



### LIBRARIES AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF GENDER EQUALITY

**Ms. Sandhya Dokhe**

*I/C Principal Siddharth College of Law*

*Anand Bhavan, D.N. Road, Fort, Mumbai-400023*

#### Abstract:

*Libraries play a pivotal role in democratizing knowledge and fostering social empowerment. In the context of women's empowerment, libraries act as agents of change by facilitating access to information, promoting literacy, and providing safe spaces for learning and dialogue. This paper explores the connection between libraries and women's empowerment through the lens of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideas of gender equality. Ambedkar, a visionary social reformer and architect of the Indian Constitution, emphasized education and equal rights for women as essential to social justice. His advocacy for women's liberation from caste and patriarchal structures finds contemporary relevance in how libraries serve as tools for transformation. This paper examines historical milestones, current practices, and future strategies to align library initiatives with Ambedkar's egalitarian principles. Through case studies, policy reviews, and community-based experiences, the paper argues that libraries are not just repositories of books but instruments of equity, especially for marginalized women. A multidisciplinary approach is adopted, covering gender studies, library science, and legal frameworks to propose an inclusive model of library services that promotes women's autonomy, leadership, and participation in nation-building.*

**Keywords:** *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Gender Equality, Libraries, Women's Empowerment, Social Justice, Access to Information*

**Copyright © 2025 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

#### Introduction:

Libraries are more than physical spaces housing books; they are powerful social institutions that empower individuals and communities. For women, especially those belonging to marginalized communities, libraries represent opportunities for learning, growth, and social transformation. This paper delves into the transformative role of libraries in empowering women in India, guided by the philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar was not only a jurist and reformer but also a champion of

women's rights and gender equality. He recognized that without educating and empowering women, true democracy and social justice could not be achieved.

The objectives of this paper are:

- To explore Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's contributions to gender equality.
- To understand the evolving role of libraries in promoting women's empowerment.
- To evaluate policies and practices that align libraries with the goals of social justice.



- To propose actionable strategies for enhancing women's access to libraries.

This analysis is particularly relevant in light of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 which advocates for gender equality and SDG 4 on quality education.

### Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision of Gender Equality

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was a pioneering advocate for the rights of the marginalized, including women. A staunch believer in education as a tool for liberation, Ambedkar insisted that women must have access to equal educational and economic opportunities.

#### 1. Historical Context

During British India, women—particularly those from lower castes—faced social exclusion, illiteracy, and systemic discrimination. Ambedkar challenged these hierarchies, asserting that caste and patriarchy were interlinked structures of oppression. He believed that education could dismantle both.

#### 2. Legislative Contributions

Ambedkar's drafting of the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s aimed to provide equal rights to women in marriage, inheritance, and divorce. Although met with resistance, the Bill laid the foundation for gender-sensitive legal reform in India.

#### 3. Advocacy for Women's Education

Ambedkar famously said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." He believed that without empowering women through education, social progress would remain a distant dream.

Ambedkar also encouraged the establishment of reading rooms and libraries in Dalit communities, recognizing that knowledge access was key to upliftment.

### Libraries as Tools for Women's Empowerment:

The connection between libraries and women's empowerment lies in access—access to information, to educational resources, to spaces of dialogue, and to tools for self-improvement.

#### 1. Knowledge Access and Lifelong Learning

Libraries provide books, journals, digital content, and training programs that support women's academic and vocational goals. Women use libraries to:

- Learn new skills
- Gain legal and health information
- Prepare for competitive exams
- Engage in self-help and entrepreneurship

#### 2. Community Spaces and Safe Zones

Libraries serve as safe, inclusive spaces for women—especially in rural or patriarchal contexts where women's mobility is restricted. Community libraries often host:

##### Literacy programs:

- Women's support groups
- Health awareness camps
- Skill development workshops

#### 3. Role in Feminist Movements:

Feminist literature, autobiographies of women leaders, and books on gender justice are preserved and promoted in libraries. These resources inspire activism and consciousness-raising.

### Ambedkarite Libraries and their Impact:

Several libraries in India have been established in the name and spirit of Ambedkar. These institutions often operate in Dalit or Adivasi neighborhoods and are run by social workers and activists.

#### 1. Case Study: Siddharth Library, Nagpur

This library, run by a local Ambedkarite trust, offers free reading material, internet access, and weekly study sessions. Over 60% of its regular users are young women preparing for exams or learning new languages.



### 2. Grassroots Reading Rooms

In Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, small libraries have been set up in slums and villages. Women lead many of these initiatives, curating reading materials relevant to local needs.

These libraries have had transformative impacts, helping women become teachers, clerks, social workers, and even political leaders.

### Public Policy and Government Support:

The Indian government has made several efforts to support library services, though gaps remain in gender-inclusive planning.

