



DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR'S ECONOMIC WRITINGS AND THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN DISSEMINATING ECONOMIC KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract:

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is predominantly recognized as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a key figure in Dalit emancipation. Dr. Ambedkar's scholarship is characterized by its interdisciplinarity, encompassing areas such as law, education, sociology, religion, anthropology, linguistics, women's rights, and water and land conservation. His contributions to economic thought in both pre- and post-independence India are substantial, with his progressive ideas addressing the intersections of caste and the economy, land reform, labor rights, and critiques of capitalism. Nevertheless, despite the profundity of his economic theories, Ambedkar's contributions remain relatively marginalized within Indian academic discourse and have yet to be fully integrated into mainstream economic policies. This paper examines the relevance of Dr. Ambedkar's writings and underscores the critical role of academic libraries in collecting, preserving, promoting, and disseminating his work to foster inclusive social and academic scholarship.

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Introduction:

Bharat Ratna, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is renowned as a principal architect of the Indian Constitution and an inspiring figure in the movement for the social upliftment of marginalized communities in India. There are at least 14 universities in India named after Dr. Ambedkar. A visionary leader who shaped modern India, Dr. Ambedkar's profound contributions extended significantly into the realm of economics, although this aspect of his scholarship is often overshadowed by his extensive political and social reform activities. His academic foundation in economics was exceptionally strong, marked by doctoral degrees earned from esteemed international institutions: Columbia University in the United States and the London School of Economics in the United

Kingdom. Dr. Ambedkar authored numerous scholarly works critically examining various facets of the Indian economy. His research and writings encompassed diverse areas, including foundational economic principles, public finance, agricultural economics, labour economics, and a pioneering analysis of the economic underpinnings and consequences of the caste system.

Dr. Ambedkar's economic thought was a rigorous evaluation of economic policies through the prism of social justice and the requirements of a welfare state. His analyses consistently focused on developing frameworks and advocating for policies aimed at the economic emancipation and upliftment of the historically oppressed and downtrodden sections of Indian society. Academic libraries have a significant



role in ensuring that his writings reach new generations of students, researchers, and policymakers.

Dr. Ambedkar's Economic literature

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's doctoral research explored into significant aspects of India's economic history under British rule. His Ph.D. thesis, submitted to Columbia University, was titled *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*. Within this work, he meticulously analyzed the development and operation of fiscal policies, tracing them from the era of the East India Company through to the period of direct British Crown administration. A key component of this research involved a critical assessment of colonial economic strategies and their detrimental impact on the Indian economy.

Subsequently, for his D.Sc. (Doctor of Science) degree from the London School of Economics, Dr. Ambedkar authored the thesis *The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution*. This influential work presented a sharp critique of the prevailing monetary policies governing the Indian currency. Analyzing the historical instability of the rupee, he controversially recommended the adoption of the gold standard as a mechanism to achieve stability for the Indian currency system.

As the Labour Minister in the Viceroy's Executive Council (1942-1946), this individual spearheaded significant labour reforms predicated on principles of social justice and economic equity.¹ His tenure was marked by the initiation of foundational regulations addressing critical aspects of the industrial workforce. These included the establishment of rules mandating minimum wages, ensuring equal remuneration for male and female workers engaged in work of equal value, the introduction of bonus provisions, and the provision of maternity leave benefits for women employees. Recognizing the exclusionary practices prevalent within industries that marginalized certain

segments of the population, he formulated protective regulations aimed at fostering inclusivity and safeguarding the rights of all labourers. His policy orientation consistently emphasized a holistic developmental paradigm, explicitly integrating the objectives of social and economic equality as integral components of national progress.

Ambedkar consistently articulated that the *varnashrama* and the caste system constitute a fundamental obstruction and a moral transgression against Indian society. His seminal works, *Annihilation of Caste* and *The Untouchables*, explain the mechanisms and detrimental effects of this social stratification, advocating for its eradication. Indian economic landscape is not merely characterized by a binary of rich and poor but is further stratified and complicated by the embeddedness of caste hierarchies. He famously stated that the division of labor in India is not simply occupational specialization (*shramache vibhajan*) but a hierarchical division of laborers (*shramikanche vibhajan*). Ambedkar's economic vision was fundamentally rooted in the redistribution of economic rights, emphasizing principles of justice and advocating for comprehensive land reforms to benefit all sections of society. A central tenet of his economic thought was the dismantling of feudal and caste-based systems of exploitation, which he viewed as intrinsically linked to economic inequality and social injustice.

It is indeed a critical observation that despite the profound and multifaceted economic thought of Babasaheb Ambedkar, his contributions have historically received limited attention within the mainstream economic curricula of Indian universities. The theories of western economist such as Keynes, Smith and Marx have dominant in educational system. This marginalization represents a significant lacuna in the Indian education. Therefore, the policymakers have a great responsibility to integrate the economic



ideas of Dr. Ambedkar and other significant Indian economic thinkers into the mainstream curriculum.

