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Pathways to Prosperity: Factors Influencing Poverty Reduction and the Way Forward in India

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Abstract

Eradication of poverty remains a critical prerequisite for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic development. India's experience between 1977 and 2022 presents a transformative narrative, one where nearly 60% of the population once lived below the $3-a-day threshold, declining to just 5.25% in 2022, and where multidimensional poverty fell from 29.17% in 2013–14 to 11.28% in 2022–23. The study analyses the determinants of this decline through sectoral and human development variables, employing multiple linear regression and complementary statistical tests. For the period 1977–2011, the results reveal a strong and statistically significant association between poverty reduction and growth in the agricultural (0.077%), industrial (0.088%), and service (0.103%) sectors, as well as literacy (0.089%) and labour force participation (0.053%). The model's high explanatory power (R^2 = 0.997) confirms the robustness of these relationships.

Extending the analysis to 2011–2022, the inclusion of financial inclusion variables PMJDY and DBT illustrates a deepening of inclusive development, where a 1% increase in PMJDY beneficiaries and DBT transfers is associated with 0.187% and 0.163% reductions in poverty, respectively. These findings underscore that digital financial inclusion has emerged as a pivotal driver of poverty alleviation, complementing traditional sectoral growth. The paired samples t-test (t = 1.184 & p = 0.045) further confirms significant improvements in poverty outcomes after Post 2004 period.

The study concludes that India's poverty governance has transitioned from a growth-led to an inclusion-led development approach. It proposes a household-centric, skill-oriented, and integrity-driven framework that integrates data-based targeting, transparent cluster governance, and human capital development. Initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan exemplify this paradigm, reinforcing the collective resolve required to achieve a self-reliant and poverty-free India.

Keywords: Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Economic Transformation, Financial Inclusion, Human Capital Development, Inclusive Growth, Multidimensional Poverty, Poverty Reduction, Sectoral Contribution, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 1).

JEL Classification: I32, O15, O18, G21, H53

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Introduction and Literature Review

Eradication of poverty remains a necessary precondition for achieving inclusive and sustainable economic development. Mahatma Gandhi's timeless assertion that "Poverty is the worst form of violence" underscores the moral and ethical dimensions of deprivation (Keshava S. R., 2009). Nelson Mandela, echoing a similar concern, remarked that "While poverty persists, there is no true freedom" (Mandela, 2005). Long before, Adam Smith (1776) observed that "No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members is poor and miserable."

Poverty, however, is not merely a question of inadequate income; it is a multidimensional challenge. As Amartya Sen (1999) articulated, "Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realise one's full potential as a human being." This broader understanding shifts the discourse from mere economic insufficiency to deprivation of capabilities, dignity, and opportunity. Mandela (2005) further emphasised that "As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality exist in our world, none of us can truly rest… They are trapped in the prison of poverty. It is time to set them free."

The economic implications of widespread poverty are profound. As Keshava S. R. (2010) notes, when a large section of the population lives below the poverty line, the overall taxable capacity of the nation diminishes. Conversely, poverty reduction enhances the state's capacity to mobilise fiscal resources for development. Although the incidence of poverty in India declined from 36 per cent in 1993–94 to 26 per cent in 1999–2000, the benefits of globalisation have been uneven, with employment growth averaging only about 1 per cent per annum during the same period (Keshava S. R., 2009).

The Government of India, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has reiterated its commitment "to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions; to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The UN further resolves "to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all."

While globalisation cannot be reversed, its adverse consequences can be mitigated by protecting the rural economy through employment generation and the revival of local industries. This approach aligns with Gandhian economics, which promotes self-reliance, rural regeneration, and equitable distribution of resources (Keshava S. R., 2009). Agricultural development, in particular, holds the key to poverty eradication in rural India, where poverty is most entrenched. As agriculture is a labour-intensive sector, it possesses immense potential to create employment opportunities. Cost of cultivation data reveal that labour accounts for nearly 40 per cent of the total variable cost of crop production, indicating the sector's capacity to sustain livelihoods (Keshava S. R., 2013). Hence, enhancing agricultural productivity directly translates into greater job creation and poverty reduction.

