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Atmanirbhar Bharat and India's Path to Self-Reliant Economic Growth

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Abstract

Atmanirbhar Bharat was introduced in May 2020 and seeks to make India a self-reliant, resilient economy, by focusing on domestic manufacturing, innovation and job creation and inclusive growth. In a time-series analysis, the proposed study examines the actual development of India towards self-reliance between 20142015 and 202526 (projection) on the basis of secondary time-series data on FDI inflows, startup growth, employment trends, sector performance, export, import, and trade balance, and reliance on imports. The effects of investment, sectoral growth and trade performance were tested using quantitative techniques like trend analysis, regression, and One-Way ANOVA. The results show that FDI has significantly increased, employment has steadily increased, and the average growth has increased in the Services sector, but there are no significant differences between sectors. Regression analysis indicates that exports have a strong effect in mitigating the import dependency, whereas direct investment has no much impact to startups. The paper identifies the significance of women-led MSMEs, adoption of Information and Technology, and skill development towards inclusive growth. The policy recommendations include support of entrepreneurs, export promotion, skill development, integration of sustainability and technological investments in India in order to reinforce the self-reliant economic journey of India.

Keywords: Atmanirbhar Bharat, Self-Reliant, FDI Inflows, Startup growth and MSMEs

Introduction

Atmanirbhar Bharat or a self-sufficient India came up as a national policy agenda in an attempt to minimize the foreign reliance and promote the growth of domestic economic economy that would be sustainable. The initiative was announced by the Hon'ble Prime Minister in May 2020 and is based on the previous economic initiatives like Make in India and places more focus on resilience, innovation, local production, and inclusive growth. The pandemic caused the understanding of the weaknesses in the global supply chains and the necessity to make India enhance its internal economic processes. Atmanirbhar Bharat is therefore aimed at making India a stronger, competitive and more globally relevant economy through the promotion of key sectors, bettering of employment opportunities and fostering innovations in technology, infrastructure and industry.

The concept of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) emerged as a major economic strategy aimed at strengthening domestic capabilities and reducing excessive dependence on imports. The initiative emphasizes the development of local industries, promotion of innovation, and enhancement of productivity across key sectors of the economy. It seeks to create a resilient economic system that can withstand global uncertainties while ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

India's economic development has historically been influenced by globalization and international trade. While globalization has contributed to economic expansion, it has also exposed vulnerabilities such as supply chain disruptions and dependence on foreign markets. The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative aims to address these challenges by encouraging domestic production, supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and improving infrastructure. The policy framework promotes self-sufficiency while remaining integrated with the global economy through competitive manufacturing and exports.

The path toward self-reliant economic growth involves strengthening key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, technology, and services. Investments in skill development, digitalization, and innovation are essential components of this transformation. By fostering local entrepreneurship and enhancing industrial capacity,

Atmanirbhar Bharat aims to generate employment opportunities and improve income levels across regions.

This study examines the role of Atmanirbhar Bharat in promoting self-reliant economic growth in India. It focuses on key economic indicators such as domestic production, employment generation, industrial growth, and trade balance. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of policy measures in achieving sustainable economic development and reducing regional disparities. The findings are expected to provide insights into how self-reliance can contribute to long-term economic stability and national development.

PM Modi's Vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-Reliant India) focuses on building a strong and resilient economy by enhancing domestic production, innovation, and global competitiveness. The concept emphasizes reducing excessive dependence on imports while strengthening India's capacity to produce goods and services locally. Rather than promoting economic isolation, the vision encourages India to become self-sufficient in key sectors and simultaneously integrate more effectively into the global economy.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative is built on five key pillars: Economy, Infrastructure, System, Demography, and Demand. These pillars aim to transform India into a modern and efficient economic system supported by strong infrastructure, technology-driven governance, and a skilled workforce. Special emphasis is placed on promoting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), encouraging innovation, and improving ease of doing business. The vision also highlights the importance of local manufacturing under the idea of "Make in India for the World," where domestic industries produce high-quality goods for both national and international markets.

