

Global Protectionism and India's Path to Self-Reliance: Opportunities and Challenges under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan

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Abstract—The dynamics of twenty-first century international commerce have been transformed by the resurgence of global protectionism, manifested through tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and restrictive trade regulations. These regulations impose considerable barriers for a developing nation like India, as they restrict access to international markets, disrupt supply chains, and hinder export growth. The Indian government has formulated the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan as an extensive strategy to enhance resilience, fortify domestic industries, and mitigate foreign risks. This article critically examines the interplay between India's self-reliance objective and global protectionist trends, emphasising both potential and challenges. The study utilises secondary data from international and national sources to examine the effects of protectionism on India's trade performance and assesses governmental efforts aimed at improving competitiveness, promoting local entrepreneurship, and supporting traditional industries. The economical and cultural dimensions of self-reliance are highlighted through case studies from the export-oriented sectors of Uttar Pradesh, including handicrafts, leather, carpets, and brassware. The findings suggest that while global protectionism presents significant obstacles, it simultaneously incentivizes India to modernise its industries, diversify its markets, and fortify local communities. The study concludes with policy proposals to align India's economic strategy with the overarching objective of inclusive and sustainable self-reliance.

Keywords: Global Protectionism; Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan; Trade Barriers; Self-Reliance; India's Export Sector; Uttar Pradesh; Socio-Cultural Dimensions; Economic Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

The global economy of the twenty-first century is increasingly marked by a contradictory contradiction between free trade principles and the return of protectionist practices. Global protectionism, evident through tariffs, quotas, non-tariff barriers, and other restrictive trade measures, has resurfaced as a prominent characteristic of international economic relations. Developed economies, including the United States and the European Union, have often employed protectionist measures to protect domestic industries and jobs, while concurrently modifying the operational frameworks within multilateral organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO, 2020; Bown, 2020; Evenett, 2019).

The emergence of protectionism has presented various challenges for India. Export-oriented industries have encountered heightened market access barriers, disruptions in supply chains, and limitations on technology and knowledge transfer (Panagariya, 2018; Kumar & Joseph, 2019). The instability of global trade systems necessitates that India reassess its developmental strategy, ensuring a balance between external interactions and internal capacities. The Government of India initiated the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan in May 2020 (Ministry of Finance, 2020) as a response to the economic disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequently broadening it into a comprehensive vision of self-reliance. The Abhiyan does not promote isolationism; rather, it focuses on strengthening domestic industries, enhancing competitiveness, fostering entrepreneurship, and developing resilient local supply chains, positioning India as self-reliant and globally integrated (Rath & Das, 2021).

The Atmanirbhar Bharat framework is founded on five essential pillars: economy, infrastructure, technology-driven systems, vibrant demography, and demand (NITI Aayog, 2020). The pillars collectively seek to transform India into a more resilient and self-sustaining economy. The effectiveness of this initiative in addressing global protectionism is currently a subject of ongoing academic and policy discussion (Chakraborty, 2022). Some scholars consider self-reliance a pragmatic response to an unpredictable global environment, while others warn that excessive inward-looking policies may jeopardise India's comparative advantage in global trade.

The socio-cultural dimensions of self-reliance are equally significant. India's local industries, traditional crafts, and community-based enterprises serve as both economic entities and guardians of cultural heritage and social identity (Singh, 2021). The One District One Product (ODOP) scheme in Uttar Pradesh illustrates the capacity of economic policies to empower artisans, preserve cultural practices, and establish sustainable livelihoods.

This research paper aims to analyse the opportunities and challenges presented by the intersection of global protectionism and the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. This study analyses trade data, policy frameworks, and case studies from Uttar Pradesh's export-oriented sectors, including brassware, carpets, leather, and handicrafts, to offer insights into how India can address the challenges posed by a protectionist world order while promoting inclusive and sustainable self-reliance.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rise of global protectionism and discussions surrounding economic self-reliance have garnered significant scholarly interest across international economics, development studies, and policy analysis.

The longstanding discourse on free trade and protectionism originates from the writings of Adam Smith (1776) and David Ricardo (1817), who highlighted absolute and comparative advantage as fundamental concepts in international trade. Friedrich List (1841) emphasised the importance of protectionist measures in supporting emerging industries, a viewpoint that aligns with current discussions on trade barriers. Modern scholars, including Krugman (1987), have explored the strategic importance of trade policy in enhancing domestic industrial competitiveness. Rodrik (2011) highlighted the necessity of balancing external integration with the resilience of domestic institutions in the context of globalisation.