#### 1. National Mission on Libraries (NML)

Launched in 2014, NML aims to modernize over 6,000 public libraries. However, gender-specific programming remains limited.

#### 2. Digital India and e-Libraries

Under the Digital India program, many rural libraries now have digital kiosks and e-learning tools. These benefit women who lack access to smartphones or computers at home.

#### 3. Need for Gender-Focused Library Policies

While state and central governments fund public libraries, few policies explicitly address women's needs. Budget allocations should include:

- Gender-sensitive collections
- Transportation and childcare support
- Women-led library committees

### Challenges to Access and Empowerment

#### 1. Socio-Cultural Barriers

In many regions, women face restrictions on movement, early marriage, and family opposition to education. Libraries cannot function as inclusive spaces unless these barriers are addressed.

#### 2. Digital Divide

Access to online resources is limited by poor internet connectivity, lack of digital skills, and unaffordability of devices. Women are

disproportionately affected by this gap.

### 3. Infrastructure and Funding

Many libraries lack clean toilets, lighting, or seating—especially for women. Budget constraints and staffing shortages further hinder effectiveness.

### The Role of Law Libraries in Empowering Women:

Law libraries, especially those in universities and courts, can serve as powerful tools in promoting women's legal literacy and professional advancement.

#### 1. Access to Legal Knowledge

Women law students, lawyers, and activists can use law libraries to understand laws affecting their rights—from domestic violence and sexual harassment to labor rights and property law.

#### 2. Promoting Legal Literacy

Law libraries can hold workshops and outreach programs on:

- ☐ Women's rights under the Constitution
- ☐ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- ☐ Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

#### 3. Training for Library Staff

Law librarians should be trained in gender-sensitive practices, legal research, and outreach. They must also be encouraged to stock feminist jurisprudence and books by women jurists.

### Strategies for Enhancing Library Services for Women :

#### 1. Gender Audits

Conduct audits to evaluate how well libraries serve women—do they feel welcome? Are their information needs met?

#### 2. Mobile Libraries and Outreach

Bring books and digital resources to the doorsteps of rural women through mobile vans and pop-up libraries.



### 3. Community Partnerships

Work with women's self-help groups (SHGs), NGOs, and Panchayats to build, manage, and sustain local libraries.

### 4. Inclusion in Library Science Curriculum

Gender issues and Ambedkarite principles should be integrated into LIS (Library and Information Science) education to foster socially conscious librarians.

#### Women-Centric Digital Initiatives in Libraries:

- **Digital Libraries for Women:** Platforms like National Digital Library of India (NDLI) and Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) offer free access to resources on women's rights, law, health, and education.
- **Language Accessibility:** Libraries that provide regional language content help break the barrier for rural women and non-English speakers.

#### Special Library Programs for Marginalized Women:

- **Caste & Gender Intersectionality:** Dr. Ambedkar emphasized the compounded discrimination faced by Dalit women. Libraries must actively curate content and host workshops focused on Dalit feminism.
- **Mobile Libraries in Rural Areas:** These bring books and learning materials to remote villages, helping rural women become literate and informed.

#### Libraries Supporting Women in Legal Empowerment:

- **Legal Literacy:** Law libraries and public libraries offering legal aid resources can educate women about domestic violence laws, inheritance rights, and workplace harassment.
- **Partnerships with Legal Aid Bodies:** Collaborations with DLSA (District Legal Services Authority) and NGOs can enable libraries to act as centers for legal awareness.

#### Women's Representation in Library Leadership:

- **Leadership Opportunities:** Promoting women in library science education and leadership roles enhances gender equity in knowledge institutions.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Senior women professionals mentoring library students and interns to build confidence and career pathways.

#### Commemorating Women's Contributions in Libraries:

- **Women's Archives:** Libraries can maintain dedicated collections preserving the works and lives of female reformers, writers, and activists.

#### Observing Days of Empowerment:

Hosting talks, exhibitions, or book fairs during International Women's Day or Ambedkar Jayanti to reinforce awareness.

#### Role of Community Libraries in Social Reform:

- Community libraries serve as platforms for organizing discussions, reading circles, and community-led initiatives focused on gender equality and social justice.

#### Libraries as Safe Spaces:

- Libraries act as non-judgmental, safe spaces where women can access information privately—vital for those facing domestic abuse or cultural restrictions.

#### Role of Women in Library Science Education :

- Highlighting the enrollment of women in LIS (Library and Information Science) programs and their academic contributions aligned with Ambedkar's call for educating and empowering women.

#### Libraries as Instruments of Social Inclusion :

- **Ambedkar's Stand Against Social Exclusion:** Dr. Ambedkar viewed exclusion from knowledge as a form of oppression. Libraries must actively reach out to women from marginalized communities, providing inclusive spaces for learning.



