

Sustainable Development and Social Justice: Perspective from India

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development and social justice are intertwined goals that aim to create a society that is equitable, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. While sustainable development emphasizes meeting the needs of the present without compromising future generations, social justice focuses on ensuring fairness, equity, and the protection of marginalized groups. This paper examines key theoretical debates, explores the interrelations between these concepts, and identifies the gaps that hinder their effective implementation. It addresses specific questions such as: How can sustainable development policies incorporate the principles of social justice? What role do marginalized groups, particularly women, play in sustainable development? What gaps exist in India's policy framework to align these goals effectively?

Keywords: *Sustainable Development, Social Justice, Intersectional Policies.*

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development is intricately linked to Amartya Sen's capabilities approach,¹ which emphasizes the enhancement of freedoms and opportunities for all individuals, and John Rawls' theory of justice,² which underscores the imperative of prioritizing the least advantaged members of society. However, tensions emerge when ecological economists contend that the pursuit of social justice may conflict with ecological limitations, highlighting the necessity of achieving a delicate balance between equitable resource distribution and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, feminist theories³ contribute significantly to this discourse by stressing the importance of gender in sustainability, advocating for the incorporation of women's rights and contributions into development frameworks. In the context of India, several government initiatives seek to reconcile the objectives of sustainable development with those of social justice. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)⁴ is a pivotal program that not only promotes rural livelihoods but also supports environmental conservation efforts through initiatives such as afforestation and water resource management. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)⁵ explicitly targets health disparities, focusing particularly on the needs of women and children. Additionally, initiatives like the Stand-Up India Scheme⁶ foster entrepreneurship among women and marginalized communities, thereby promoting economic inclusion. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana⁷ further aims to provide affordable housing for underprivileged groups, contributing to the creation of sustainable urban environments. Despite these commendable initiatives, significant gaps remain. Structural inequalities, limited implementation capacity, and inadequate resource allocation hinder the effective integration of social justice within sustainability frameworks. Women and marginalized groups continue to encounter systemic barriers that restrict their access to these programs, while the absence of intersectional

¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* 3-4 (Oxford University Press, 1999).

² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* 60-65 (Harvard University Press, 1971).

³ Simone and bell hooks de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans., Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) (Original work published in French) & *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* 18-21 (South End Press, 1984).

⁴ Ministry of Law and Justice, *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (Act No. 42 of 2005)* (Government of India, 2005), available at: <https://nrega.nic.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

⁵ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *National Rural Health Mission (2005–2012): Mission Document* (Government of India, 2005), available at: <https://nhm.gov.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

⁶ Ministry of Finance, *Stand-Up India Scheme: Facilitating Bank Loans for SC/ST and Women Entrepreneurs* (Government of India, 2016), available at: <https://www.standupmitra.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

⁷ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Housing for All (Urban)* (Government of India, 2015), available at: <https://pmy-urban.gov.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).



policies exacerbates these challenges. To address these pressing issues, there is a critical need for inclusive governance, participatory planning, and a comprehensive re-evaluation of resource distribution mechanisms. In conclusion, this paper underscores the urgent need for policies that weave social justice into the fabric of sustainable development. It advocates for actionable strategies aimed at bridging existing gaps and ensuring that the voices of marginalized communities are at the forefront of decision-making processes, ultimately fostering a just and sustainable future for all.

2. Theoretical Debate: Interplay of Two Concepts

Sustainable development is an interdisciplinary construct that seeks to reconcile economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Its theoretical framework is enriched by a variety of perspectives, including Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, John Rawls' theory of justice, ecological economics, and feminist theories. The integration of these paradigms reveals complex tensions and synergies, necessitating a nuanced analysis of their foundational arguments and implications. Amartya Sen's capabilities approach offers a human-centered lens for evaluating development. In his influential work, "Development as Freedom" (1999),⁸ Sen posits that the ultimate goal of development is to expand individuals' substantive freedoms—the capabilities necessary for leading lives they have reason to value. This perspective shifts the emphasis from traditional economic indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP),⁹ to broader considerations of well-being, agency, and opportunity. Sen asserts that freedom is not only the primary objective of development but also a means to its achievement. This approach underscores the importance of recognizing the diverse values and aspirations inherent in various cultural and social contexts. Moreover, Sen's framework aligns the enhancement of individual capabilities with broader social justice objectives, aiming to mitigate inequalities and empower marginalized populations. However, the application of Sen's approach to environmental sustainability presents challenges, as critics contend that unbounded human freedoms may lead to ecological degradation unless moderated by constraints that prioritize intergenerational equity. In "A Theory of Justice" (1971), John Rawls¹⁰ introduces a procedural framework for fairness that is grounded in his principles of justice. Through the thought experiment of the "original position" and the "veil of ignorance," Rawls seeks to establish impartial principles for social

