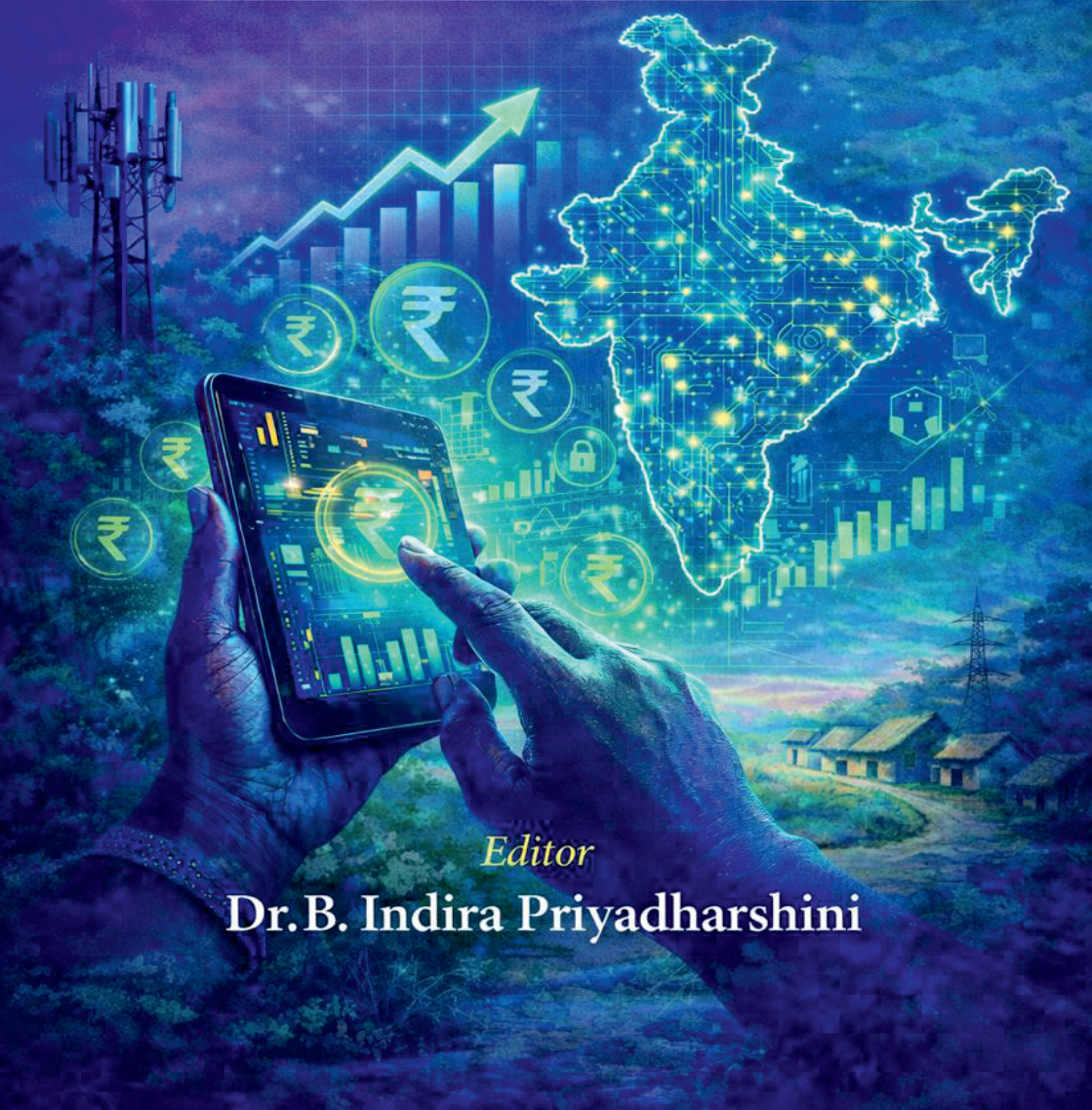


Empowering the Marginalized

Digital Finance as a Tool for Social Inclusion



Editor

Dr. B. Indira Priyadharshini

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FROM ACCESS TO EMPOWERMENT : DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN THE ERA OF AMRIT KAAL