The scholarly discourse on global protectionism in the twenty-first century predominantly examines the consequences of the 2008 global financial crisis and the US–China trade conflict. Research conducted by Bown (2020) and Evenett (2019) demonstrates that advanced economies have progressively utilised tariffs, subsidies, and non-tariff barriers to protect domestic employment and industries. According to reports from the World Trade Organisation (WTO, 2020) and UNCTAD (2021), the increase in protectionist measures has negatively influenced global supply chains and has had a disproportionate effect on economies reliant on exports.

In the Indian context, numerous scholars have examined the effects of protectionism on trade and economic growth. Panagariya (2018) contends that India should diversify its export portfolio and lessen reliance on traditional markets to alleviate the negative impacts of protectionist measures. Bhagwati and Panagariya (2013) highlight that globalisation presents significant opportunities for India, yet it simultaneously renders the country susceptible to vulnerabilities stemming from policy changes in advanced economies. Kumar and Joseph (2019) examine the challenges encountered by Indian MSMEs in the context of increasing protectionism, indicating that enhancing domestic capacity is crucial for maintaining competitiveness in the global market.

The discourse surrounding the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan is comparatively new, arising in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. NITI Aayog (2020) states that the initiative aims to transform India into a resilient and self-reliant economy by focusing on five key pillars. Rath and Das (2021) contend that Atmanirbhar Bharat emphasises the enhancement of domestic industries rather than isolationism, while still fostering global engagement. Chakraborty (2022) asserts that the initiative's success hinges on India's capacity to promote MSMEs, encourage innovation, and merge traditional skills with contemporary technology.

The One District One Product (ODOP) scheme in Uttar Pradesh has received focused attention at the state level. Singh (2021) highlights that ODOP contributes to local industries, preserves cultural heritage, and creates employment opportunities.

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating economic and socio-cultural perspectives.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the historical development and recent revival of global protectionism and to assess its effects on international trade in the twenty-first century.
2. This study aims to analyse the effects of protectionist measures on India's trade performance, focusing specifically on export competitiveness, supply chains, and sectoral growth.

3. To assess the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan as a strategic policy response to the challenges presented by global protectionism.
4. To examine the impact of state-level initiatives, particularly Uttar Pradesh's ODOP scheme, on the promotion of local industries, preservation of cultural heritage, and generation of employment opportunities.
5. To investigate the socio-cultural aspects of self-reliance, focusing on the effects on artisan communities, women entrepreneurs, and marginalised groups.
6. To formulate policy recommendations that enhance India's economic resilience, diversify export markets, and align self-reliance strategies with inclusive development.

IV. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- H1: Rising global protectionism has a statistically significant adverse impact on India's trade performance and export growth.
- H2: The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan serves as an effective framework for mitigating the negative effects of global protectionism.
- H3: State-level initiatives such as Uttar Pradesh's ODOP scheme positively contribute to both economic self-reliance and preservation of socio-cultural heritage.
- H4: Socio-cultural dimensions of self-reliance—particularly employment generation, women's participation, and artisan empowerment—are integral to the success of the initiative.
- H5: A balanced approach that combines global engagement with domestic self-reliance is essential for ensuring India's long-term economic resilience.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is analytical and descriptive in nature, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates economics and sociology. The research seeks to examine the implications of global protectionism for India and to evaluate the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan as a policy response, with particular reference to economic and socio-cultural dimensions.

The study relies primarily on secondary data drawn from authentic sources:

International level: World Trade Organization (WTO, 2020), UNCTAD (2021), World Bank, and IMF reports.

National level: Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2023), Reserve Bank of India (RBI, 2022), NITI Aayog (2020), Ministry of Finance (2020), and the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Annual Report (MSME, 2022).

State level: Export Promotion Bureau, Government of Uttar Pradesh, and reports on the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme (Singh, 2021).

Scholarly sources: Research contributions from journals, books, and think-tank institutions such as ICRIER, RIS, and ORF (Bhagwati & Panagariya, 2013; Kumar & Joseph, 2019; Chakraborty, 2022).

For analysis, the study employs:

1. Trend analysis of India's trade data.
2. Comparative analysis with other emerging economies.
3. Case studies of Uttar Pradesh's key export-oriented sectors such as brassware (Moradabad), carpets (Bhadohi–Varanasi), leather (Kanpur), and handicrafts including chikankari (Lucknow).
4. Content analysis of policy documents to assess the strategies and priorities of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

Where applicable, hypotheses are tested through correlation and trend-based evaluation of secondary data.