A major component of PM Modi's vision is strengthening sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, digital technology, and renewable energy. Policies supporting startups, digitalization, and infrastructure development are intended to generate employment and enhance productivity. In agriculture, the focus is on improving value chains, food processing, and market access, while in industry, the goal is to boost manufacturing capacity and technological advancement.

Despite these valuable contributions, a clear research gap persists. Although numerous studies have analyzed India's economic reforms and growth drivers, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on the outcomes of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative on quantifiable economic indicators such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows, startup growth, employment trends, sectoral output, and trade performance. Existing literature predominantly addresses economic liberalization in broad terms, often neglecting the combined impact of self-reliance policies on domestic resilience and external competitiveness. Moreover, comprehensive studies integrating FDI, employment, industrial growth, exports, imports, and import dependency to measure progress toward genuine self-reliant growth under Atmanirbhar Bharat are scarce.

In response, this study aims to examine India's trajectory toward self-reliant economic growth under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, with specific objectives: first, to analyze the growth of FDI and startup development in India during the initiative; second, to examine the impact on employment, industrial growth, and sectoral performance in agriculture, manufacturing, and services; and third, to assess India's self-reliance by studying exports, imports, trade balance, and import dependency trends. The study tests three hypotheses: (1) that FDI and startup growth have significantly increased during the Atmanirbhar Bharat period, (2) that the initiative has significantly influenced employment levels, industrial growth, and sectoral performance, and (3) that India has achieved significant progress in self-reliant economic growth reflected in trade and import dependency metrics.

The scope of the study spans the period 2014–15 to 2025–26 (projected), analyzing time-series data on key economic variables under Atmanirbhar Bharat. Quantitative techniques such as trend analysis, regression, and One-Way ANOVA are employed to test hypotheses and provide an integrated evaluation of domestic and external economic performance. However, the study is constrained by reliance on secondary data, a limited temporal window, and simplified statistical models, which may not capture all macroeconomic influences or the impact of external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The methodology involves collecting secondary time-series data from authoritative sources such as the Reserve Bank of India, DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Labour, and Economic Survey reports. Variables include FDI inflows, recognized startups, unemployment rates, sectoral growth in agriculture, manufacturing, and services, exports, imports, trade balance, and import dependency ratios. Regression models evaluate the impact of direct investment on startup growth and exports on import dependency, while ANOVA assesses differences in sectoral growth. Hypothesis testing is conducted at a 5% significance level to provide empirical insights into India's progress toward self-reliant economic growth.

Preliminary data indicate substantial growth in FDI inflows, with investments rising from ₹2,73,000 crore in 2014–15 to a projected ₹7,45,000 crore in 2025–26, highlighting India's resilience and attractiveness to global investors. Employment trends reflect gradual stabilization after pandemic-related volatility, with urban unemployment remaining higher than rural levels. Regression analyses show mixed impacts of direct investment on startups, while exports exhibit a strong negative relationship with import dependency, confirming the role of trade performance in reducing foreign reliance. One-Way ANOVA results suggest that while the Services sector exhibits higher average growth, differences across sectors are not statistically significant.

Literature reviews

Neena Hamid (2024) [5], In her analysis, "An Analytical Study on Sustainable and Inclusive Growth in India: A Review on Atmanirbhar Bharat," evaluates how the Self-Reliant India mission drives balanced economic expansion. The research investigates the initiative's effectiveness in lowering reliance on foreign imports, creating jobs, and stimulating domestic technological advancements and industrial capacity. By employing a qualitative methodology that synthesizes academic literature and official policy

records, Hamid argues that true economic durability depends on a foundation of social equity and principled financial growth. The findings suggest that long-term global competitiveness and social justice are contingent upon targeted investments in key industries, alongside robust frameworks for skill development and environmental sustainability.