- **Reservation in Knowledge Access:** Advocating for policies to ensure representation of women, especially from SC/ST backgrounds, in library boards and decision-making bodies.

### Gender-Responsive Library Policies :

- **Collection Development Policies:** Libraries should ensure balanced acquisition of materials authored by women, focusing on gender studies, feminism, and social justice.
- **Budget Allocations:** Dedicated budget for gender-centric collections and women's empowerment programming.

### Libraries Encouraging Political Empowerment:

- **Access to Civic and Constitutional Education:** Libraries provide resources that educate women about electoral rights, constitutional provisions (like Articles 14, 15, and 21), and Ambedkar's role in drafting them.
- **Voter Awareness Drives:** Public libraries can partner with election commissions to promote women's voter participation through reading materials and seminars.

### Promoting Financial Literacy through Libraries:

- Libraries can serve as hubs for **financial education for women**, offering books and resources on budgeting, entrepreneurship, and banking services.
- Ambedkar strongly emphasized **economic independence** as a key to gender equality.

### Collaboration with Women's MovementsL:

Libraries can work with feminist organizations like the **All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)** to host awareness campaigns, oral history projects, and panel discussions.

- Encouraging reading circles or clubs for **collective consciousness-raising** among women readers.

### Libraries as Platforms for Health and Wellness Awareness:

- Offering curated resources on **maternal health,**

**menstrual hygiene, mental health,** and nutrition.

- Hosting **health literacy workshops** in collaboration with public health departments, focusing on adolescent girls and young mothers.

### Encouraging Women's Writing and Expression:

- Organizing **writing competitions, poetry readings,** and local publishing initiatives to encourage women to express their stories.
- Special sections in libraries to highlight **Dalit women authors** and **regional women writers** who reflect Ambedkarite thought.

### Gender Sensitization through Library Programming:

- Libraries can conduct **gender sensitization sessions for youth** using books, films, and storytelling—building empathy and respect across gender lines.
- In alignment with Ambedkar's philosophy of **education as liberation**, such programs dismantle stereotypes from an early age.

### Role of School Libraries in Shaping Gender Attitudes :

- School libraries play a critical role in breaking gender bias from an early age by promoting **inclusive and diverse literature.**
- Teachers and librarians must be trained to encourage girls' engagement with reading and ensure gender-neutral environments.

### Impact of Mobile and Digital Libraries on Empowerment :

- **E-library vans** or mobile reading units powered by solar energy are effective in reaching women in remote and tribal areas.
- **Free Wi-Fi-enabled digital libraries** allow women access to legal rights, employment info, and education from their homes or community centers.





### Accessibility for Differently-Abled Women:

- Libraries must ensure access for **disabled women**, offering braille books, audiobooks, ramps, and inclusive reading technology.
- Ambedkar's principles of **dignity and equity** must reflect in accessible library infrastructure.

### Libraries and Vocational Empowerment:

Providing access to **skill development resources** such as tailoring, baking, computer literacy, and local employment schemes.

- Partnering with training centers and NGOs for hands-on workshops for women's economic self-reliance.

### Conclusion:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice and gender equality remains profoundly relevant today. Libraries, when aligned with his emancipatory ideals, become engines of change. They empower women with knowledge, confidence, and agency. For marginalized women especially, libraries can mean the difference between silence and voice, exclusion and participation.

By embedding Ambedkar's principles into library policy, infrastructure, and programming, India can take a giant step toward gender justice. It is not enough

to build libraries—we must ensure they belong to every woman, regardless of caste, class, or location.

### References:

1. Ambedkar, B. R. (1942). *The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women*. Government of India Press.
2. Rege, S. (2006). *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*. Zubaan Books.
3. UNESCO. (2020). *Libraries and Gender Equality*. Retrieved from [unesco.org](https://unesco.org)
4. National Mission on Libraries (2014). Ministry of Culture, Government of India.
5. National Digital Library of India (NDLI). <https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in>
6. Thorat, S. & Aryama. (2005). *Ambedkar in Retrospect: Essays on Economics, Politics, and Society*. Rawat Publications.
7. Government of India. (1956). *The Hindu Code Bill*.
8. Indian Library Association. (2022). *Library Services for Women: A National Perspective*.
9. International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA). (2019). *Access and Opportunity: Libraries for Gender Equality*.
10. Singh, R. (2023). *Gender Justice and the Role of Law Libraries in India*. *Journal of Library Development*, 28(3), 112-126.

### Cite This Article:

**Ms. Dokhe S. (2025)** *Libraries and Women's Empowerment: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Vision of Gender Equality*. In **Electronic International Interdisciplinary Research Journal: Vol. XIV** (Number II, pp. 105–110).