⁸ *Supra* note 1 at 74-75.

⁹ See generally, N. Gregory Mankiw, *Principles of Economics* (9th ed., Cengage Learning, 2021).

¹⁰ *Supra* note 2 at 11-17, 136-142.

cooperation. His two central principles are the equal basic liberties for all individuals and the difference principle, which permits social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. This framework is congruent with sustainable development, as it emphasizes equity and prioritizes the needs of vulnerable populations. However, Rawls' focus primarily addresses justice within a single generation, giving less consideration to intergenerational justice. Scholars such as Brian Barry¹¹ and Simon Caney¹² extend Rawlsian justice to encompass obligations toward future generations, arguing that sustainable development necessitates the preservation of environmental resources for posterity. The tension between Rawlsian justice and ecological economics lies in the potential trade-offs between resource redistribution and environmental sustainability.¹³ Ensuring equitable resource allocation for current disadvantaged groups may strain finite ecological limits, necessitating a balance between Rawlsian principles and ecological constraints. Ecological economics critiques mainstream economic models by emphasizing the Earth's biophysical limitations. Scholars like Herman Daly¹⁴ advocate for a "steady-state economy," which seeks to maintain a stable level of economic activity within ecological boundaries. Daly argues that conventional growth-driven paradigms fail to account for environmental externalities and the finite nature of natural resources. He calls for strong sustainability, which requires the preservation of natural capital, as it cannot be substituted by human-made alternatives. This perspective stresses intergenerational equity, asserting that current consumption and emissions must be constrained to ensure that future generations inherit a livable planet. Furthermore, ecological economics advocates for decoupling economic growth from resource depletion and environmental degradation, thereby aligning economic activities with ecological realities. The interplay between ecological economics and social justice reveals the complexities of addressing resource inequalities while respecting ecological limits. Ecological constraints may restrict the capacity to redistribute resources equitably, as such actions could lead to environmental degradation or exceed sustainable thresholds. Scholars like Joan Martinez-Alier¹⁵ champion the concept of "just sustainability," which seeks to integrate social equity with ecological

¹¹ Brian Barry, *Justice as Impartiality* 189-193 (Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹² Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory* 122-127 (Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹³ See generally, Tim Hayward and Andrew Dobson, *Ecological Thought: An Introduction* (Polity Press, 2006) & *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Theories of Distributive Justice* 55-61 (Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Herman E. Daly, *Steady-State Economics: Second Edition with New Essays* 16-18 (Island Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* 11-15, 63-68 (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002).



boundaries. This approach emphasizes participatory decision-making, ensuring that marginalized communities have a voice in the allocation and management of resources. Balancing fairness in resource distribution with the imperative to preserve ecological integrity for both current and future generations is essential. Feminist theories critically engage with sustainable development by examining the intersections of gender, environmental issues, and social justice. Advocated by scholars such as Vandana Shiva¹⁶ and Bina Agarwal,¹⁷ these perspectives highlight that women, particularly in developing regions, face disproportionate challenges due to environmental degradation. Given their roles in food production, water collection, and caregiving, women are especially vulnerable to ecological crises. Feminist theories advocate for the recognition and integration of women's traditional ecological knowledge into development strategies, underscoring the significance of their expertise in sustainable resource management. Additionally, these theories underscore the necessity of women's empowerment and active participation in decision-making processes to foster inclusive and equitable development approaches. Feminist critiques also address the patriarchal biases present in mainstream development models, which often neglect systemic gender inequalities. By advocating for the incorporation of gender equity into sustainability frameworks, feminist perspectives broaden the discourse to emphasize justice, inclusivity, and the centrality of women's rights in formulating sustainable solutions. The theoretical tensions among the frameworks of Sen, Rawls, ecological economics, and feminist theories reflect the complex, multidimensional challenges inherent in achieving sustainable development. Addressing these challenges necessitates a deliberate and integrative approach that balances human freedoms, social equity, and ecological constraints. Development strategies must draw from insights across these paradigms, ensuring alignment with both local contexts and global environmental imperatives. Tailoring policies to specific cultural, social, and environmental circumstances is critical to their efficacy. Sustainability solutions must account for the unique challenges and opportunities presented by diverse regions, recognizing the interplay of local traditions, resources, and societal needs. Additionally, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars, policymakers, and stakeholders is essential for bridging divides between theoretical perspectives, thereby enabling more comprehensive and effective approaches to sustainable development. Inclusive governance is fundamental to reconciling these tensions. Decision-making processes must prioritize the participation of marginalized