The scope of the study is limited to the period 2010 onwards, with special focus on post-2018 developments in global protectionism and post-2020 implementation of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The reliance on secondary data constitutes the main limitation of the study, although the use of government and institutional sources ensures reliability and validity.

VI. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

VII. GLOBAL PROTECTIONISM: TRENDS AND PATTERNS

Global protectionism has re-emerged as a defining characteristic of the international economic order in the twenty-first century. The post-World War II era, governed by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and subsequently the World Trade Organisation, was characterised by a gradual liberalisation of trade. In recent decades, particularly following the 2008 global financial crisis, advanced economies have increasingly adopted protectionist policies to protect domestic industries and employment (Bown, 2020; Evenett, 2019; WTO, 2020).

The US-China trade conflict (2018-2020) marked a significant turning point, characterised by the imposition of substantial tariffs on Chinese goods by the United States, which prompted retaliatory measures from China. Bown (2020) indicates that this episode disrupted bilateral trade flows and generated uncertainties for global supply chains. Evenett (2019) notes that this period experienced an increase in non-tariff barriers, subsidies, and domestic preference policies, indicating a significant transition from multilateralism to unilateralism in global trade practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified protectionist tendencies. Countries implemented export restrictions on essential goods, medical equipment, and food items. WTO (2020) reports indicate that more than 90 economies implemented temporary or permanent restrictions during the pandemic, underscoring the vulnerability of global supply chains. Although certain measures were temporary, they underscored the notion that national security and self-sufficiency frequently take precedence over free trade commitments during crises.

Emerging economies such as India, Vietnam, and Bangladesh experienced significant impacts. Developed countries' focus on domestic recovery has led to decreased demand and increased competition for export-dependent industries in the Global South (UNCTAD, 2021). India's textiles, pharmaceuticals, and leather sectors experienced negative effects due to increasing tariffs and technical barriers in key markets, including the US and the EU (Panagariya, 2018; Kumar & Joseph, 2019).

The present global trade landscape can be delineated by three primary patterns:

1. **Resurgence of Tariffs:** While average global tariff levels are still below those prior to the establishment of the WTO, there has been an increase in targeted tariffs, particularly in strategic sectors such as steel, technology, and textiles.
2. **Expansion of Non-Tariff Measures:** Standards concerning environmental, labour, and product quality are increasingly utilised as tools of covert protectionism.
3. **Shift towards Regionalism and Bilateralism:** In light of the WTO's diminishing influence, nations are increasingly engaging in regional trade agreements and bilateral arrangements, frequently incorporating protectionist measures.

India faces a dual challenge presented by these global patterns. Protectionism limits traditional export markets, posing challenges for labor-intensive industries. Conversely, it encourages the fortification of domestic industries and diminishes reliance on external demand. Global protectionism functions as both a challenge and a catalyst for the self-reliance vision outlined in the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Rath & Das, 2021; Chakraborty, 2022).

VI.II. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

The revival of global protectionism has significantly affected India's trade and industrial development. Tariff increases and non-tariff barriers in key markets, including the United States and the European Union, have limited India's export competitiveness, especially in labor-intensive industries such as textiles, leather, and engineering goods (Panagariya, 2018; Kumar & Joseph, 2019). The restrictions have adversely impacted employment and diminished opportunities for small and medium enterprises (MSME, 2022), which are fundamental to India's export economy.

Protectionism has disrupted supply chains and raised input costs in essential sectors like pharmaceuticals and electronics, underscoring India's reliance on imported intermediates (UNCTAD, 2021). This situation highlights the inherent structural vulnerabilities in India's global trade position.

Simultaneously, these challenges have created opportunities for recalibration. The government's response via the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan highlights import substitution, production-linked incentives, and the enhancement of local supply chains (Ministry of Finance, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2020). The measures are designed to mitigate external vulnerabilities and improve domestic competitiveness.

The situation in Uttar Pradesh exemplifies this dual reality. Traditional industries such as brassware in Moradabad, carpets in Bhadohi–Varanasi, and chikankari in Lucknow have experienced a decline in export demand. Initiatives like the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme are revitalising industries by promoting local entrepreneurship and connecting cultural heritage with market opportunities (Singh, 2021).

Global protectionism limits India's trade opportunities while simultaneously fostering the enhancement of domestic capabilities. The challenge involves balancing self-reliance with ongoing integration into global markets (Chakraborty, 2022).

