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## EMPOWERING EQUALITY: AMBEDKAR'S VISION AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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### ABSTRACT

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1891 in a family of social outcasts, was a direct victim of social discrimination and inequality in both opportunities and standard of living. Yet he had overcome all odds to become the Father of the Indian Constitution and contributed monumentally towards eradicating poverty and improving the quality of life of marginalised communities in India This rationale is the basis of this paper. In 2015, the United Nations adopted seventeen Sustainable Development Goals as a universal call to action to end poverty and reduce socio-economic divide. More than 165 countries have adopted and are striving to achieve the SDGs. However, reports indicate that most of the nations are too far from achieving the SDG goals by 2030. Across all 17 goals, Sweden tops the list of countries surveyed, where as India ranked around 120.

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable Development Goals, Babasaheb, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, United Nations economic progress, equality, sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

Quality of life, environmental health and sustainable development are interconnected social impact components that trade between synergy and antagonism. The world is surrounded by conflicting social standards - massive poverty, inequalities and poor standard of living co-exist with rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and technological advancements [1]. The socio-economic and political consequences deeply add to these linkages and compound progressive human development [2]. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to overcome this conflict - the big divide in people's living standards [3]. These SDGs are a collection of 17 interconnected global goals designed to improve quality of living and achieve a more sustainable future for all. The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the

United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by 2030. The 17 SDGs are: (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reduced Inequality, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life On Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

### **Global adoption and progression of the SDGs**

The UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the annual space for global monitoring of the SDGs, under the auspices of the United Nations economic and Social Council. The online publication SDGTracker was launched in June 2018 and presents data across all available indicators [5,6]. The SDG-Tracker has a global coverage and tracks whether the world is making progress towards the SDGs. It aims to make the data on the 17 goals available to a wide audience in an understandable manner. According to these tracker reports, more than 165 countries have adopted and are striving to achieve the SDGs. Across all 17 goals, Sweden tops the list of countries surveyed. It is, on average, 84.5% of the way to achieving the targets envisaged for 2030. Following closely were Scandinavian neighbours, Denmark, Norway and Finland. Western European countries took the remainder of the top 10 slots and four of the top 20. Also in the top 20 were Canada, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. AsiaPacific's top performers Japan, Singapore and Australia rounded off the list of the top 20. India ranked around 120, has shown a slow 20% improvement in its SDR ranking since 2002 and its progress continues to be slow but very steady.

### **SDGs and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

The UN SDGs are directly in line with the vision and tireless efforts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, towards ensuring excluded groups were politically, socially and economically empowered[41]. The UN Development Programme Administrator Achim Steiner has categorically stated that Ambedkar's vision of equality and social justice echoes the ambitions of the UN's 2030 development agenda [9,10,41]. It may wonder how the UN SDGs which are yet to be achieved by 2030 were envisioned by a man, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, nearly a century earlier. It goes to show the revolutionary visionary in him and the tremendous foresight he possesses.

**Contribution of this paper: An Ambedkar driver action plan to achieve SDGs.**

The key contribution of this paper is to place forth a practical and simple action plan following Ambedkar's strategic ideologies and decisions to successfully achieve the SDGs. Babasaheb Ambedkar's views and ideologies provide direction with clarity and action plan as the socioeconomic divide is expanding with time in India. The SDGs aim to achieve sustained development of every individual human being which is in line with reducing the socio-economic divide. However the SDG tracker indicates that the countries are too far from achieving the SDG goals by 2030.

**SDG 1 - No poverty** The UN SDG 1, one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015, calls for the end of poverty in all forms [13,14]. Achieving this goal includes finding solutions to new threats caused by socioeconomic divides. SDG 1 focuses not just on people living in poverty, but also on the services people rely on and social policy that either promotes or prevents poverty. The outcome targets of this SDG are eradication of extreme poverty, reduction of all poverty by half, implementation of social protection systems, ensuring equal rights to ownership, basic services, technology and economic resources, and the building of resilience to environmental, economic and social disasters.

**SDG 1 and Ambedkar:** Ambedkar was the first Indian to pursue a doctorate in economics abroad. His ideology was that industrialisation and agricultural growth could enhance the economy. Ambedkar was one of the pioneers who examined the relationship between socio-economic and political variables co-jointly and the role of development projects in transforming India. He was the first Indian economist who comprehensively studied the public finances, and taxation and also the monetary standards of British India, and explained the adverse effects of both the internal and external taxes on local business in British India. s to stabilise the economy.