The Pivotal Role of Academic Libraries in Disseminating Ambedkar's Economic Thought

Academic libraries, as crucial institutions for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, hold a significant responsibility in promoting awareness and understanding of Babasaheb Ambedkar's profound economic thought. Their role extends beyond mere custodianship of information to active engagement in facilitating scholarly inquiry and public discourse. Academic libraries serve as vital repositories of research-based information for scholars, educators, and students. They act as mediators in scholarly communication, connecting users with relevant resources. However, a critical gap exists in the holdings of many academic libraries concerning the comprehensive works of Ambedkar.

To rectify this, libraries must proactively undertake the task of **systematically collecting and preserving** Ambedkar's writings, speeches, and other relevant materials in both print and digital formats. This includes acquiring his published books, articles, government reports he was involved in, and any other primary source documents. Curating a robust collection of his economic writings is essential to ensure sustained access for current and future generations of scholars interested in his contributions. The availability of digital collections on platforms like veliveda.com and the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Foundation provides valuable starting points for libraries to build upon and integrate into their own digital repositories, enhancing accessibility and discoverability.

Academic libraries can play a proactive role in **supporting teaching and research** on Ambedkar's economic ideas. This involves curating course materials for educators, encompassing not only his major works but also relevant secondary literature,

research articles analyzing his economic theories, newspaper articles providing contemporary context, government publications related to his policy recommendations, and even archival clippings. By compiling such resources, libraries can significantly ease the burden on educators and provide students with a comprehensive understanding of Ambedkar's economic vision and its enduring relevance to modern India.

Academic libraries can function as dynamic spaces for **intellectual engagement and public education** on Ambedkar's economic contributions. Hosting talks, exhibitions, and discussion forums focused on his economic theories can foster interdisciplinary dialogue and encourage critical engagement with contemporary socio-economic issues through an Ambedkarite lens. These activities can bring together scholars from various disciplines, policymakers, and the wider community, promoting a broader understanding of his ideas and their potential application in addressing current challenges. By actively promoting such intellectual exchange, libraries can transform into hubs for critical thinking and social change inspired by Ambedkar's vision of social and economic equality. Ambedkar wrote in English and Marathi. Libraries can promote translations of his work into regional languages to make his ideas accessible to a broader audience. This step is vital in democratizing knowledge across linguistic and social boundaries.

Challenges and Recommendations for Disseminating Ambedkar's Economic Thought through Academic Libraries :

Academic libraries, while central to knowledge dissemination, face specific challenges in effectively promoting the economic thought of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Addressing these obstacles is crucial to ensure his significant contributions reach a wider audience of students, scholars, and the public.



Challenges:

- Academic librarians are often heavily engaged in providing routine services to their users. Allocating sufficient time and resources for the dedicated task of identifying, acquiring, and curating a comprehensive collection of Ambedkar's works can be challenging amidst these regular duties.
- The irregular and often limited publication of Dr. Ambedkar's writings, particularly by government agencies, poses a significant hurdle for libraries to build collections.
- Most of the students and even scholars within economics remain unaware of the depth and relevance of Ambedkar's economic ideas. This lack of exposure limits demand and consequently, the perceived priority for libraries to invest in these collections.

Recommendations:

- Libraries should strategically integrate collection development related to Ambedkar's works through specific staff or team. This could involve dedicated time allocation and professional development opportunities focused on identifying and acquiring relevant materials.
- Collaboration with scholarly associations and Ambedkarite organizations, should actively advocate for the consistent and widespread publication of Dr. Ambedkar's complete works by both state and central government agencies. This includes ensuring affordability and accessibility through various formats.
- Universities should proactively incorporate Ambedkar's economic thought into their curricula with interdisciplinary approach. Libraries can support to identify relevant materials and develop course-specific resources.
- Funding agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, should prioritize initiatives aimed at digitizing all of Dr. Ambedkar's writings and

making them widely accessible through open-access platforms and library repositories. This would overcome geographical limitations and enhance discoverability.

- Libraries should actively organize seminars, conferences, workshops, and exhibitions highlighting Ambedkar's economic contributions. Also develop specialized digital resources, such as annotated bibliographies, research guides, and online exhibitions, dedicated to Ambedkar's economic thought. These resources can serve as valuable entry points for researchers and students.

Conclusion:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's economic writings remain a rich, underexplored resource for understanding India's socio-economic challenges. His blend of economic analysis and social justice makes his work uniquely relevant in today's world, where economic inequality and social exclusion still persist. Academic libraries have a profound responsibility and opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap by preserving and promoting Ambedkar's economic legacy. By doing so, they can help cultivate a more equitable, informed, and inclusive academic environment.

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