Poverty Eradication Programmes in India

Since independence, India has pursued an extensive array of poverty alleviation programmes

to address deprivation in its multiple dimensions: food security, housing, health, education, and employment. These initiatives have evolved over the decades, reflecting shifting policy paradigms and socioeconomic priorities. Prominent among them are: Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY), Rural Employment Generation Programme (REGP), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Swaran Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Annapurna Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY), National Food for Work Programme, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP). Public Distribution System (PDS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), National Maternity Benefit Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), Solar Charkha Mission, National Nutrition Mission (NNM) and Poshan Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM), Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)

Among these, the MGNREGA, PMJDY, DBT, PMKVY, and PMGKY stand out as the most transformative. MGNREGP Conceptualised as a social safety net, it was designed to protect rural households from the adverse effects of economic globalisation and provide assured wage employment. As Keshava S. R. (2012) observes, it is "a policy designed for the common man, aimed at empowering him." Collectively, these programmes reflect the government's multidimensional strategy to combat poverty not merely through income transfers but by enhancing capabilities, promoting inclusive growth, and ensuring social justice. The success of these initiatives, however, depends on effective implementation, continuous monitoring, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of equity and human dignity.

Research Design

Research Objectives

1. To identify the trends in poverty reduction in India
2. To find the effect of the Sectoral growth contribution, human capital and financial inclusion on the reduction of poverty in India.
3. To identify the reasons for the increase/ decrease in poverty in India
4. To suggest policy suggestions for further poverty reduction in India

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in poverty in absolute numbers between the 1991–2004 period and the post-2004 period.

Methodology

This study is based on secondary data, primarily sourced from the World Bank's Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP). The World Bank's poverty estimates are standardised using

Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs), which convert household income and consumption into a common international currency. The World Bank International Poverty Line (WB IPL), derived from the median poverty thresholds of the world's poorest countries, is periodically revised using updated PPPs to ensure global comparability. As of June 2025, the international poverty line is set at USD 3.00 per day (in 2021 purchasing power parity, or PPPs).

The analysis focuses on identifying key determinants contributing to poverty reduction in India. Seven major variables are considered: Agriculture Sector Contribution (ASC), Industrial Sector Contribution (ISC), Service Sector Contribution (SSC), Labour Force Participation Rate (LF), Literacy Rate (LR), PMJDY Beneficiaries (PMJDY-b) and DBT Fund Transfers (DBT-ft)

A multiple linear regression analysis is employed to examine the impact of these variables on poverty reduction. Additionally, a Paired Sample t-test is used to test the stated hypotheses and assess the statistical significance of observed changes over time.

Discussion and Results

1. The data presented in Table 1 clearly demonstrate India's significant progress in poverty reduction over the past four decades. In 1977, nearly 60 per cent of the population lived below the $3.00-a-day threshold (PPP 2021), and almost 47 per cent lived below the $2.15-a-day international poverty line (PPP 2017). By 2022, these figures had fallen dramatically to 5.25% and 2.35%, respectively, reflecting a historic transformation in living standards and economic inclusivity.
2. The decline in poverty has not been linear but rather the outcome of distinct policy phases and socio-economic shifts. The modest decline during the late 1970s and early 1980s coincided with the limited reach of early poverty alleviation programmes, which primarily relied on public distribution

Table 1. Decline in Poverty in India (1977–2022)

Year	Population Living in Poverty (Million) $3.00/ day (2021 PPP)	Poverty Rate (%) $3.00/day	Population Living in Poverty (Million) $2.15/ day (2017 PPP)	Poverty Rate (%) $2.15/day
1977	387.02	59.70	303.90	46.88
1983	375.08	50.87	280.56	38.05
1987	423.63	51.78	315.49	38.56
1993	442.37	47.48	312.99	33.60
2004	531.71	46.42	372.81	32.55
2009	426.84	34.58	277.72	22.50
2011	344.47	27.12	205.93	16.22
2022	75.24	5.25	33.66	2.35

Source: Compiled from World Bank Poverty and Inequality Data (various years)

and employment schemes. The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a period of stagnation, with marginal reductions despite increasing economic activity, suggesting that growth during this phase was not sufficiently inclusive.