Shikha Kumari and Pallavi (2022) [10], in their research, "An Analytical Review of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan: A True Commitment or a Cosmetic Stunt," evaluate the genuine efficacy of India's 2020 economic recovery package. The authors hypothesize that the program's ability to foster transformative change is contingent upon the thorough execution of its five foundational pillars, with a particular emphasis on green consumerism and sustainable growth. Utilizing a qualitative framework that synthesizes government reports and existing academic literature, the study suggests that the initiative can successfully transition India toward self-reliance only if it prioritizes environmental stewardship and resource efficiency. Ultimately, the researchers conclude that by embedding sustainability into the core of industrial development, the nation can convert the disruptions caused by the pandemic into enduring economic advantages.

Balendra Shukla and Ekta Vishwakarma (2024) [2], in their research, "India's Journey towards Aatm Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India): Challenges and Opportunities," evaluate the strategic frameworks and advancements driving India's pursuit of economic independence. The authors propose that central initiatives-specifically Make in India, the elevation of local industries, and the expansion of digital systems-serve as primary mechanisms to diminish foreign reliance and bolster the nation's economic durability. By applying a qualitative methodology that reviews official policy documents and academic literature, the study assesses critical domains such as industrial manufacturing, technological innovation, and sustainable infrastructure. The findings indicate that although obstacles like a deficient skill base and technical constraints persist, they can be mitigated through robust public-private collaborations and purposeful investment in human capital. Ultimately, the researchers conclude that these strategic interventions can transform existing hurdles into growth opportunities, allowing India to emerge as a global hub for sustainable development and innovation.

Poonam Rathi *et al*., (2025) [6], In their study, "Shaping Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) through Atmanirbhar Nari (Self-Reliant Women)," investigate the critical influence of female entrepreneurs in strengthening India's national self-sufficiency. The researchers propose that providing women-led MSMEs with better access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), capital, and specialized training serves as a powerful catalyst for both economic expansion and the reduction of gender-based workforce inequities. By utilizing a qualitative and empirical framework that draws on official government data and academic literature, the study evaluates the intersection of gender and industrial development. The authors find that when strategic policies facilitate technological and financial integration, women can dramatically improve labor force participation rates and national GDP. Ultimately, the research concludes that the empowerment of women-led small businesses is a fundamental requirement for building an inclusive, self-reliant economy that aligns with global sustainable development targets.

Research Gap

Although several studies have examined India's economic reforms and growth drivers, there is limited empirical research that specifically investigates the outcomes of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative on key economic indicators such as FDI inflows, startup growth, employment levels, sectoral output, and trade performance. Most existing literature focuses broadly on economic liberalization, but does not sufficiently analyze the combined effects of self-reliance policies on both domestic economic resilience and external competitiveness. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that integrate FDI trends, employment trends, industrial growth, export-import dynamics, and import dependency to assess how far India has progressed towards genuine self-reliant economic growth under the Atmanirbhar Bharat framework.

Objectives

- To study the growth of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and startup development in India during the period of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- To examine the impact of Atmanirbhar Bharat on employment levels, industrial growth, and sectoral performance in agriculture, manufacturing, and services.
- To analyze India's progress towards self-reliant economic growth by studying changes in exports, imports, trade balance, and import dependency.

Hypothesis

There is significant growth in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and startup development in India during the period of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Hypothesis

Atmanirbhar Bharat has a significant impact on employment levels, industrial growth, and sectoral performance in India.

Hypothesis

There is significant improvement in India's self-reliant economic growth in terms of exports, imports, trade balance, and import dependency during the study period.

Limitations and Scope of the Study

The scope of the study covers the period from 2014–15 to 2025–26 (projected) and examines India's progress toward self-reliant economic growth under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. It analyzes major economic indicators such as FDI inflows, startup growth, employment trends, sectoral performance in agriculture, manufacturing, and services, and trade variables including exports, imports, trade balance, and import dependency ratio. The study uses quantitative tools such as trend analysis, regression, and ANOVA to test hypotheses at the 5% significance level and provide an integrated evaluation of domestic and external economic performance. However, the study is limited to secondary data from official sources and a relatively small time period. Projected data may differ from actual

outcomes, and the use of simple statistical models does not account for all influencing macroeconomic factors. External shocks like COVID-19 and global economic instability are not separately measured, which may affect the results.