VI.III. ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT ABHIYAN AS A POLICY RESPONSE

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, introduced in May 2020, serves as India's holistic strategy to address external challenges posed by global protectionism and internal structural weaknesses. The initiative, originally presented as an economic recovery package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has evolved into a comprehensive strategy aimed at fostering resilience, enhancing competitiveness, and promoting inclusive self-reliance (Ministry of Finance, 2020).

The policy highlights five key pillars: economy, infrastructure, technology-driven systems, vibrant demography, and demand (NITI Aayog, 2020). The Government of India announced a stimulus package totalling ₹20 lakh crore (approximately 10% of GDP), encompassing liquidity support, credit guarantees, and sectoral reforms. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme is a crucial element, with an allocation of ₹1.97 lakh crore across 14 sectors, designed to enhance domestic manufacturing capabilities in electronics, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and renewable energy.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) contribute approximately 30% to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and account for around 48% of exports, highlighting their significance (MSME, 2022). Reforms encompass collateral-free loans totalling ₹3 lakh crore and a revision of MSME classification to enhance coverage. These measures directly target the vulnerabilities faced by export-oriented small enterprises impacted by increasing trade barriers internationally (Kumar & Joseph, 2019).

The Abhiyan includes components of import substitution. India decreased its dependence on imported PPE kits and masks, evolving from a net importer in early 2020 to manufacturing approximately 500,000 PPE kits daily by 2021 (Ministry of Textiles, cited in Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2023). In the electronics sector, mobile phone production under the PLI scheme attained a value of ₹3.5 lakh crore in 2022–23, indicating an increase in domestic capacity.

At the state level, alignment with the national vision is demonstrated through initiatives such as Uttar Pradesh's One District One Product (ODOP) programme, which provides support to local industries and artisans. Moradabad brassware exports, valued at approximately ₹6,000 crore annually, and Bhadohi carpets, which represent nearly 75% of India's handmade carpet exports, have been incorporated into the ODOP branding and marketing strategy (Singh, 2021).

These achievements underscore opportunities; however, challenges persist regarding infrastructural deficiencies, inconsistent implementation, and the potential for excessive inward focus (Chakraborty, 2022). To achieve the success of Atmanirbhar Bharat, India needs to enhance domestic capabilities while simultaneously engaging in global value chains (Rath & Das, 2021).

VI.IV. REGIONAL DIMENSIONS: UTTAR PRADESH CASE STUDIES

Uttar Pradesh serves as a critical case study for analysing the intersection of global protectionism and the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan at the regional level. The One District One Product (ODOP) scheme implemented by the state has played a crucial role in preserving traditional industries while aligning them with self-reliance objectives (Singh, 2021). Case studies of critical sectors illustrate the challenges posed by global trade barriers and the potential benefits of domestic policy interventions.

1. Moradabad Brassware: Recognised as the “Brass City of India,” Moradabad generates approximately ₹6,000 crore each year, representing around 80% of India's brass handicraft exports. Protectionist tariffs in the US and EU markets resulted in an export decline of approximately 15–18% during 2020–21 (WTO, 2020; UNCTAD, 2021). The ODOP scheme has facilitated this sector by implementing branding initiatives, enhancing design quality, and promoting on digital platforms like GeM and ONDC, thus revitalising growth prospects.

2. The Bhadohi–Varanasi region accounts for approximately 75% of India's handmade carpet exports, with an annual value of around ₹9,000 crore. In 2019–20, exports decreased by approximately 10% as a result of global competition and increasing

non-tariff barriers (Bown, 2020; Evenett, 2019). ODOP interventions, participation in trade fairs, and improved digital marketing have contributed to the sector's renewed visibility in domestic and international markets.

3. Kanpur Leather Industry: Kanpur is a prominent centre for leather production in India. Leather exports from Uttar Pradesh experienced a decline of nearly 25% from 2017 to 2021, attributed to stricter environmental standards, non-tariff restrictions, and diminished demand in Western economies (Panagariya, 2018; Kumar & Joseph, 2019). The Atmanirbhar Bharat framework promotes initiatives including credit facilities, technology upgrades, and support for environmentally sustainable production processes to enhance competitiveness.

4. Lucknow Chikan Embroidery: The chikankari craft of Lucknow engages approximately 250,000 artisans, predominantly women from marginalised communities (Singh, 2021). Despite diminished export opportunities during the COVID-19 period, support from ODOP, along with e-commerce platforms and government branding initiatives, has enhanced livelihoods and cultural heritage. This demonstrates that the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision encompasses economic recovery, gender empowerment, and cultural preservation.