**Observations and proposals**

One of the two UN targets towards achieving SDG 1 is the establishment of poverty eradication policy frameworks at all levels. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had made clear strategic propositions to alleviate poverty amongst the downtrodden, which is directly connected to the target of establishing poverty eradication policy frameworks at all levels. His strategic propositions resulted in low income tax rates / No income tax for the marginalised and economically depressed. They can be further summarised as (1) sufficient checks and balances

in the economic system to impede exploitation of the poor by the rich, (2) national level economic policies to protect perpetual national growth, including land reforms, (3) strike a right balance between economic and agricultural growth, etc.

### **SDG 2 - No hunger**

According to the United Nations, there are around 690 million people who are hungry, which accounts for slightly less than 10 percent of the world population. One in every nine people goes to bed hungry each night, including 20 million people currently at risk of famine in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria. Under-nutrition has been on the rise since 2015, after falling for decades. This majorly results from the various stresses in food systems that reduce the purchasing power and the capacity to produce and distribute food. The UN SDG 2 aims to achieve Zero Hunger and end all forms of hunger and malnutrition by 2030, making sure all people—especially children—have sufficient and nutritious food all year[20,21].

**SDG 2 and Ambedkar:** Babasaheb Ambedkar stressed investment in agriculture as the key component for food security and sufficiency. His theory of socialism is three-pronged: state ownership of agricultural land, the maintenance of resources for production by the state, and a just distribution of these resources to the population.

**Observations and proposals:** The UN proposed means of achieving SDG 2 include: addressing trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets and food commodity markets and their derivatives. This is straightforwardly in line with the current food generation (agriculture) and trade policies. Those nations export and import to make someone self-sufficient and hence alleviate hunger. However this paper observes an interesting philosophical conflict in the vision and ideology of Ambedkar. He strongly advocates self-sufficiency both in terms of agricultural production and national economic structure. From Babasaheb

**SDG 4 - Quality education** The SDG 4 ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all [26]. The SDG aims to provide children and young people with quality and easily accessible education plus other learning opportunities. One of its targets is to achieve universal literacy and numeracy. The seven "outcome-oriented targets" are: 'free primary and secondary education'; 'equal access to quality pre-primary education'; 'affordable technical, vocational and higher education'; 'increased number of people with relevant skills for financial success'; 'elimination of all

discrimination in education'; 'universal literacy and numeracy'; and 'education for sustainable development and global citizenship'. The three "means of achieving targets" are: 'build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools'; 'expand higher education scholarships for developing countries'; and 'increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries'.

**Observations and proposals:** The three means of achieving targets towards providing quality education to all sects people are very much in-line with the ideology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's contribution to this mostly included empowerment of children from marginalised classes. The social marginalisation in education leads to economic marginalisation in employment. This socio-economic divide will pull down any good brought forth from the three UN proposed means of achieving the targets.

### **SDG 5 - Gender equality**

The SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls [31]. Based on data from 87 countries, 1 in 5 women under the age of 50 will have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. It has been found that women do 2.6 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. While families, societies and economies depend on this work, for women, it leads to lower earnings and less time to engage in non-work activities. In addition to equal distribution of economic resources, which accelerates development in multiple areas, there needs to be a fair balance of responsibility for unpaid care work between men and women. Achieving Gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the some root causes of discrimination that still curtail women's rights in private and public spheres.

**5.1. SDG 5 and Ambedkar:** Dr. B.R. Ambedkar quoted, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." His philosophy was put to action in the Hindu Code Bill formulation. The Hindu code was brought into existence first by Jawaharlal Nehru. It was revised by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1948 and was referred to a select committee under the chairmanship of law minister. The committee made a number of important changes to the bill, including making the laws applicable to even non-Hindus [32].

**5.2. Observations and proposals:** The three means of achieving gender equality, as proposed by the UN SDGs are: equal rights, and property ownership; promoting empowerment of women through technology; and constitutional provisions. From what can be directly connected to these targets, the visionary Babasaheb Ambedkar has already worked

extensively on the three means. He ensured constitutional provision for (1) equal rights, (2) property ownership, and (3) empowerment, safety and free legal aid.

