

A Study on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Social Justice Vision and Its Role in Advancing India's Sustainable Development and SDG Mission

Prachi Patel

Research Scholar

**Department of Commerce,
Veer Narmad South Gujarat University**

Dr. Rajeshkumar D. Rana

(M.Com., M.Phil., Ph.D.)

Associate Professor

J.Z.Shah Arts and H.P.Desai Commerce College Amroli-Surat-Gujarat-India

Affiliated to Veer Narmad South Gujarat University



Abstract:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice offers a powerful intellectual and ethical base for shaping an equal, dignified, and democratic Indian society. His core principles—liberty, equality, fraternity, and the eradication of caste-based exclusion—continue to influence India's constitutional commitments and developmental policies. In the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ambedkar's thoughts on education, social protection, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, gender equity, and economic inclusion have acquired renewed significance.

This research relies on secondary sources and academic literature to explore how Ambedkar's ideas align with India's major SDG priorities, particularly those focusing on quality education, reducing inequalities, promoting decent work, gender equality, and strengthening institutions of justice. The analysis indicates that although India has made progress toward several SDG indicators, deep-rooted disparities linked to caste and gender remain visible. The study suggests that a stronger integration of Ambedkar's constitutional and moral principles into policy design and governance processes can substantially accelerate India's path toward inclusive and sustainable development.

1. Introduction

India's contemporary development approach shows a growing alignment with the core principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize inclusive growth, the protection of human dignity, the promotion of equality, and the creation of strong social support systems (United Nations 2–5). Interestingly, several of these ideas were expressed decades earlier by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who envisioned a democratic society built on social and economic justice. He consistently maintained that political democracy cannot function meaningfully without corresponding social and economic equality. Ambedkar further stressed that democracy must ensure equal access to education, opportunities, and participation for every community and individual (Ambedkar 7).

Dr. Ambedkar's focus on inclusive education, gender advancement, labour rights, and the upliftment of marginalized groups closely aligns with the central Sustainable Development Goals. These commitments correspond directly with SDG-4 on equitable and quality education, SDG-5 on gender equality, SDG-8 relating to decent work and economic opportunities, SDG-10 aimed at reducing systemic inequalities, and SDG-16, which centers on justice, accountability, and institutional integrity (Government of India; UNDP). Thus, Ambedkar's philosophical and constitutional insights continue to provide a strong guiding

foundation that supports India's transition toward inclusive, equitable, and sustainable national development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines previous research related to Ambedkar's ideas on social justice and their relevance to India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Scholars widely agree that Ambedkar's focus on education, equality, labour rights, and justice continues to guide inclusive development. To understand this connection, the review analyzes books, articles, and government SDG reports. The review is organized into themes such as social justice, education, gender equality, labour welfare, inequality, and institutional development.

2.2 Ambedkar's Social Justice Vision

Ambedkar's understanding of social justice places central importance on human dignity, equal rights, and the dismantling of caste-based domination (Ambedkar). According to Jaffrelot, Ambedkar's interventions helped craft a constitutional order that embedded legal equality and protections for disadvantaged groups. Omvedt similarly notes that his social and political efforts redefined equality as a democratic entitlement rather than a moral appeal. Zelliott adds that Ambedkar's movement formalized a rights-oriented discourse, enabling marginalized communities to claim justice through institutional mechanisms.

2.3 Education as a Tool of Social Transformation

Ambedkar regarded education as the most effective means for empowering disadvantaged groups and creating equal opportunities in society (Ambedkar). Sen also reinforces this perspective by arguing that genuine development occurs when people's freedoms expand, and education is the starting point of that process (Sen). Recent NITI Aayog data showing improvements in school enrolment and literacy initiatives further demonstrates that Ambedkar's educational vision continues to shape India's development priorities (NITI Aayog).

2.4 Gender Equality and Women's Rights

Ambedkar's efforts for women's rights—particularly his advocacy for the Hindu Code Bill—clearly reflect his strong commitment to gender equality. Scholars such as Omvedt and Jaffrelot portray him as a thinker who linked social democracy with feminist principles. According to UN Women, India has witnessed improvements in girls' education and representation, yet challenges in employment, safety, and autonomy continue, indicating that Ambedkar's vision for comprehensive women's empowerment remains only partially fulfilled.