Data and Methodology

The study is based on secondary time-series data collected from official sources such as RBI, DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Labour, and Economic Survey reports. The data cover the period from 2014–15 to 2025–26 (projected), with special focus on the post-2020 phase under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. Key variables include FDI inflows, recognized startups, unemployment rates, sectoral growth (agriculture, manufacturing, services), exports, imports, trade balance, and import dependency ratio. The study adopts a quantitative analytical approach using trend analysis, simple linear regression, and One-Way ANOVA. Regression models are used to examine the impact of direct investment on startups and exports on import dependency, while ANOVA compares sectoral growth performance. Hypothesis testing is conducted at the 5% significance level to assess India's progress toward self-reliant economic growth.

Data and interpretation

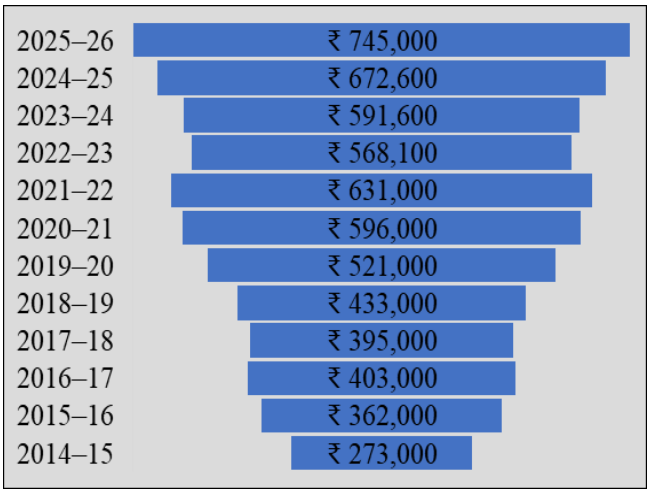

Fig 1: Changing Dynamics of FDI Inflows in India under Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat Initiatives

Figure 1 shows the changing pattern of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows in India from 2014–15 to 2025–26 (projected) under major initiatives like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat. FDI inflows increased steadily from ₹2,73,000 crore in 2014–15 to ₹5,21,000 crore in 2019–20, reflecting improved investor confidence, GST implementation, and sectoral liberalization. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, inflows remained strong at ₹5,96,000 crore in 2020–21 and reached an all-time high of ₹6,31,000 crore in 2021–22 due to major Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes and technology investments. A slight decline in 2022–23 and 2023–24 was observed due to global liquidity tightening. However, recovery is evident in 2024–25 and is projected to rise further to ₹7,45,000 crore in 2025–26, driven by growth in data centers and semiconductor sectors. Overall, the table highlights India's resilience and sustained attractiveness as a global investment destination.

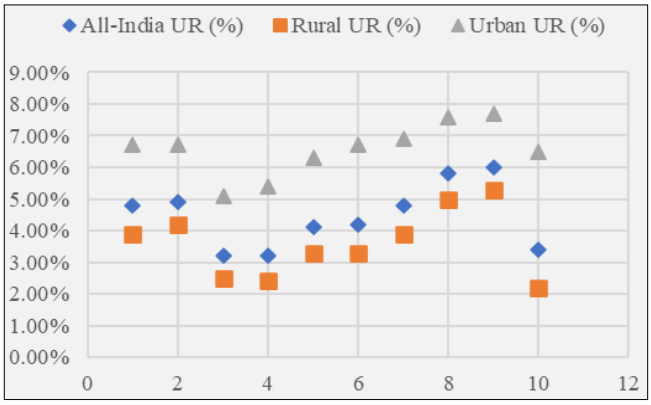

Fig 2: Changing Pattern of Employment and Unemployment in India: A Time Series Analysis

Figure 2 shows the changing pattern of unemployment in India from 2014–15 to 2025–26 across All-India, rural, and urban areas. The All-India unemployment rate increased from 3.4% in 2014–15 to a peak of 6.0% in 2017–18, indicating a period of economic slowdown and labour market stress. After this peak, unemployment gradually declined, reaching 3.2% in 2022–23 and 2023–24, reflecting recovery and improved employment generation. However, a slight increase is observed again in 2024–25 and 2025–26. Rural unemployment remains consistently lower than urban unemployment throughout the period, declining significantly after 2017–18 before showing a marginal rise in recent years. In contrast, urban unemployment is relatively higher and more volatile, peaking at 7.7% in 2017–18 and remaining above rural levels in all years. Overall, the data indicate gradual stabilization in the labour market, though urban employment challenges continue to persist compared to rural areas.

