

Free Libraries Zindabad

Quarterly Round up of Network News

Issue 2 | Apr- Jun 22

ALL ARE WELCOME

Library is the safest space we know. Do we like to go to the library again and again? Why does the library belong to the reader and become their own? A library opens a door to its heart to welcome you and opens a window to look at the outer world

Does the reader of my library feel welcome and safe in my library? To welcome and create a safe space we follow one principle i.e., all are welcome and we welcome all "pyar se" or "moromere" (with love). FLN librarians believe in welcoming everyone pyar se. These simple words mean breaking hierarchies and welcoming everyone as they are. A library is a truly inclusive space when a reader is not denied access on the basis of their education, gender, caste, religion, class, race, ability, sexuality, etc. At the same time, a library does not forget to make policies for child safety. When we say we welcome people pyar se it is not just child-appropriate behaviour or body language but understanding every child on the ground of human rights and creating a space of equal opportunity.

True inclusiveness starts with a vision for the library. This vision must be visible, in small ways and big - a banner or poster in the library about child safety, open shelving practices, a diverse collection, and daily practice of library work with readers which breaks power structures consciously.

In the current times the Library is one place which still holds the hope for our people to see what a true inclusive, democratic space should look like. So why not welcome everyone pyar se? Let's think aloud.

Rituparna

Project Kitape Katha Koi

Core Group Member, Free Libraries Network

June 22

WE ARE FLN!

FLN members work to build, operate and propagate free libraries that welcome all without prejudice of caste, class, religion, gender & sexual identity, or disability. We strive to ensure free access to books for all and nurture new readers, who may not have the means to do so themselves.

Website- <https://www.fln.org.in/>.

Twitter [@FreeLibNetwork](#)

Insta: [@freelibrariesnetworkfln](#)

Facebook: [@freelibrariesnetworkFLN](#)

Email:

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FLN Events and Workshop

Workshop | Social Media 2 Apr 22

This workshop was facilitated by Bansa community library and attended by 10 member libraries. Jatin Lalit Singh and Purnima Rao highlighted the benefits of social media outreach and self-documentation. The workshop began with an exercise encouraging members to reflect on

their desired outcomes from social media. Practical exercises such as creating bios and model posts helped members practice their skills and get feedback. Members discussed how they can and should amplify each others voices. The session covered important points like safety and privacy on platforms, including information on cybercrimes. Tools like amazon wishlists to facilitate book donations were also discussed. Social Media can be a great tool for advocacy and the session helped participants in using all tools available



For more information contact Jatin at Jatinlalit@bansacommunitylibrary.com

Publishers Connect | Tulika Books 14 May 22



In this session with over 60 participants, Radhika Menon (Publishing Director Tulika), Deepa Nayar (Senior editor) and Thilak (Sales) spoke to FLN about their 26 year journey of publishing books in 9 Indian languages and their engagement with libraries in India. The webinar was aimed at understanding the publishing landscape and forging a relationship with publishers as stakeholders in the free library movement.

Several library practitioners shared their experiences of read-alouds with Tulika books, the popularity of some books and how these have helped them navigate difficult conversations with readers. The Q and A session was active as library practitioners pushed Tulika to think about reading cultures and shared what was missing in the books, such as a lack of a true reflection of lived realities of many communities in India. Unavailability of some titles in specific languages and books being out of stock was also a common concern from the participants. Despite the need and a constant demand for books in various languages in India, Tulika books cited costs, technical difficulties in publishing reprint, requirement for multiple translations as obstacles that keep them from fully

meeting these demands. It is clear that publishers as well as library practitioners need to reflect on bridging this gap and work towards inclusivity in literature when collaborating on the common goal for access to books and reading for all.

Other FLN News

FLN'S Legal Identity

As on 2 June 22, Free Libraries Network FLN - is a registered society. FLN has a legal identity and can now talk to publishers, governments and other stakeholders as an organisation. Of course, FLN will now have compliance responsibilities too. Watch this space and the whatsapp group for details for the first general body meeting.



FLN is talking!



FLN has been advocating for free libraries and a robust public library system by engaging in conversations with each other, state governments and other stakeholders. FLN has been using all forums to stress the "Free" in library movements and introduce the idea of a library curriculum. Success stories of FLN member-libraries demonstrate why and how community ownership work. A round up of some (not all!) advocacy efforts in the last quarter:

- **Education South Asia Seminar series:** Organised in collaboration with South Asian Studies and University of Oxford, Purnima Rao (FLN core group) represented FLN and shared experiences and strategies to deal with special challenges for first-generation learners and made new library friends from India and South Asia.
- **Maharashtra and Karnataka Policy and Legislation:** FLN participated in two roundtable discussions, hosted by Vidhi Centre for Policy Research on these states' library legislation and public libraries. FLN Libraries like Bansa Community Library, Reading Stars India, Haadibadi participated in the Karnataka session, while Purnima Rao represented the FLN collective at Maharashtra and shared ground-level stories on what worked to create thriving libraries and what did not. They represented different models of library ownership and management. FLN members urged the state and other stakeholders to keep community ownership (or at least involvement) and free access at the forefront for public library policy. The two sessions revealed the lack of support for librarians, the lopsided & exorbitant investment in digital libraries and bureaucratic processes that prevent public libraries from being accessible.
- **Gram Panchayat Libraries & Information Centers, Karnataka:** School for Democracy (SFD), The Community Library Project (TCLP) and Purnima Rao were part of a consultation with Ms. Uma Mahadevan, Principal Secy, Panchayati Raj Dept., Karnataka, They submitted recommendations for strengthening Gram Panchayat libraries including baseline standards to promote inclusivity, widened the meaning of library services and advocated for community involvement.