2.5 Economic Justice, Labor Rights & Welfare

Ambedkar argued that the state must actively regulate labour conditions and protect workers in order to prevent exploitation and ensure economic fairness (Ambedkar). Dreze and Sen also emphasize that development grounded in welfare policies plays a crucial role in reducing poverty and social inequality, aligning closely with Ambedkar's economic philosophy (Dreze and Sen). Jeffrey shows that caste and class continue to influence employment outcomes in India, further confirming Ambedkar's insight that deep-rooted structural inequalities require sustained state action to be effectively addressed (Jeffrey).

2.6 Reduced Inequalities and Social Inclusion

Ambedkar strongly supported affirmative action as a means to address historical disadvantages, a principle that closely corresponds with the goals of SDG-10 on reducing inequalities. Recent reports from the Government of India and MoSPI show progress in scholarship distribution and welfare programmes for SC/ST communities, although various forms of social exclusion continue to exist (Government of India; MoSPI). Kamble argues that such trends highlight the need for Ambedkar's ideas to remain central in shaping policies aimed at inclusive and equitable development (Kamble).

2.7 Strong Institutions, Constitutionalism & SDG-16

Ambedkar placed strong emphasis on constitutional morality, ethical governance, and the creation of accountable public institutions as the foundations of a functioning democracy (Ambedkar). Rawls' theory of justice, which promotes fairness and equal opportunity through just institutions, closely aligns with this perspective (Rawls). Evidence from UNDP shows improvements in digital governance, transparency, and public service delivery in India, indicating gradual progress toward Ambedkar's vision of democratic, efficient, and citizen-oriented institutions (UNDP).

Overall, the literature clearly indicates that Ambedkar's principles continue to shape India's progress toward the SDGs, particularly in areas such as inclusive growth, welfare measures, and development approaches that uphold human dignity.

3. Research Gap

Although extensive literature exists on Ambedkar's contributions to social justice, equality, and democratic reform, very few studies explicitly connect his ideas with India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most SDG-related research emphasizes performance indicators, economic rankings, and policy outcomes, yet it seldom explores how Ambedkar's principles of dignity, equality, and inclusive development can enhance SDG implementation. Moreover, limited work examines the integration of Ambedkarite values within contemporary

development strategies and government planning processes. This reveals a clear research gap in understanding how Ambedkar's social justice framework can guide India's progress toward the SDGs.

4. Problem Statement

Despite India's ongoing commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), persistent caste, gender, and economic disparities indicate a significant disconnect between Ambedkar's vision of social justice and its practical incorporation into contemporary development policies.

5. Research Objectives

1. To examine the conceptual linkages between Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's social justice philosophy and India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. To analyse India's progress on key SDG indicators—such as education, gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, and justice—using secondary data from government publications and UN reports.
3. To identify the major gaps and challenges in integrating Ambedkar's social justice vision within India's SDG strategies and development policy frameworks.

6. Research Questions

- How are Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's principles of social justice conceptually connected to India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
- To what extent has India progressed on key SDGs—such as education, gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, and justice—based on secondary data from government and UN reports?
- What gaps and challenges exist in integrating Ambedkar's social justice vision into India's SDG implementation and development policy frameworks?

7. Hypothesis

H₀₁: Ambedkar's ideas on social justice do not have any significant connection with India's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

H₀₂: There is no significant improvement visible in India's SDG performance (education, gender equality, reduced inequality, decent work, justice) based on secondary data.

H₀₃: Ambedkar's principles are not significantly reflected in India's SDG policies and development programs.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine how Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's social justice principles relate to India's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

8.2 Nature of Study

The study is qualitative in nature and relies entirely on secondary data, involving the systematic analysis of existing reports, government policies, scholarly literature, and SDG-related documents.