3. A turning point emerged in the post-liberalisation period (after 1991), when structural reforms accelerated economic growth but also exposed disparities between regions and sectors. By 2004, the poverty rate remained high, although the foundation for rapid reduction had been laid through improved agricultural productivity, increased rural employment, and expanded access to education and health services.
4. The period from 2004 to 2011 witnessed the second most remarkable decline with 20 percent decline and 187.24 million moving out of poverty, largely due to a combination of high growth rates, targeted social safety nets, and the implementation of transformative programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Public Distribution System (PDS) reforms, and improved access to microfinance and self-employment opportunities. The reduction in poverty by nearly 20 percentage points during this period reflects the success of integrating economic expansion with social protection.
5. The post-2012 period represents a new paradigm in poverty governance. 269.23 million, representing 21 percentage points, have been lifted out of poverty during the period from 2011 to 2022. Policies became more data-driven, technologically integrated, and outcome-oriented. Initiatives such as the PMJDY, Ujjwala Yojana, PM Awas Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, and the DBT system have enhanced last-mile delivery and reduced leakages. These measures not only expanded access to basic needs but also empowered vulnerable households through financial inclusion and digital connectivity. Consequently, by 2022, the poverty headcount had reached an unprecedented low, with less than 3 per cent of Indians living below the extreme poverty line. The reduction in poverty in India is attributed to the achievement of a combination of factors, including sustained economic growth, well-targeted welfare schemes, and improved access to essential services such as education, healthcare, housing, and digital infrastructure (Keshava S.R., Hanumantharayappa B.H., 2025)
6. The effective reduction in people below the poverty line after 2011, and more so since 2014, is since it recognised that every policy has a finite life cycle: effectiveness tends to decline as structural conditions evolve (Figure 1). The present government's approach of periodic review and reinforcement, adapting policies to emerging needs, has been instrumental in maintaining its relevance and effectiveness. The integration of welfare delivery with real-time data monitoring, Aadhaar-linked transfers, and rural infrastructure development has further strengthened the sustainability of poverty alleviation outcomes.

Effect of Sectoral Growth, Labour Force and Literacy on Poverty Reduction from the Period of 1977-2011

To examine the impact of key economic and social variables on poverty reduction in India from 1977 to 2011, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using five explanatory

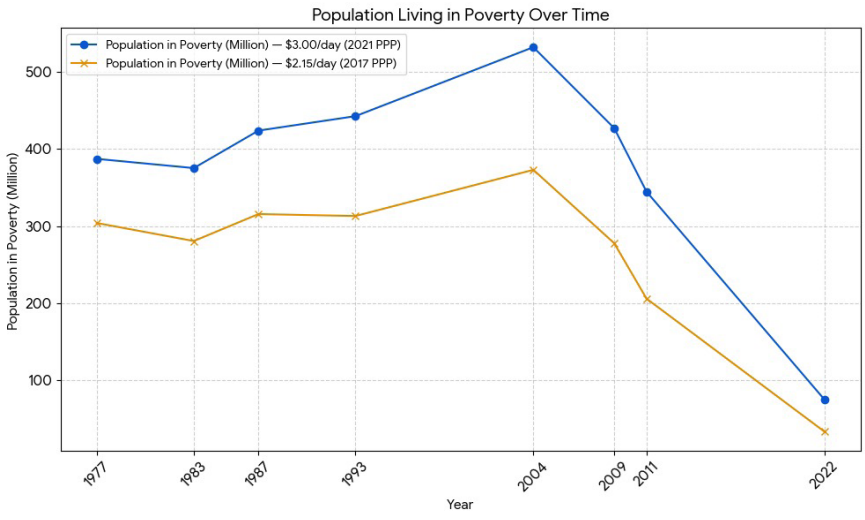


Figure 1. Population Living in Poverty
Source: Graph derived from the Data Table 1.

variables: ASC, ISC, SSC, LFP, and Literacy. Sectoral contributions were measured using real gross value added at basic prices (2011–12 series, constant prices) for agriculture, industry, and services. Poverty estimates, based on the World Bank's international poverty line of $ 3 per day (2021 PPP), were used to assess changes in poverty levels.