VI.V. SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF SELF-RELIANCE

While self-reliance is often discussed in economic terms, its socio-cultural dimensions are equally significant. The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and state-level initiatives such as ODOP illustrate that self-reliance also entails sustaining communities, traditions, and cultural identities alongside economic development (Singh, 2021).

EMPLOYMENT GENERATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Traditional crafts in Uttar Pradesh—such as Moradabad brassware, Bhadohi carpets, Kanpur leather, and Lucknow chikankari—employ lakhs of artisans, many of whom belong to marginalized communities and women-led households. For instance, the chikankari industry provides work to nearly 2.5 lakh artisans, highlighting how self-reliance fosters gender participation and community empowerment (Rath & Das, 2021).

PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Products like Bhadohi carpets and Moradabad brassware are not only export commodities but also custodians of centuries-old traditions. Integrating these crafts into national branding and digital marketing initiatives strengthens cultural pride while expanding economic opportunities (Chakraborty, 2022).

ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Digital platforms and e-commerce have opened new avenues for artisans to access wider markets. Initiatives such as Government e-Marketplace (GeM), Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), and ODOP's online visibility programs have enabled small producers to reach consumers directly, reducing dependence on traditional intermediaries (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2023).

CHALLENGES IN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Despite these positive outcomes, socio-cultural challenges persist. Many artisan households still face:

Lack of social security coverage,

Informal and unstable working conditions,

Limited bargaining power in supply chains.

Addressing these requires policies that combine economic incentives with welfare measures, ensuring that self-reliance translates into sustainable and equitable growth (Bhagwati & Panagariya, 2013).

In essence, the socio-cultural dimension of Atmanirbhar Bharat highlights that economic resilience must be accompanied by community empowerment, gender inclusion, and cultural preservation. Only through this holistic approach can self-reliance become inclusive and sustainable.

VII. CRITICAL DISCUSSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The interplay between global protectionism and India's pursuit of self-reliance under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan presents a complex set of opportunities and challenges.

VIII. OPPORTUNITIES

1. Strengthening Domestic Industries

Rising protectionism abroad has created a strong incentive for India to reduce external dependence. Initiatives such as the PLI schemes (₹1.97 lakh crore), MSME reforms, and ODOP in Uttar Pradesh demonstrate how self-reliance can stimulate local entrepreneurship and strengthen domestic value chains (Ministry of Finance, 2020; MSME, 2022).

2. Export Diversification

Protectionism in traditional markets like the US and EU has encouraged India to expand trade partnerships with Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reducing overdependence on Western economies (Panagariya, 2018; WTO, 2020).

3. Integration of Tradition and Modernity

The incorporation of traditional industries—such as carpets, brassware, and chikankari—into global marketing platforms under ODOP shows how economic growth can be aligned with cultural preservation (Singh, 2021; Chakraborty, 2022).

4. Women's Empowerment and Inclusivity

Craft-based industries, particularly chikankari in Lucknow, have expanded opportunities for women artisans, thereby advancing gender equity and inclusive development (Rath & Das, 2021).

IX. CHALLENGES

1. Risk of Isolationism

Excessive inward orientation could undermine India's comparative advantage in global trade. If Atmanirbhar Bharat is perceived as isolationist, it may discourage foreign investment and technology transfer (Krugman, 1987; Rodrik, 2011).

2. Infrastructure Bottlenecks

Poor logistics, high energy costs, and weak port connectivity continue to restrict India's global competitiveness (Reserve Bank of India, 2022).

3. Productivity and Technology Gaps

Labor-intensive industries such as textiles and leather lag behind in adopting cleaner and more efficient technologies, which are increasingly necessary to meet global environmental and quality standards (UNCTAD, 2021).

4. Limited Access to Finance and Markets for Artisans

Despite MSME and ODOP support, many small producers still face difficulties in accessing credit, marketing networks, and social protection measures (Bhagwati & Panagariya, 2013; Kumar & Joseph, 2019).

5. Global Uncertainty

Protectionism itself is fluid—sudden policy shifts in advanced economies, such as tariffs during the US–China trade war, continue to create volatility for India's export basket (Bown, 2020; Evenett, 2019).

In conclusion, the critical task for India lies in balancing domestic self-sufficiency with global integration. Self-reliance should not be equated with withdrawal from the global economy, but rather with building resilient capacities to engage on equitable terms. Only through this balanced approach can India convert the challenge of protectionism into an opportunity for inclusive and sustainable development (Chakraborty, 2022; Rath & Das, 2021).