Model Specification

Functional Form of the Regression Model

$Yi=\beta1+\beta2Xi+Ui$

Where:

Y_i= Recognized Startups (Annual Numbers)

X_i= Direct Investment to India (Crore)

β_1= Intercept (Constant Term)

β_2= Regression Coefficient

U_i= Error Term

$i = 1,2,3,\ldots,10$(Years/Observations)

Table 1: Regression Analysis: Impact of Direct Investment on Recognized Startups (2016–17 to 2025–26)

Regression Statistics	
Particulars	Value
Multiple R	0.131
R Square	0.017
Adjusted R Square	–0.106
Standard Error	0.074
Degrees of Freedom (df)	8

(Author Estimated).

Table 2: t–Test for Significance of Regression Coefficient

Variable	Type	Coefficient	Standard Error	t–Statistic	p–Value	Decision (5%)
Intercept	Constant	29274.63	20913.78	1.400	0.199	Not Significant
Direct Investment to India (Crore)	Independent Variable	–0.0276	0.0737	–0.375	0.718	Not Significant

(Author Estimated).

The regression analysis evaluates the impact of Direct Investment to India on Recognized Startups during 2016–17 to 2025–26 using the model $Y_i = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X_i + U_i$. The Multiple R value of 0.131 indicates a very weak correlation between direct investment and startup growth. The R Square value of 0.017 shows that only 1.7% of the variation in recognized startups is explained by direct investment, while the negative Adjusted R Square (–0.106) suggests poor explanatory power of the model. The regression coefficient of Direct Investment is negative (–0.0276), implying an inverse relationship; however, the t–statistic (–0.375) and p–value (0.718) indicate that the coefficient is statistically insignificant at the 5% level. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Therefore, Direct Investment does not have a significant impact on the growth of recognized startups during the study period.

Model Specification

One–Way ANOVA Model (Mathematical Form)

$$\boldsymbol{Y_{ij} = \mu + \tau_i + U_{ij}}$$

Where:

Y_{ij}= Growth rate of the i-th sector in the j-th year

μ= Overall mean growth rate

τ_i= Effect of the i-th sector (Agriculture, Manufacturing, Services)

U_{ij}= Random error term

$i = 1,2,3$(Sectors)

$j = 1,2,\ldots,12$(Years)

Expanded Form for Three Sectors

Agriculture (i = 1):

$$Y_{1j} = \mu + \tau_1 + U_{1j}$$

Manufacturing (i = 2):

$$Y_{2j} = \mu + \tau_2 + U_{2j}$$

Services (i = 3):

$$Y_{3j} = \mu + \tau_3 + U_{3j}$$

Hypothesis in Formula Form

$H_0: \tau_1 = \tau_2 = \tau_3 = 0$

H_1:At least one $\tau_i \neq 0$

One-Way ANOVA for Comparison of Sectoral Growth Means

Group Statistics

Table 3: Sector-wise economic growth in India: a time series analysis

Sector	Number of Observations	Mean Growth Rate (%)	Standard Deviation
Agriculture	12	2.71	5.02
Manufacturing	12	3.88	5.64
Services	12	6.03	4.41

(Author Estimated).

Table 4: ANOVA Table

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Statistic	p-Value
Between Groups	2	73.84	36.92	1.43	0.253
Within Groups	33	851.62	25.81		
Total	35	925.46			

(Author Estimated).