The following regression equation was formulated to capture the relationship between these variables and poverty reduction.

$$Y = A + X1\,\alpha + X2\,\beta + X3\,\gamma + X4\,\lambda + X5\Delta \quad (1)$$

Where

Y = increase in Poverty/reduction of Poverty

X1 = Agriculture sector Contribution(ASC)

X2 = Industry sector Contribution (ISC)

X3 = Service sector Contribution (SSC)

X4 = Labour force participation rate (LFP)

X5 = Literacy rate (LR)

Furthermore, A is the total factor productivity that explains the factors not accounted for by the five factors listed: α, β, γ, λ, and Δ.

That is

$$\text{Log } Y = \text{Log } A + \alpha \log X1 + \beta \text{ Log } X2 + \gamma \text{ Log } X3 + \lambda \text{ Log } X4 + \Delta \text{ Log } X5 \quad (2)$$

After making such a transformation, the final equation is expressed as follows by the corresponding lowercase letters.

The multiple regression equation resulted in:

$$y = 0.075 + 0.077 + 0.088 + 0.103 + 0.053 + 0.089$$
$$(8.454)\ (7.191)\ (8.178)\ (6.105)\ (11.938)\ (7.099)$$

$R2 = 0.997, \quad F = 196.338$

Durbin-Watson = 1.419

The multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the influence of sectoral growth, labour force participation, and literacy

on poverty reduction in India from 1977 to 2011 reveals strong empirical evidence of a positive and statistically significant relationship between economic progress and social development indicators. Using log-transformed variables, the model demonstrates that all five explanatory variables, ASC, ISC, SSC, LFPR, and LR, contribute positively to poverty reduction.

A 1% rise in the agricultural sector's contribution corresponds to a 0.077% reduction in poverty, while similar increases in industrial and service sector contributions result in 0.088% and 0.103% declines, respectively. The dominant coefficient of the service sector underscores its pivotal role in driving inclusive growth through employment generation and income diversification. Human development factors also exhibit notable effects: a 1% increase in literacy leads to a 0.089% reduction in poverty, whereas a 1% rise in labour force participation contributes to a 0.053% decline. The exceptionally high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.997$) confirms that 99.7% of the variation in poverty reduction is accounted for by the selected variables, while the significant F-statistic (F = 196.338) establishes the overall model's validity. The Durbin–Watson statistic (1.419) indicates acceptable levels of autocorrelation. Collectively, these results affirm that structural transformation, enhanced labour participation, and educational progress jointly propelled poverty reduction during this period.

Effect of Sectoral Growth, Labour Force, Literacy, and Financial Inclusion on Poverty Reduction (2011–2022)

To assess the impact of key economic, social, and financial factors on poverty reduction in India from 2011 to 2022, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The explanatory variables include ASC, ISC, SSC, LF, Literacy, Financial Inclusion (PMJDY), and DBT. Sectoral contributions were measured using real gross value added at basic prices (2011–12 series, constant prices) for agriculture, industry, and services. Poverty estimates, based on the World Bank's $3.00 per day threshold (2021 PPP), were used to evaluate changes in poverty levels.