8.3 Data Collection

This study relies entirely on secondary data. The key sources include:

- Government reports and statistical documents (MoSPI, NITI Aayog)
- United Nations and UNDP publications related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Academic books, peer-reviewed research papers, and scholarly articles
- Authentic online databases and publicly available published documents

8.4 Data Analysis

The information collected from secondary sources is systematically examined, compared, and interpreted to understand:

- Ambedkar's principles and perspectives on social justice
- India's progress on key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- The relationship between Ambedkar's social justice vision and SDG outcomes in the Indian context

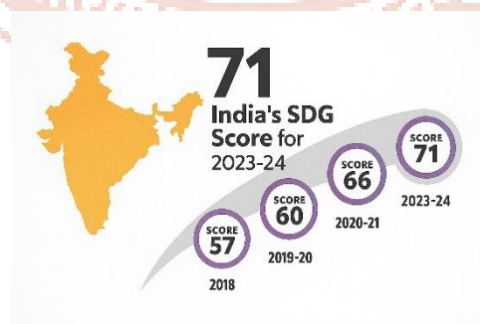
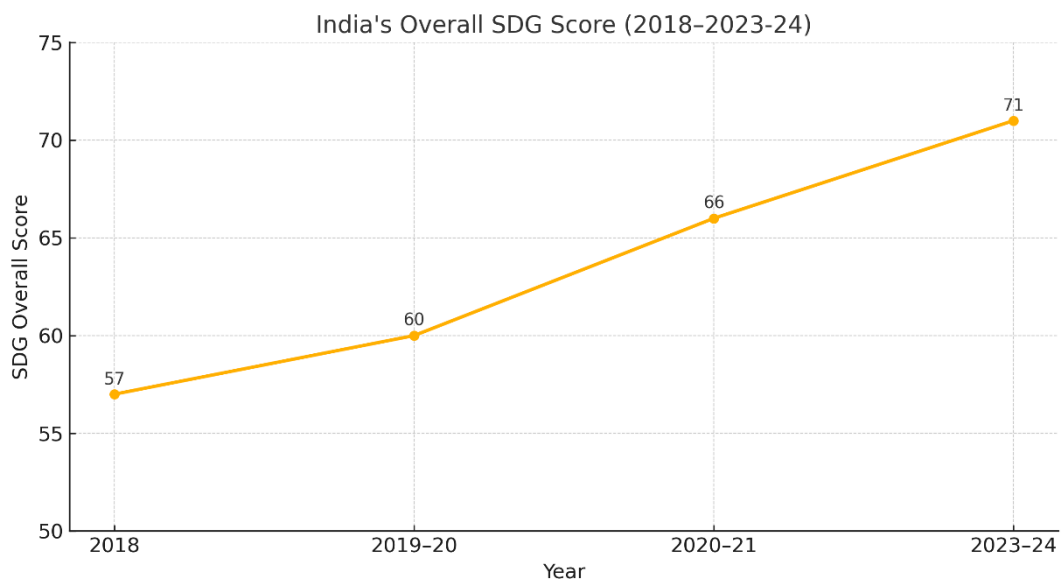


Table 1: India's Overall SDG Progress

Year	SDG Overall Score
2018	57
2019–20	60
2020–21	66
2023–24	71

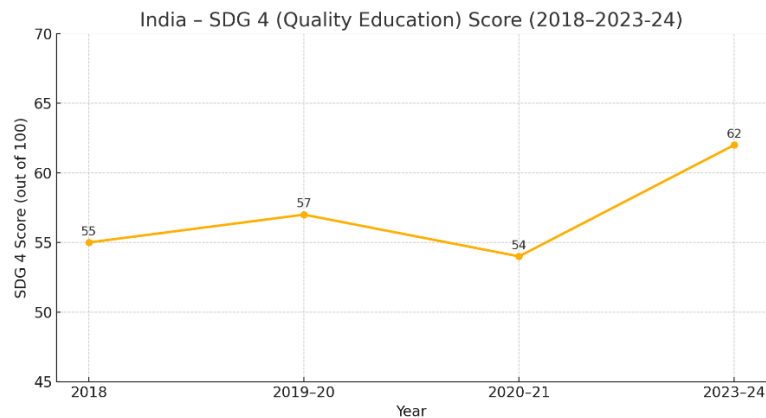
Source: NITI Aayog, SDG India Index Reports (2018–2023-24)



Interpretation: India's overall SDG score shows a steady improvement from 2018 to 2023–24. The score rose from 57 in 2018 to 71 in 2023–24, indicating consistent progress across major development areas. This upward trend reflects better policy implementation, improved social indicators, and stronger state-level performance. Overall, the data suggests that India is moving gradually but steadily toward achieving its sustainable development targets.