### **SDG 10 - Reduced inequality**

The SDG 10 aims to reduce income inequality within and among countries [37]. This UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "Equality of opportunity and development for all" at its heart is the shadow of its forerunner ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and Bhimrao Ambedkar who made groundbreaking contributions towards reducing social and economic inequalities in India [41]. Reducing inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind are integral to achieving the SDGs. Inequality within and among countries is a persistent cause for concern. Despite some positive signs toward reducing inequality in some dimensions in some countries, inequality in India still persists.

### **SDG 10 and Ambedkar**

"What are we having this liberty for? We are having this liberty in order to reform our social system, which is fuel of inequality, discrimination and other things, which conflict with our fundamental Rights" – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Caste posed a great challenge to the world both due to its origin and implications. Most of the academics have analysed its existence and described the operations with some implications. Ambedkar had not only written on the issues of caste inequality but also fought against it in India, especially for the human rights of untouchables/social outcasts known as Dalits [38]. According to him, the fundamental principle of the caste system is graded inequality.

### **Summary**

This section summarises the action plan to achieve SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 10 in coherence with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Ideology. The SDG 1 aims to alleviate poverty of all kinds in all individuals; the UN action plan is synonymous to the Babasaheb driven action plan proposed in this paper.

The Sustainable Development Goals and UN suggested means to achieve them and proposed Babasaheb Ambedkar Driven Action Plan are presented below in tabular forms.

<b>SDG</b>	<b>1 - No poverty</b>
Means to Achieve the SDG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mobilisation of resources to end poverty.</li> <li>2. Establishment of poverty eradication policy frameworks at all levels.</li> </ol>
Ambedkar driven action plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No income tax for the marginalised and economically backward employees.</li> <li>2. Sufficient checks and balances in the economic system to impede exploitation of the poor by the rich.</li> <li>3. National level economic policies to protect perpetual national growth, including land reforms.</li> <li>4. Strike a right balance between economic and agricultural growth, etc.</li> </ol>

<b>SDG</b>	<b>2 - No hunger</b>
Means to Achieve the SDG	Addressing trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets and food commodity markets and their derivatives.
Ambedkar driven action plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Achieve food security by becoming self-sufficient producers of crops.</li> <li>2. Equal distribution of agricultural land.</li> <li>3. Governmental interference in distribution and allocation of land holdings.</li> </ol>
<b>SDG</b>	<b>4 - Quality education</b>

Means to Achieve the SDG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools.</li> <li>2. Expand higher education scholarships for developing countries.</li> <li>3. Increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries.</li> </ol>
Ambedkar driven action plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inclusion of reservations / benefits for marginalised classes</li> <li>2. Provision of high quality education to all classes of people without which any efforts to provide quality education will only result in a huge divide between the rich and the poor.</li> <li>3. Free education to marginalized students</li> </ol>
<b>SDG</b>	<b>5 - Gender equality</b>
Means to Achieve the SDG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fostering equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services for women.</li> <li>2. Promoting empowerment of women through technology.</li> <li>3. Adopting, strengthening policies and enforcing legislation for gender equality.</li> </ol>
Ambedkar driven action plan	(1) Equal rights, (2) Property ownership, (3) Women empowerment, safety and free legal aid, (4) Women Leadership (5) Special constitutional provisions to women

<b>SDG</b>	<b>10 - Reduced inequality</b>
Means to Achieve the SDG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Special and differential treatment for developing countries;</li> <li>2. Encourage development assistance and investment in least developed countries;</li> <li>3. Reduce transaction costs for migrant remittances.</li> </ol>
Ambedkar driven action plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reservations to the marginalised classes of people.</li> <li>2. Additional benefits to uplift these marginalised classes..</li> <li>3. Providing constitutional inclusions in all areas of socio-economic aspects.</li> </ol>

## CONCLUSION

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is a pioneering soul who worked for the cause of the upliftment of the downtrodden and marginalised communities in India and proposed solutions within a democratic framework to reduce the socio-economic divide in people. This paper proposed an Ambedkar driven action plan to achieve the UN SDGs to create a happy and contented world / nation India by 2030. This paper focussed on SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 10 and made a descriptive analysis of the coherence in the ideologies of Babasaheb Ambedkar with the SDGs. The key contention of this study is that if one man, Babasaheb Ambedkar, possessing the same spirit and passion with which the SDGs have been framed, could achieve transformational change in a country as geographically and socially varied as India, then the strategic policies and ideologies of this could be straightforwardly adopted by a country as a whole in unison to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

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