¹⁶ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* 41-45 (Zed Books, 1988).

¹⁷ Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* 7-10, 155-160 (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

groups, including women and indigenous communities, whose perspectives are often overlooked in mainstream initiatives. Their involvement ensures that solutions are equitable, culturally sensitive, and grounded in lived experiences. The synthesis of these theoretical insights, alongside the acknowledgment of their inherent tensions, paves the way for the development of more just, inclusive, and resilient strategies for sustainable development. By integrating diverse perspectives and addressing their contradictions, scholars and policymakers can work collaboratively toward solutions that harmonize human well-being, social justice, and ecological sustainability.

3. Social Justice Discourse In India

The discourse surrounding social justice in India is complex and multifaceted, deeply embedded in the nation's historical context of caste-based discrimination, economic disparity, and entrenched social hierarchies.¹⁸ Pioneering figures such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar,¹⁹ the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, alongside other prominent social reformers including Jyotirao Phule, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, and Dalit leaders like Kanshi Ram, have significantly shaped the theoretical foundations and advocacy for social justice in the country.²⁰ Their contributions have catalyzed critical discussions regarding equality, affirmative action, and the dismantling of caste-based oppression. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stands out as a seminal thinker in conceptualizing social justice. His insights were profoundly influenced by his own experiences as a Dalit and his academic pursuits in law, economics, and social theory. A cornerstone of Ambedkar's vision was the eradication of the caste system, which he articulated in his pivotal work, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). Ambedkar posited that caste serves as the fundamental source of inequality in India, advocating for its complete dismantlement due to its perpetuation of economic exploitation, social discrimination, and political disenfranchisement. Additionally, Ambedkar underscored the principle of equality before the law as integral to social justice. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, he embedded provisions for equality in Articles 14 to 18,²¹ which prohibit caste-based discrimination and endorse affirmative action for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Furthermore,

¹⁸ Gopal Guru (ed.), *Humiliation: Claims and Contexts* 1-8 (Oxford University Press, 2009) & Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India: A Sociological View* 104-112 (Viking/Penguin India, 2003).

¹⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* 37-45 (Bheem Patrika Publications, Bombay, 1936).

²⁰ Anand Teltumbde, *Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva* 87-95 (Navayana, 2020) & Omvedt, Gail, *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India* (Penguin Books, 2004).

²¹ Government of India, *The Constitution of India* (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1950), available at: <https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india> (last visited on May 15, 2025).



Ambedkar emphasized economic justice, as discussed in his work *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*, highlighting that true social justice remains unattainable without the economic empowerment of marginalized communities. The exploration of social justice has been furthered by various thinkers in India, with Jyotirao Phule emerging as a pivotal figure. A trailblazer in social reform, Phule critiqued the caste system and the dominance of Brahmanical ideology in his book *Gulamgiri* (1873).²² He asserted that the oppression of Shudras and Dalits is central to India's social fabric, advocating for education as a transformative tool to dismantle entrenched social hierarchies, particularly for women and marginalized groups. E. V. Ramasamy Periyar,²³ through his Self-Respect Movement, contested caste hierarchies and patriarchal norms. His writings, notably *Why Women Were Enslaved*, explored the intersectionality of caste and gender oppression, promoting rationalism and atheism as instruments for liberation from oppressive structures. Kanshi Ram, founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), expanded upon Ambedkar's vision by emphasizing political empowerment for marginalised groups. In his work *The Chamcha Age* (1982),²⁴ he critiqued the appropriation of Dalit leaders by dominant political entities and popularized the term "Bahujan," encompassing SC, ST, OBC, and religious minorities to forge a coalition against upper-caste dominance. Savitribai Phule,²⁵ recognized as India's first female teacher, collaborated with Jyotirao Phule to champion education for marginalized populations, highlighting the critical role of schooling for women and the oppressed. Contemporary activists, such as Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan,²⁶ persist in addressing caste-based oppression and advocating for social justice through grassroots movements. The implementation of these theories in political practice has sparked significant debates in India, particularly concerning affirmative action, reservation policies, and the intricate relationship between caste and class. A contentious issue has arisen around the criteria for affirmative action, with some advocating for a shift from caste-based to class-based considerations. This perspective suggests that caste is no longer a primary barrier to