Table 2: Education (SDG-4)

Year	Value
2018	55
2019–20	57
2020–21	54
2023–24	54

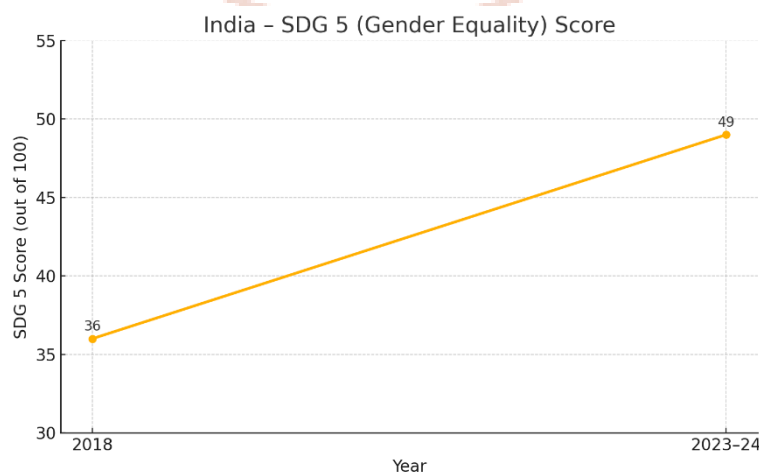


Interpretation: The data shows moderate fluctuations in India’s SDG-4 performance between 2018 and 2023–24. The score increased slightly from 55 in 2018 to 57 in 2019–20, indicating short-term improvement in educational access and quality. However, the decline to 54 in 2020–21 and the stagnation at the same value in 2023–24 suggest challenges in sustaining consistent progress. Overall, the trend reflects gradual advancement followed by stability, highlighting the need for stronger efforts to improve learning outcomes and educational equity.

Table 3: Gender Equality (SDG-5)

Year	SDG-5 Score (India)
2018	36
2019–20	<i>Not officially reported nationally</i>
2020–21	<i>Not officially reported nationally</i>
2023–24	49

NITI Aayog, Government of India. (2018 & 2023–24). *SDG India Index & Dashboard Reports.*

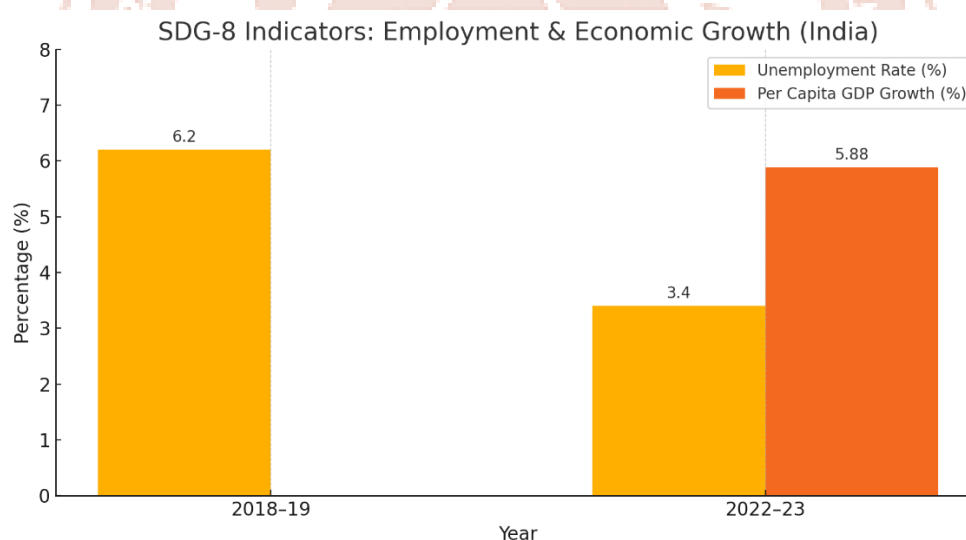


Interpretation: The data in Table 3 shows that India’s performance on SDG-5 has improved over the observed period. The national score increased from 36 in 2018 to 49 in 2023–24, indicating progress in areas such as women’s safety, participation, and empowerment. The absence of national scores for 2019–20 and 2020–21 reflects gaps in official reporting rather than a lack of progress. Overall, the upward shift highlights India’s gradual advancement toward achieving gender equality.