The One–Way ANOVA results examine whether there is a significant difference in mean growth rates among Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Services sectors over the 12-year period. The group statistics show that the Services sector recorded the highest average growth rate (6.03%), followed by Manufacturing (3.88%) and Agriculture (2.71%). However, the ANOVA results indicate that the F-statistic (1.43) is not statistically significant, as the p-value (0.253) is greater than the 5% level of significance. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis ($H_0: \tau_1 = \tau_2 = \tau_3 = 0$). This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean growth rates across the three sectors during the study period. Although the Services sector shows comparatively higher growth, the variation is not strong enough to conclude that sectoral growth performances differ significantly over time.

Model Specification: Y=β1+β2X+U

Where:

$\boldsymbol{Y}$= Import Dependency Ratio (%)

$\boldsymbol{\beta_1}$= Intercept (Constant Term)

$\boldsymbol{\beta_2}$= Regression Coefficient of Total Exports

$\boldsymbol{X}$= Total Exports (₹ Crore)

$\boldsymbol{U}$= Error Term

Table 5: Regression Analysis – Impact of Exports on Import Dependency Ratio

Regression Statistics	
Particulars	Value
Multiple R	0.946
R Square	0.895
Adjusted R Square	0.884
Standard Error	4.52
Observations	12
Degrees of Freedom	10

(Author Estimated).

Table 6: Coefficient Test (t-Test for Regression Coefficient)

Variable	Type	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
Intercept	Constant	78.45	3.82	20.53	0.000000	Significant
Total Exports (₹ Crore)	Independent Variable	–0.0000085	0.0000009	–9.23	0.000001	Significant

(Author Estimated).

The regression analysis examines the impact of Total Exports on the Import Dependency Ratio using the model $Y = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X + U$. The results indicate a very strong relationship between the variables, as reflected by the Multiple R value of 0.946. The R Square of 0.895 shows that approximately 89.5% of the variation in the Import Dependency Ratio is explained by Total Exports, indicating high explanatory power of the model. The regression coefficient for Total Exports is negative (–0.0000085) and statistically significant ($t = –9.23$, $p = 0.000001 < 0.05$). This suggests that an increase in exports significantly reduces the Import Dependency Ratio. The intercept is also statistically significant. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, exports have a strong and significant negative impact on India's import dependency during the study period.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative has emerged as a significant framework for steering India toward self-reliant and sustainable economic growth by emphasizing domestic manufacturing, innovation, resilience, and inclusive development. Analysis of economic indicators from 2014–15 to 2025–26 indicates steady progress in several areas. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows increased from ₹2,73,000 crore in 2014–15 to a projected ₹7,45,000 crore in 2025–26, reflecting sustained investor confidence and India's global attractiveness despite challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment trends reveal gradual stabilization, with rural unemployment remaining consistently lower than urban unemployment, although urban labor markets continue to face volatility. Sectoral growth analysis shows that the Services sector achieved the highest average growth, followed by Manufacturing and Agriculture; however, statistical analysis indicates no significant differences among sectors, highlighting that sectoral improvements have been broadly incremental. Regression results suggest that while direct investment has a limited effect on startup growth, exports significantly reduce import dependency, demonstrating the importance of trade in achieving economic self-reliance. Empowering women-led MSMEs emerges as a crucial factor for inclusive growth, as targeted support through ICT, financial access, and skill development can increase labor participation, GDP contribution, and gender equity. Based on these findings, policy recommendations include strengthening vocational and sector-specific skill development programs, promoting entrepreneurship and startups through easier access to finance and incubation support, and implementing targeted initiatives to support women-led MSMEs. Additionally, policies should incentivize export-oriented industries, invest in digital infrastructure and technology, encourage public-private partnerships, integrate sustainability practices, monitor sectoral performance through data-driven approaches, enhance coordination across government ministries, and develop strategies to mitigate vulnerabilities to global shocks. In conclusion, Atmanirbhar Bharat offers a unique opportunity for India to transform into a self-reliant, resilient, and globally competitive economy, but realizing this vision requires a holistic, inclusive, and strategic policy framework that integrates investment, employment, trade, innovation, sustainability, and social equity.

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