappear even when it becomes inconvenient, and the fragile yet persistent sense of belonging that survives crisis, loss, and uncertainty. Seen through this lens, development cannot be reduced to figures, infrastructure, or global rankings alone. The vision of Viksit Bharat therefore compels a deeper interrogation, not only of what India constructs, but of what it preserves and strengthens: its civic spirit, moral courage, and capacity for social cohesion. For a nation as complex and diverse as India, development is not a completed structure to be unveiled, but an ongoing, contested process that must be consciously renewed, ethically grounded, and continuously reimagined.

Understanding the Vision of Viksit Bharat

Viksit Bharat is not presented merely as an economic target, but as a comprehensive national transformation aimed at achieving inclusive, sustainable, and participatory development by 2047. The slogan “Bold Vision, Brighter Future” reflects an attempt to combine ambition with long-term planning. At its core, the vision emphasises zero poverty, universal access to quality education and healthcare, a skilled and productive workforce, increased participation of women in economic activity, environmental sustainability, and active citizen engagement through platforms such as MyGov.

The conceptual framework draws inspiration from India’s demographic reality and civilisational ethos. Initiatives such as Yuva, Garib, Mahilayen, Annadata, and Atmanirbhar Bharat reflect an effort to approach development through both social and economic lenses. Growth, within this vision, is not an end in itself, but a means to enhance human well-being.

Structural Pillars and Policy Architecture

The vision of Viksit Bharat is operationalised through multiple frameworks. Four core pillars and six strategic pillars together shape the policy ecosystem. These include positioning India as a global manufacturing hub, strengthening indigenous knowledge systems, expanding the global presence of Indian products, promoting green energy and sustainable tourism, and fostering inclusive global development.

These are complemented by five broad thematic areas: empowered citizens, a thriving and sustainable economy, innovation-driven science and technology, leadership in the global knowledge economy, and good governance with a strong security architecture. What stands out is the emphasis on coherence. The success of Viksit Bharat depends not on isolated schemes, but on effective coordination across pillars, themes, institutions, and levels of government.

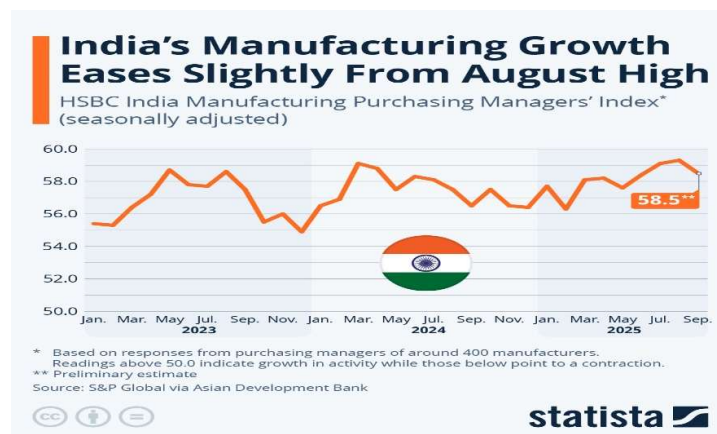


Figure 1: Manufacturing Share in India's GDP

The manufacturing sector remains central to employment generation and economic transformation under Make in India.

Strategies and Policy Framework

At the centre of this policy framework lies NITI Aayog, functioning as the apex public policy institution guiding the vision. Its foundational document, *Vision for Viksit Bharat @2047: An Approach Paper*, outlines strategic priorities across sectors. Major national initiatives such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Digital India, Skill India Mission, the PM Gati Shakti Master Plan, and the National Education Policy 2020 are aligned with this long-term trajectory.

Fiscal policy plays a critical role. Increased budgetary allocations for infrastructure development, alongside efforts to manage fiscal deficits, reflect a balancing act between expansion and macroeconomic stability. Programmes such as the Viksit Bharat Ambassador and Yuva Connect aim to institutionalise youth participation, while platforms like Jan Bhagidari emphasise collaborative governance and citizen engagement.

Economic Growth and Developmental Targets

Economic growth remains a central pillar of the Viksit Bharat vision. According to estimates cited by Arvind Panagariya, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission, India would require a consistent annual per capita income growth of approximately 7.3 percent in dollar terms to attain developed economy status by 2047. The near-term economic outlook offers cautious optimism. Official first advanced estimates and independent reporting place growth for fiscal 2025–26 at around 7.3 to 7.4 percent, driven by strong domestic demand and elevated public capital expenditure. This momentum is significant, as sustained growth creates the fiscal capacity to invest in health, education, and infrastructure at scale.