The following regression equation was formulated to capture the combined effect of these variables on poverty reduction.

$$Y = A + X1\,\alpha + X2\,\beta + X3\,\gamma + X4\,\lambda + X5\Delta \quad (1)$$

Y = increase in Poverty/reduction of Poverty

X1 = Agriculture sector Contribution(ASC)

X2 = Industry sector Contribution (ISC)

X3 = Service sector Contribution (SSC)

X4 = Labour force participation rate (LFP)

X5 = Literacy rate (LR)

X6 = PMJDY Beneficiaries (PMJDY-b)

X7 =DBT Fund Transfers (DBT-ft)

Further, A is the total factor productivity that explains the factors not accounted for by the five factors listed, $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \lambda, \Delta, \varepsilon, \zeta$

That is

$$\text{Log } Y = \text{Log } A + \alpha \log X1 + \beta \text{ Log } X2 + \gamma \text{ Log } X3 + \lambda \text{ Log } X4 + \Delta \text{ Log } X5 + \varepsilon \text{ Log } X6 + \zeta \text{ Log } X7 \ldots (2)$$

After making such a transformation, the final equation is expressed as follows by the corresponding lowercase letters.

The multiple regression equation resulted in:

$$y = 0.063 + 0.187 + 0.098 + 0.093 + 0.042 + 0.096 + 0.187 + 0.163$$
$$(8.152) \quad (8.194) \quad (9.174) \quad (7.100)$$
$$(15.938) \quad (8.089) \quad (6.474) \quad (2.187)$$

R-squared = 0.996, F = 338.583
Durbin-Watson = 1.880

Extending the analysis to the period 2011–2022, the model incorporates financial inclusion indicators Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana beneficiaries (PMJDY-b) and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT-ft) alongside ASC, ISC, SSC, LFPR, and LR. The findings reveal a broad-based, inclusive pattern of poverty reduction, where both sectoral performance and digital financial initiatives play decisive roles.

A 1% increase in contributions from the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors leads to reductions of 0.187%, 0.098%, and 0.093% in poverty, respectively. The rise in the agriculture coefficient highlights the renewed rural focus through technology and direct financial transfers. Similarly, a 1% increase in literacy (0.096%) and LFPR (0.042%) continues to reinforce poverty alleviation through human capital enhancement. Significantly, PMJDY and DBT exhibit strong coefficients (0.187% and 0.163%), illustrating that financial inclusion and direct welfare delivery have become crucial mechanisms in lifting households above the poverty line. The model's robustness is affirmed by its high explanatory value (R^2 = 0.996), a strong F-statistic (338.583), and a satisfactory Durbin–Watson statistic (1.880), indicating minimal autocorrelation.

Comparative Analysis of Two Periods: 1977–2011 and 2011–2022

A comparative interpretation of the two regression models provides insight into India's evolving trajectory of poverty reduction. Between 1977 and 2011, poverty alleviation was predominantly driven by economic structural transformation, particularly the expansion of the service sector and improvements in literacy and labour participation. However, during the 2011–2022 period, the strategy expanded to include direct financial empowerment through the PMJDY and DBT mechanisms. The comparable magnitudes of PMJDY's coefficient (0.187) and DBT's (0.187) reveal that financial inclusion now rivals traditional growth sectors in its potential to alleviate poverty.

This transition signifies a paradigm shift from growth-led to inclusion-driven development, reflecting India's emergence as a digitally enabled welfare economy. The consistently high R^2 values across both models confirm the explanatory strength of the chosen variables; however, the improved F-statistic for the post-2011 period underscores enhanced policy coherence and efficiency.

Both regression models exhibit statistical soundness and strong explanatory capacity. However, certain limitations merit consideration. The exceptionally high R^2 values (0.997 and 0.996), while indicative of strong model fit, may also suggest possible multicollinearity among variables, particularly among sectoral contributions, which tend to move concurrently with overall GDP growth. Additionally, the reliance on aggregate time-series data may obscure regional disparities in poverty reduction. Future analyses could

employ disaggregated or panel data to capture spatial and temporal heterogeneity more accurately.