²² See generally, Jyotirao Phule, *Gulamgiri [Slavery]* (Original work published in Marathi, 1873), trans. G. P. Deshpande, in *Selected Writings of Jyotirao Phule* (LeftWord Books, 2002).

²³ E. V. Ramasamy, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva, Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* 35-42 (M. S. S. Pandian, ed., Samya, 1991).

²⁴ Kanshi Ram, *The Chamcha Age: An Era of the Stooges* 5-12 (Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DS4), 1982).

²⁵ Savitribai Phule, *Selected Writings of Savitribai Phule* 14-20 (M. S. Wankhade, ed. & trans., Mountain Peak Publishers, 2008).

²⁶ See generally, Anurag Yadav, *The Dalit Uprising: Bhim Army and the Struggle for Caste Equality in India* (Juggernaut Books, 2021) & Scroll.in, "Chandrashekhar Azad Launches Political Party Named Azad Samaj Party" (15 March 2020), available at: <https://scroll.in/latest/955929> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

social mobility. However, scholars, including Ambedkar, maintain that caste remains a deeply rooted source of social inequality, with thinkers like Phule and Periyar echoing similar sentiments regarding the enduring impact of caste on India's social and economic frameworks. Another critical discourse revolves around the perceived tension between meritocracy and social justice. Critics of reservation policies argue that such measures undermine meritocratic ideals, while Dalit leaders and scholars contend that systemic barriers inherently faced by marginalized communities preclude a fair assessment of merit, which cannot be disentangled from access and opportunity. Moreover, the intersectionality of caste, gender, and religion complicates any uniform approach to social justice; for example, Dalit women confront multifaceted oppression requiring nuanced, context-specific responses. In the contemporary landscape, economic liberalization and the rise of neoliberal ideologies have prompted a reevaluation of traditional social justice frameworks. Nevertheless, Dalit voices continue to assert the ongoing reality of caste-based discrimination, emphasizing the necessity for targeted policies that address these persistent structural inequalities.

4. Affirmative Actions and Public Policies: Bridging Social Justice and Sustainable Development In India

In India, affirmative action²⁷ and public policies targeting marginalised and disadvantaged groups have been instrumental in addressing historical inequalities and fostering social justice. These initiatives are not only pivotal in their own right but also align with the broader objectives of sustainable development by integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The theoretical frameworks proposed by prominent scholars such as B.R. Ambedkar, Amartya Sen, and Vandana Shiva provide valuable insights into how these policies serve as a conduit between social justice and sustainability.

4.1 Affirmative Action and the Concept of Social Justice

Affirmative action in India, which is deeply rooted in the equality and justice principles enshrined in the Constitution, aims to uplift historically marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a principal architect of India's affirmative action policies, contended that historical injustices, particularly caste-based discrimination, necessitate

²⁷ Government of India, *The Constitution of India* (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1950), available at: <https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india> (last visited on May 15, 2025) & Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience* (Oxford University Press, 1999).



proactive measures to ensure equal opportunities and full participation for these marginalized groups. His philosophy underscores that social justice transcends mere formal equality; it requires dismantling structural inequalities that impede substantive equality. From a broader perspective, Amartya Sen's capabilities approach bolsters the rationale for affirmative action as a means to enhance the freedoms and capabilities of disadvantaged populations. By addressing structural barriers, affirmative measures empower individuals to engage fully in economic, social, and political life, thereby fostering inclusive development. In the Indian context, policies such as reservations in education and employment operationalize these theoretical insights, facilitating access to vital resources and opportunities for marginalized communities. Importantly, achieving sustainable development in India is contingent upon addressing social justice, as issues of inequality and poverty are intricately linked to environmental degradation. Consequently, affirmative actions and protective policies for weaker sections serve as essential mechanisms to bridge these gaps, promoting equity while also aligning with sustainability goals through a focus on resource conservation, health, education, and livelihood security.