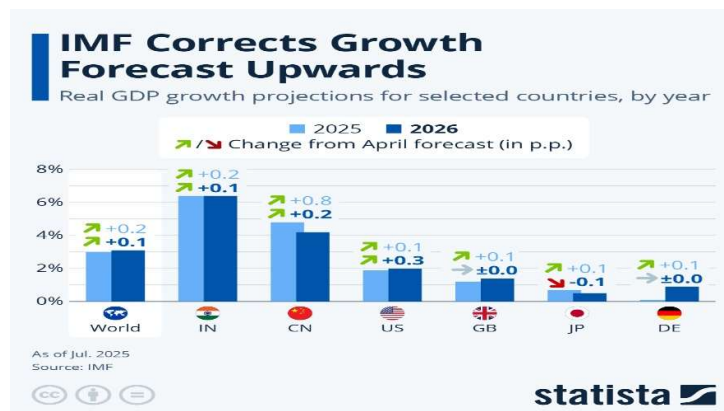


Figure 2: India's Real GDP Growth Trend

India remains the fastest-growing major economy, creating fiscal capacity for long-term social and infrastructure investment.

Yet growth alone is neither the metric nor the mission. As Amartya Sen argues, development is fundamentally the expansion of real freedoms that people enjoy. If incomes rise while freedoms remain constrained, the nation may improve its balance sheet while failing its citizens. Any honest appraisal of Viksit Bharat must therefore measure outcomes in capabilities and lived freedoms, not GDP figures alone.

Durable Constraints

India faces several structural hurdles that will shape whether Viksit Bharat is realised or remains aspirational. First, a substantial segment of the population continues to live close to subsistence. Depending on the poverty threshold applied, a significant share of Indians remained vulnerable to small shocks in the early 2020s. Under the lower-middle-income poverty line, nearly one in four people were counted as poor in 2022, exposing persistent fragility. Poverty reduction cannot be treated as a residual outcome of growth; it must remain an explicit and continuously monitored objective.

Second, India's demographic opportunity is both real and precarious. Converting a young population into a genuine demographic dividend requires better schooling, faster skilling, and the creation of far more productive jobs across manufacturing and services. Estimates by public economists suggest that sustained high per capita growth is essential if India is to close the gap with advanced economies within a generation. Achieving this

demands higher investment rates, improved logistics, and reforms that enhance both firm creation and firm productivity.

Third, governance and institutional capacity remain decisive constraints. While technology can reduce transaction costs, it cannot automatically generate trust, accountability, or distributive justice. B. R. Ambedkar's insight that democracy is a mode of associated living serves as a reminder that institutional formality is ineffective unless accompanied by social equality and an inclusive civic culture. The "software" of the nation must therefore be strengthened through civic education, independent institutions, and rules that protect the vulnerable.

Strategy, Trade-offs, and Expert Judgement

The policy programme underlying Viksit Bharat recognises inherent trade-offs. Fiscal expansion for capital projects is being balanced against the need for macroeconomic stability. The PM Gati Shakti Master Plan, NEP 2020, Skill India, and targeted fiscal incentives form an integrated package whose success depends on coordination between the Centre and the states. NITI Aayog's strategy papers emphasise that national vision must translate into district-level action, not remain a catalogue of aspirations.

International institutions and domestic experts such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and Deloitte India remain cautiously optimistic. They point to India's resilient growth, expanding digital public goods, and reform momentum as genuine strengths, while consistently emphasising the need for continued reforms in education, labour markets, and urban governance. Aggregate numbers may signal progress, but they risk obscuring uneven outcomes if not carefully interpreted.

A Youth Verdict and Conclusion

As a young citizen, I do not view Viksit Bharat as an abstract target to be celebrated on paper, but as a challenge that demands responsibility. Development must be evaluated through lived experience: access to quality education, reliable healthcare, dignified employment, and a public sphere where truth and accountability matter. Participation must extend beyond consultation to sustained civic engagement. Nehru's assertion that nations are built by their people is not sentimental, but strategic. A developed India requires ethical citizens as much as efficient policies.

Hannah Arendt's warning that the most radical revolutionary becomes a conservative the day after the revolution offers a final lesson. Transformation loses its meaning the moment it is declared complete. Viksit Bharat cannot be treated as a destination to be announced or claimed. It must remain a discipline of constant renewal. The true risk lies not in insufficient ambition, but in premature satisfaction. A developed nation is one that institutionalises self-correction and remains attentive to inequality. If India can resist complacency and sustain development as an ongoing moral and civic project, the aspiration of Viksit Bharat can mature into a resilient and enduring reality.