Nevertheless, the theoretical consistency, statistical significance, and logical coherence of the coefficients lend credibility to the findings. The results collectively underscore that economic diversification, labour engagement, education, and financial inclusion have operated in synergy to reduce poverty in India, with post-2011 policies marking a decisive shift toward targeted, technology-driven inclusivity.

Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant difference in poverty in absolute numbers between 1991 and 2004, and the post-2004 period.

The paired samples t-test further substantiates this transformation (table 2). The test results (t= 1.181, p = 0.045) reject the null hypothesis, confirming that absolute poverty levels were significantly higher during 1991–2004 compared to the post-2004 period. This outcome aligns with India's economic narrative, as the post-2004 reforms, inclusive welfare programmes, and accelerated growth collectively contributed to deeper poverty reduction.

In essence, the statistical evidence suggests that India's post-reform economic trajectory has evolved from a growth-centric to an inclusivity-oriented development model. The transition highlights how structural economic change, human capital development, and targeted financial empowerment have collectively contributed to India's sustained success in poverty alleviation.

Suggestions

According to the World Bank, there has been a significant and historic transformation in living standards and economic inclusion in India, as 456 million people have moved above the poverty line in India from 2004 to 2022. However, sustained efforts are crucial to achieving the SDG 1 goal of eradicating poverty. The World Bank estimates that 17.74% of people remained under multidimensional poverty in 2022, whereas NITI Aayog reports that the multidimensional poverty headcount ratio in India fell from 29.17% in 2013–14 to 11.28%

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Poverty_1991_2004 - Poverty_Post_2004	101.38500	121.41731	85.85500	989.50621	1192.27621	1.181	45	.045

Source: Desk Research

in 2022–23. This progress, though remarkable, calls for targeted and innovative strategies to further reduce poverty.

Policy Recommendations for Accelerated Poverty Alleviation

Prepare a comprehensive database of households living below the Poverty Line (BPL) and under multidimensional poverty, with each assigned a unique identification number for effective tracking and intervention. Focus on empowering the head of each household through skill development programs aligned with their aptitude and local employment opportunities. Continue providing free rations and welfare benefits with strict monitoring to ensure their optimal utilisation and prevent leakages.

Organise BPL households into manageable clusters and assign a dedicated official to oversee the effective implementation of welfare schemes within each cluster. Set clear, time-bound targets for moving identified households above the poverty threshold through sustained income generation and asset creation. Ensure quality education for children from BPL households, with mentorship and scholarship support to break intergenerational poverty cycles. Conduct regular capacity-building and counselling sessions for all household members to enhance financial literacy, self-reliance, and resource management skills.

Institute a transparent, multi-tier monitoring system, cluster-level officers supervised by Tahsildars at the taluk level and Deputy Commissioners at the district level to ensure accountability and impact assessment. Appoint only officials of proven integrity and public commitment to the program, with performance-based evaluation and public transparency measures. Introduce community-led social audits and digital dashboards for real-time monitoring of progress and inclusion outcomes.

Conclusion

India's remarkable journey from widespread deprivation in 1977, when nearly 60% of the population lived below the $3-a-day threshold, to just 5.25% in 2022 reflects one of the most profound socio-economic transformations among developing nations. The decline in multidimensional poverty, from 29.17% in 2013–14 to 11.28% in 2022–23, demonstrates that sustained policy innovation, inclusive governance, and institutional accountability have been pivotal in improving living standards and expanding economic opportunities.

The findings affirm that poverty eradication extends beyond economic growth; it demands a household-centric, skill-oriented, and integrity-driven approach that empowers individuals while ensuring efficient delivery of welfare programmes. The proposed model, built on identifying, skilling, and mentoring each household through transparent cluster-based governance, offers a practical framework to sustain and accelerate poverty reduction.

Initiatives such as the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan have already strengthened the foundations of self-reliance and economic revival. Going forward, collective commitment from all stakeholders, government, civil society, and citizens is essential to translate this progress

into complete poverty eradication. With honesty, coordination, and accountability as guiding principles, India can move decisively towards the vision of a poverty-free and self-reliant nation.

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