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ABSTRACT

The vision of Amrit Kaal represents India's commitment to inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development as the nation approaches its centenary in 2047. Digital financial inclusion has emerged as a key policy instrument to achieve this vision by expanding access to formal financial services through digital platforms. While initiatives such as the Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile (JAM) trinity and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) have significantly increased financial access, marginalized communities continue to face barriers in translating access into meaningful empowerment. This paper examines the nature of the digital divide in India, analyzes challenges faced by marginalized groups in adopting digital financial services, and proposes policy measures to ensure inclusive and empowerment-oriented digital finance in the era of Amrit Kaal.

Keywords: Digital Financial Inclusion, Marginalized Communities, Digital Divide, Amrit Kaal, Inclusive Development

1. Introduction

India's financial landscape has undergone rapid digital transformation over the last decade. Government-led initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Aadhaar-enabled Payment Systems (AePS), and UPI have expanded access to banking and financial services at an unprecedented scale. These initiatives aim to promote transparency, efficiency, and inclusion.

As India enters the era of Amrit Kaal, inclusive growth and social justice are central to national development priorities. However, financial inclusion cannot be measured merely by the number of bank accounts or digital transactions. True inclusion requires that marginalized communities—such as rural households, women, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), migrant workers, and elderly citizens—are able to use digital financial

services confidently, safely, and productively. This paper argues that the focus must shift from access to empowerment.

2. Digital Divide and Marginalization

The digital divide refers to unequal access to digital infrastructure, skills, and the ability to effectively use digital technologies. In the context of financial inclusion, the digital divide manifests in multiple ways:

- **Infrastructure divide:** Limited internet connectivity and electricity in rural and tribal areas
- **Skill divide:** Low levels of digital and financial literacy
- **Usage divide:** Irregular or superficial use of digital services
- **Trust divide:** Fear of fraud, data misuse, and lack of grievance redressal

Marginalized communities often experience overlapping forms of social and economic exclusion, which intensify the impact of digital inequalities.

3. Digital Financial Inclusion in the Era of Amrit Kaal

Digital financial inclusion involves providing affordable, accessible, and secures financial services through digital platforms. In the Amrit Kaal framework, it plays a crucial role in:

- Empowering marginalized populations economically
- Improving welfare delivery through DBT
- Reducing corruption and leakages
- Integrating informal workers into the formal economy

While policy initiatives have succeeded in expanding account ownership, meaningful usage remains uneven. Many beneficiaries rely on intermediaries, limiting autonomy and increasing vulnerability to exploitation.

4. Challenges Faced by Marginalized Communities

4.1 Infrastructure and Connectivity

Poor digital infrastructure in rural and remote regions restricts access to online financial services.

4.2 Digital and Financial Literacy

Low literacy levels limit understanding of digital platforms, leading to dependence on others for transactions.

4.3 Gender Inequality

Women often have limited access to mobile phones and decision-making power over finances.

4.4 Cyber security and Trust

Incidents of digital fraud have eroded trust among first-time users of digital finance.

5. Policy Measures for Empowerment-Oriented Inclusion

To transform digital financial access into empowerment, the following measures are essential:

- Expansion of rural digital infrastructure through public investment
- Community-based digital and financial literacy programs
- Development of multilingual and user-friendly digital platforms
- Strengthening consumer protection and grievance redressal mechanisms
- Partnerships between government, banks, FinTech firms, and civil society

These measures should prioritize the needs of marginalized groups rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

6. Conclusion

In the era of Amrit Kaal, digital financial inclusion must move beyond numerical achievements toward empowerment-driven outcomes. Bridging the digital divide requires addressing structural inequalities that prevent marginalized communities from fully benefiting from digital finance. A people-centric and inclusive digital ecosystem will be essential to realizing the broader goals of social justice and equitable development. True success in Amrit Kaal will be measured by how effectively digital finance empowers the most marginalized sections of society.

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