X. FINDINGS

The analysis of global protectionism and India's response through the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan yields several significant findings:

1. Global Trade Environment:

Protectionist measures, particularly tariff hikes and non-tariff barriers in advanced economies, have constrained India's export competitiveness and disrupted supply chains. Labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, and handicrafts have been disproportionately affected (WTO, 2020; UNCTAD, 2021).

2. Domestic Response:

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, supported by schemes like PLI and MSME reforms, has emerged as a strategic response. By focusing on import substitution, strengthening local value chains, and promoting entrepreneurship, the initiative aims to reduce external vulnerabilities (Ministry of Finance, 2020; MSME, 2022).

3. Regional Case Studies:

Uttar Pradesh's ODOP scheme illustrates the regional application of self-reliance strategies. Industries such as Moradabad brassware and Bhadohi carpets highlight both the risks of global protectionism and the opportunities of targeted state-level interventions (Singh, 2021).

4. Socio-Cultural Dimensions:

Self-reliance is not purely economic; it also involves sustaining cultural heritage, empowering artisan communities, and enhancing women's participation. These aspects are central to inclusive growth (Rath & Das, 2021; Chakraborty, 2022).

5. Hypotheses Reflection:

While formal statistical testing was not undertaken, the descriptive and data-supported analysis broadly supports the guiding hypotheses—namely, that: protectionism adversely affects India's trade, and Atmanirbhar Bharat provides opportunities for resilience and socio-cultural sustainability.

XI. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that global protectionism, while creating immediate challenges for India's trade and industry, has simultaneously acted as a catalyst for the reorientation of economic policy. The disruptions caused by tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and supply chain restrictions in advanced economies have exposed the vulnerabilities of India's export-oriented sectors, particularly textiles, leather, and handicrafts (WTO, 2020; UNCTAD, 2021).

In response, the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan represents a comprehensive effort to transform adversity into opportunity by strengthening domestic industries, promoting MSMEs, and modernizing traditional crafts (Ministry of Finance, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2020). The initiative not only addresses structural weaknesses in India's global trade position but also integrates socio-cultural objectives such as employment generation, women's empowerment, and cultural preservation (Rath & Das, 2021; Singh, 2021).

However, the success of this initiative depends on striking a delicate balance:

Excessive inward orientation risks isolationism, undermining India's global competitiveness (Krugman, 1987; Rodrik, 2011).

Overdependence on volatile international markets makes India vulnerable to external shocks.

Therefore, a nuanced approach that combines domestic self-sufficiency with global engagement is essential. Self-reliance must not be equated with withdrawal from global markets but rather with building resilient capacities to engage on equitable and sustainable terms.

In this way, India can convert the challenge of protectionism into an opportunity for inclusive growth, cultural revival, and long-term economic resilience.

XII. POLICY SUGGESTIONS

This document presents policy recommendations derived from an analysis of global protectionism and India's response via the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

1. Increasing the number of markets for exports

India should reduce its dependence on the US and EU markets and increase trade with emerging economies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. To mitigate the impact of external shocks, it is advisable to utilise regional trade agreements and foster South–South cooperation (Panagariya, 2018; WTO, 2020).

2. Strengthening MSMEs

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) constitute approximately 30% of India's GDP and 48% of its exports. Consequently, policy initiatives should prioritise enhancing access to affordable loans, improving infrastructure, and providing targeted skill development programmes.

These modifications will enhance the competitiveness of businesses, even as other nations seek to protect their own enterprises (MSME, 2022; Kumar & Joseph, 2019).

3. Innovative concepts and technological advancements

India must promote the adoption of cleaner technologies in industries such as leather, textiles, and handicrafts to meet international standards for environmental sustainability, labour practices, and quality (UNCTAD, 2021). Government-funded research and incentives for innovative ideas will enhance production.

4. Assistance for artisan communities

ODOP ought to prioritise historic industries. Policies should ensure that artisans receive social security, have access to markets via digital platforms (GeM, ONDC), and obtain assistance with branding and international certification.

These initiatives will preserve employment and cultural heritage (Singh, 2021; Rath & Das, 2021).

5. An equitable approach to policy formulation

Atmanirbhar Bharat should not lead to isolationism. India should engage in global supply chains while simultaneously strengthening its domestic economy (Chakraborty, 2022).

6. Monitoring and assessing

Establishing distinct methods for monitoring the effectiveness of PLI, ODOP, and MSME programmes would ensure accountability among policymakers and facilitate fact-based decision-making (NITI Aayog, 2020).

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