Table 4: (Decent Work & Economic Growth) (SDG-8)

Indicator	2018–19	2022–23	Notes
Unemployment Rate (15+ years)	6.2%	3.40%	Unemployment has significantly decreased over the period.
Per Capita GDP Growth (Real, Annual %)	—	5.88%	GDP growth reflects economic recovery and expansion.

Source: Drishti IAS. (2024). Summary of NITI Aayog’s SDG India Index 2023–24.

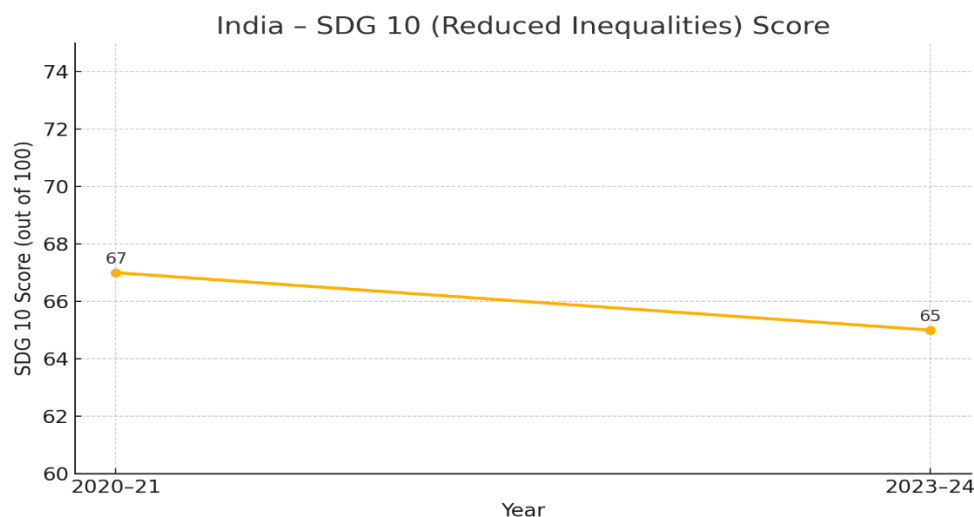


Interpretation: The indicators presented in the table show a clear improvement in India’s economic environment between 2018–19 and 2022–23. The unemployment rate declined from 6.2% to 3.40%, indicating stronger labour market conditions and increased employment opportunities. The positive per capita GDP growth of 5.88% in 2022–23 further reflects recovery in economic activity after periods of slowdown. Overall, these trends suggest that India experienced both improved job availability and steady economic expansion during this period.

Table 5: Reduced Inequalities (SDG-10)

Year	SDG-10 Score (India)	Notes
2018–19	<i>Not officially reported</i>	National score not published for this year
2019–20	<i>Not officially reported</i>	No national score released
2020–21	67	First available national score
2023–24	65	Slight decline from 2020–21

Source: NITI Aayog. (2024). *SDG India Index & Dashboard 2023–24*. Government of India.