4.2 Policy Initiatives Bridging Social Justice and Sustainable Development

i) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)²⁸

MGNREGA embodies the principle of the right to work while integrating sustainability through environmental conservation. This act guarantees 100 days of wage employment to rural households, focusing on creating durable assets such as water conservation structures, afforestation, and soil preservation. Scholars like Jean Drèze argue that MGNREGA promotes social justice by empowering rural workers, particularly women and marginalized communities, through dignified work and financial security. Simultaneously, its emphasis on ecological projects aligns with sustainable development by restoring degraded ecosystems and enhancing natural resource management.

ii) National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)²⁹

NRHM addresses health disparities by targeting maternal and child health, with a particular emphasis on marginalized communities. By improving healthcare access for women, children, and tribal populations, NRHM directly contributes to social justice by

²⁸ Government of India, *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005* (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2005), available at: <https://nrega.nic.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

²⁹ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *National Rural Health Mission (2005–2012): Mission Document* (Government of India, 2005), available at: <https://nhm.gov.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

³⁰ *Supra* note 6.

rectifying systemic inequities in health outcomes. Enhanced health outcomes also serve to bolster human capital, facilitating sustainable economic growth and resilience to environmental and social shocks. Amartya Sen highlights the significance of health as a critical capability, arguing that improved healthcare access empowers individuals to lead lives they value.

iii) Stand-Up India Scheme³⁰

This initiative encourages entrepreneurship among women and marginalized communities, thereby promoting economic inclusion and self-reliance. By facilitating access to credit for small businesses, the scheme addresses structural barriers that have historically excluded disadvantaged groups from economic opportunities. Vandana Shiva emphasizes that empowering marginalized communities economically not only fosters social equity but also encourages sustainable practices, as localized and community-driven enterprises tend to be more environmentally conscious and resource-efficient.

iv) Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)³¹

The provision of affordable housing under PMAY aims to guarantee shelter for economically vulnerable sections, including SCs, STs, and OBCs, while promoting sustainable urban development. The integration of eco-friendly construction practices and energy-efficient technologies within these housing projects illustrates how social justice and environmental sustainability can converge. This program reflects what urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre described as the "right to the city," advocating for inclusive urban policies that prioritize the needs of marginalized populations.

The interconnection between social justice and sustainable development in India aligns with broader theoretical frameworks. B.R. Ambedkar's emphasis on substantive equality resonates with the necessity for targeted policies that empower historically marginalized groups, ensuring that no one is left behind. Amartya Sen's capabilities approach underscores the importance of expanding freedoms and opportunities for all, asserting that development must be evaluated based on its impact on individuals' real capabilities. Furthermore, the principles of sustainability espoused by ecological economist Herman Daly reinforce the imperative of integrating social justice with ecological conservation. Daly posits that sustainable development must guarantee a fair distribution of resources while respecting ecological limits, aligning seamlessly with India's commitment

³¹ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Housing for All (Urban)* (Government of India, 2015), available at: <https://pmay-urban.gov.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).



to integrating livelihoods, health, and environmental conservation within its policy landscape.

4. Challenges and Pathways Forward

Despite the notable strides made through affirmative actions and protective policies aimed at bridging the gap between social justice and sustainability, several challenges persist. Issues such as inadequate implementation, corruption, and resource constraints can significantly undermine the effectiveness of these initiatives. Furthermore, the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender necessitates more nuanced and targeted approaches to ensure that the most marginalized communities genuinely benefit from these policies. To enhance the impact of these measures, it is essential for policymakers to emphasize participatory governance, ensuring that marginalized groups have a meaningful voice in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Additionally, integrating climate resilience and adaptive strategies into social justice frameworks will be critical for addressing the escalating challenges posed by climate change. In the Indian context, affirmative actions and protective policies have played a pivotal role in promoting social justice while simultaneously advancing sustainable development goals. Programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), Stand-Up India, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) exemplify how targeted measures can effectively address both historical inequalities and ecological concerns. Grounded in the theoretical insights of prominent scholars such as B.R. Ambedkar, Amartya Sen, and Vandana Shiva, these initiatives showcase the potential of inclusive policies to foster a more equitable and sustainable society. By continuing to refine and expand these efforts, India can establish a pathway that reconciles social equity with economic growth and environmental conservation.

5. Current Inclusive Government Policies: Steps Towards Sustainability

The social and economic landscape of India has been significantly influenced by a

³² Ministry of Finance, *Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)* (Government of India, 2014), available at: <https://pmjdy.gov.in> (last visited on May 10, 2025).

³³ Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), *Atal Pension Yojana* (Government of India, 2015), available at: <https://www.npscra.nsdl.co.in> (last visited on May 10, 2025).

³⁴ Ministry of Finance, *Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY)* (Government of India, 2015), available at: <https://jansuraksha.gov.in> (last visited on May 10, 2025).

³⁵ Ministry of Finance, *Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY)* (Government of India, 2015), available at: <https://jansuraksha.gov.in> (last visited on May 10, 2025).

series of affirmative actions and protective policies designed to empower marginalized and underprivileged sections of society. The current Indian Government has launched several initiatives, including the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY),³² the Atal Pension Yojana (APY),³³ the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY),³⁴ the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY),³⁵ and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY). These programs reflect targeted efforts to promote financial inclusion, social protection, and economic empowerment, aligning with broader sustainable development objectives by addressing poverty, inequality, and vulnerability. The PMJJBY and PMSBY are two insurance schemes specifically designed to provide affordable life and accident insurance to low-income groups. PMJJBY offers life insurance coverage, while PMSBY focuses on accidental death and disability coverage. By safeguarding vulnerable households against catastrophic financial losses, these schemes enhance resilience and mitigate poverty traps. Theoretical perspectives on social safety nets, as proposed by economist Joseph Stiglitz, emphasize the crucial role of such measures in fostering economic stability and reducing inequality. Stiglitz posits that social protection policies create a safety net that enables individuals to take entrepreneurial risks, thereby contributing to broader economic growth. The integration of technology and e-governance has further amplified the reach and effectiveness of PMJJBY and PMSBY. The implementation of digital payment systems, mobile applications, and Aadhaar-enabled verification has streamlined the enrollment and claims processes, ensuring that benefits are efficiently delivered to intended beneficiaries. This technological advancement aligns with the principles of good governance, promoting accountability, transparency, and inclusivity.

6. Economic Empowerment Through Credit Access

Launched in 2015, the PMMY aims to provide collateral-free loans to small and micro-entrepreneurs, with a particular focus on women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backwards Classes (OBC) entrepreneurs. By addressing the structural barriers to credit access, PMMY fosters economic inclusion and self-reliance, contributing to social justice by empowering marginalised groups to actively participate in economic activities and reducing their dependence on exploitative systems. The arguments presented by Vandana Shiva regarding localised and sustainable economic practices resonate with the objectives of PMMY, as she emphasizes that empowering marginalized communities economically not only promotes social justice but also encourages environmentally sustainable practices. Small-scale enterprises often rely on local resources and traditional knowledge, which aligns with Shiva's advocacy for sustainable



development. Moreover, the integration of PMMY with digital platforms has facilitated the disbursement and monitoring of loans, thereby reducing bureaucratic delays and enhancing transparency. The effective use of technology ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, minimizing the risk of misuse while maximizing the social impact of these initiatives. Through such strategic advancements, India can continue to pave the way towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