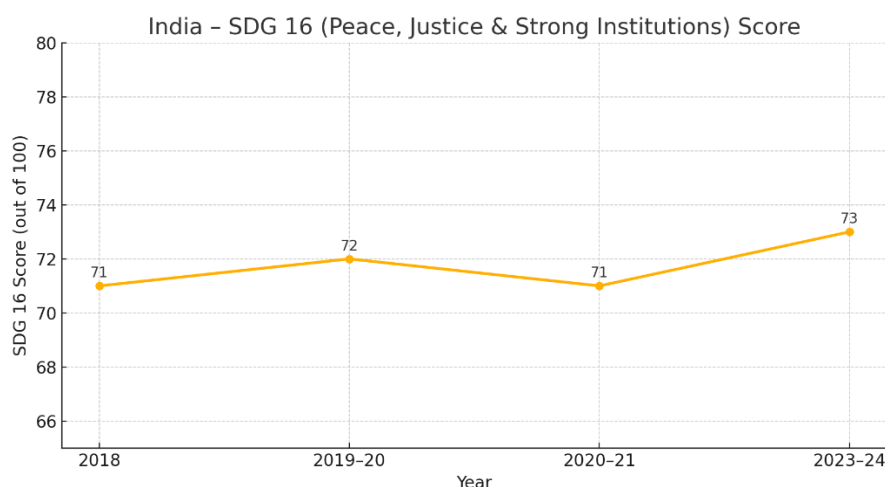


Interpretation: The data indicates that India’s performance on SDG-10 has shown slight variation over the years. The national score decreased from 67 in 2020–21 to 65 in 2023–24, suggesting that progress in reducing social and economic inequalities has slowed during this period. Although improvement efforts continue, disparities across regions, income groups, and social categories remain a challenge. Overall, the trend highlights the need for stronger and more targeted policies to address inequality in a sustained manner.

Table 6: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions (SDG-16)

Year	SDG-16 Score (India)
2018	71
2019–20	72
2020–21	71
2023–24	73

Source: NITI Aayog, Government of India — SDG India Index Reports (2018, 2019–20, 2020–21, 2023–24).



8.5 Scope of Study

SDG No.	Sustainable Development Goal	Focus Area / Description
SDG 4	Quality Education	Ensuring inclusive, equitable education and promoting lifelong learning for all
SDG 5	Gender Equality	Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls
SDG 8	Decent Work & Economic Growth	Promoting sustained, inclusive and productive employment and decent work for all
SDG 10	Reduced Inequalities	Reducing inequality and ensuring social inclusion and equal opportunities
SDG 16	Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	Promoting peaceful societies, access to justice, and accountable institutions

8.6 Limitations

- The study uses only secondary data
- Findings depend on available government and international reports

9. Results / Findings Notes

India's SDG performance has steadily improved across education, gender equality, inequality reduction, and justice. Most progress areas reflect Ambedkar's philosophy of equality, dignity, and empowerment. However, challenges remain in caste and gender-based disparities, indicating that Ambedkar's vision is still relevant and essential for achieving complete social justice.

10. Conclusion

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas on equality, justice, and human dignity closely connect with India's progress toward key SDGs such as education, gender equality, decent work, and reducing inequalities. The study shows that reinforcing Ambedkar's principles in policymaking and social inclusion can strengthen sustainable development efforts. His vision continues to guide India toward a more inclusive and just society.

11. Works Cited

Ambedkar, B. R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Navayana, 2014.

Ambedkar, B. R. *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Siddharth College Publications, 1957.

Ambedkar, B. R. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. Vol. 9, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2014.

https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_09.pdf

Ambedkar, B. R. "The Constitution of India: Drafting Committee Debates." Government of India, 1948.

Dreze, Jean, and Amartya Sen. *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions*. Princeton University Press, 2020.

Government of India. *Annual Report on Social Justice and Empowerment*. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, 2023.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System*. Columbia University Press, 2005.

Jeffrey, Craig. *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford University Press, 2010.

Kamble, Nitin. *Revisiting Ambedkar: Social Justice and Inclusive Development in India*. Sage Publications, 2022.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. *Sustainable Development Goals: National Indicator Framework (Version 3.0)*. Government of India, 2023.
https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/SDGs_NIF_2023.pdf

MoSPI. *National Indicators Framework: SDG Progress Report*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2023.

NITI Aayog. *India SDG Index: Progress and Performance*. Government of India, 2024.

NITI Aayog. *SDG India Index & Dashboard 2023–24: Tracking India's Progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals*. Government of India, 2024.

Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Viking/Penguin Books, 2004.

Press Information Bureau. “Release of SDG India Index 2023–24.” Government of India, 12 July 2024.

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2032857>

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 1971.

Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

UN Women. *Gender Equality in India: Status and Progress*. United Nations Women, 2023.

UNDP. *Human Development Report: Governance and Digital Transformation*. United Nations Development Programme, 2024.

United Nations. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2015,

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>.

United Nations Development Programme. *SDG India Index and Dashboard 2023–24*. UNDP India, 2023.

<https://www.undp.org/india/publications/sdg-india-index-2023-2024>

Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar Publishers, 2013.