7. Bridging Social Justice And Sustainable Development: The Role of E-Governance In India

The convergence of social justice and sustainable development is increasingly recognized as critical for fostering inclusive growth. Affirmative actions and protective policies that ensure access to financial resources, social protection, and economic opportunities empower marginalised communities, enabling them to break free from the constraints of poverty and actively contribute to societal progress. This empowerment is closely aligned with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal -01 (No Poverty),³⁶ Goal-08 (Decent Work and Economic Growth),³⁷ and Goal -10 (Reduced Inequalities).³⁸ The integration of technology and e-governance plays a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of these policies. By leveraging digital platforms, biometric authentication, and mobile connectivity, e-governance initiatives address traditional barriers to service delivery, including geographic isolation and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Furthermore, e-governance promotes accountability and transparency, ensuring that resources effectively reach their intended beneficiaries. This is particularly relevant in light of critiques from scholars such as Jean Drèze,³⁹ who have highlighted the inefficiencies of welfare programs. However, despite the substantial progress made, challenges remain. Issues such as a lack of awareness, digital literacy gaps, and

³⁶ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015), available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

³⁷ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015), available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

³⁸ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015), available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

³⁹ See generally, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁴⁰ National Informatics Centre, *NICNET and DISNIC: Initiatives in E-Governance Infrastructure* (Government of India, 1987), available at: <https://www.nic.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

⁴¹ Department of Electronics and Information Technology, *National E-Governance Plan (NeGP): Approach and Key Components* (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Government of India, 2006), available at: <https://www.meity.gov.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).

infrastructural limitations in remote areas hinder the full realization of these initiatives. Addressing these challenges necessitates targeted efforts to enhance digital inclusion, strengthen infrastructure, and improve financial literacy. Additionally, fostering greater community participation and establishing feedback mechanisms can ensure that these programs remain responsive to local needs. In the context of India, e-governance—defined as the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by government entities to deliver services and facilitate communication—has transformed traditional governance systems. The evolution of e-governance in India can be traced back to foundational initiatives like the National Satellite-Based Computer Network (NICENET)⁴⁰ in 1987 and the District Information System of the National Informatics Centre (DISNIC). These initiatives laid the groundwork for a comprehensive e-governance framework, culminating in the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)⁴¹ introduced in 2006. The NeGP aimed to enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and transparency of government services. Among the notable initiatives stemming from the NeGP is the Digital India initiative, launched in 2015, which seeks to empower citizens through a robust digital infrastructure and the digital delivery of government services. Key components of this initiative include the Aadhaar biometric identification system, which facilitates identity verification and direct benefit transfers, and the myGov platform, which engages citizens in policymaking processes. Other significant tools include the Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG),⁴² which centralises access to government services, and the Digital Locker, which allows citizens to securely store important documents. The implementation of the PayGov payment gateway and the Mobile Seva platform further exemplifies the commitment to making government services more accessible and user-friendly. In summary, India's e-governance framework is not merely a technological advancement; it catalyses promoting inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity. As these initiatives continue to evolve, they hold the potential to further integrate sustainable practices and amplify the voices of marginalized communities, ultimately creating a governance model that embodies the principles of equity, justice, and sustainability.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the intricate relationship between sustainable development and social justice in India underscores the necessity for a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized communities. This paper has

⁴² Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, *UMANG: Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance* (Government of India, 2017), available at: <https://www.umang.gov.in> (last visited on May 15, 2025).



elucidated how theoretical frameworks, particularly those articulated by thinkers such as Amartya Sen, John Rawls, and B.R. Ambedkar, provide valuable insights into the need for policies that not only promote economic growth but also prioritize equity and environmental sustainability. The examination of various initiatives, including MGNREGA, NRHM, the Stand-Up India Scheme, and PMAY, reveals that while significant strides have been made, persistent gaps in implementation and systemic barriers remain. The integration of e-governance within these frameworks has demonstrated potential in enhancing transparency, accountability, and access to resources, thereby empowering marginalized groups. However, for these policies to achieve their intended impact, it is crucial to emphasize participatory governance that incorporates the voices of those directly affected. Moreover, addressing the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender is essential for crafting nuanced strategies that ensure no community is left behind. As India navigates the complexities of development in an era marked by rapid environmental changes and socio-economic disparities, a concerted effort to weave social justice into the fabric of sustainable development policies is imperative. By fostering interdisciplinary collaborations and embracing inclusive practices, India can pave the way toward a more equitable future that harmonizes the principles of justice and sustainability, ultimately contributing to the global discourse on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The path forward lies in recognizing the intrinsic value of every individual and ensuring that development policies reflect a commitment to dignity, empowerment, and ecological stewardship for generations to come.