- **Yuva Samvad:** In a session organized by National Alliance of Peoples Movements (NAPM), on Youth Led Community Libraries as shared learning spaces, Seemanchal Library Foundation, Project Kitape Katha Koi, SFD and TCLP discussed the role free libraries play in strengthening democracy and our fundamental right to equality.

Books For All Program



'Books For All' (BFA) program sends free books with free shipping to FLN member-libraries. So far this program has sent over 12,000 books to libraries in need, since it began in 2019. This program is spearheaded by FLN core group members- The Kutumb Foundation (Qissagadh) and The Community Library Project. FLN leverages its relationships with publishers and individual donors to collect books. These books are carefully curated (based on language, theme, age of average library user) and mostly brand new. Each beneficiary-library is entitled to 80-100 excellent titles or between 1-2 book boxes (depending on availability). They can be shipped free or librarians can visit the office in Khirki, New Delhi to select and take away books. **Contact : Vipin (program in charge) at booksforallfln@gmail.com for information.**

FLN Chapter Meet up | North East 7-8 May 22

FLN is strongest in the north east with over 15 members from Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. On 7th May, 2022 Purnima & Sumit (FLN representatives from Delhi) and Rituparna (FLN representative, Assam) travelled to 4 libraries in Guwahati and Nalbari districts and observed community libraries in urban & rural settings. The team visited Snehjori Library in Guwahati as well as Buniyaad, Prerna and Samaanay Puthibhural in Nalbari to observe how different models run. They studied library documentation practices, book-curation, reading services and cultural activities conducted by the libraries and learnt much. Assam has a deep history of engagement around community-owned libraries and many villages crowdfund their own spaces, maintaining a fiercely independent ecosystem.

On 8th May, nine representatives from FLN member-libraries met at Guwahati. Meeting in person for the first time, this was a tremendous opportunity to learn and strengthen our bonds of solidarity. Held in the NEET Community Library, FLN members talked about what makes a model library, how read alouds & welcoming practices nurture member ownership and how we can all extend regional solidarities in FLN. The meeting closed with a book exchange and a determination to conduct more frequent meetups in the region and across the country.



Spotlight on Member Libraries

An introduction to some of the Free Libraries Network members. Please watch this column to know more about our FLN Libraries

Conversation with Hemen Sarma | *Buniyad Puthibharal*, in village Bastor, Nalbari district, Assam, is a circulating library founded in July 2019 with around 100 members. **Reader Engagement:** Hemen Sarma realised that active and regular outreach is necessary. They organise events like extempore speaking, quiz and have small rewards for winners and returning members. **Inclusion means:** Being a



space where all are welcome. Currently the library is facing a challenge where students of minority communities are hesitant to come. Hemen plans to reach out, understand the barriers stopping them and then involve respected members from the minority communities to champion the library. **Stand Out Library moment:** Learning that even nominal fee is an entry barrier. **Network power:** Being part of FLN has helped the Hemen interact with like minded peers and find stories that resonate. He would like to see FLN to work on increasing awareness among regional publishers and help increase availability books in local language, including Assamese

WHAT ARE WE READING?

Top 3 books at Buniyad Puthibharal

Assamese folk tales are very popular with this library readers. Their top 3 picks are: a) *Burhi aair Sadhu* (literally translates to Grandmothers tales) compiled by Lakshminath Bez Baruah b) *Jibonimulok Grontho*- autobiographies of famous/prominent persons c) *Aseemot Jaar Heral Seema* (novel- Who lost their limit to infinity) by Kanchan Baruah

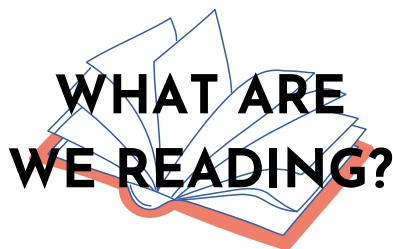
Buniyaad Puthibharal, Vill & P.O. Batsor, District: Nalbari, Assam, PIN-781303, Email: hemen12sarma@gmail.com.



Conversation with Saba Dave | *School for Democracy (SFD) or Loktantrashala*, an organisation dedicated to promoting and deepening understanding of democracy, supports libraries in villages - Devdungri, Thana, Kaladeh, Kheemakheda, Beend ka Badia, Kaya Bheela, Jodhgarh, and Bhim - in Bhilwara, Pali and Rajsamand districts of Rajasthan. Founded in 2017 and part of the Democracy and Constitutional Values fellowship, community youth run these

libraries. Some libraries are in physical structures, while others operate out of the library fellows' Aangans and rooftops. They are open for 2-3 hours a day currently and serve approximately 350 children. **Reader Engagement:** SFD has addressed the challenge of engaging users through strategies like mobilisation drives, conversations with parents, leveraging allies like MKSS and the Rajasthan Asanghathit Mazdoor Union (RAMU).

Saba believes that when the community truly believes the library is a safe space and offers a window to a larger world centred around values of equality, justice, fraternity and compassion, they will engage. **Inclusion:** SFD does not hesitate to take on uncomfortable conversations on gender, religion, discrimination when an opportunity arises. These conversations happen through workshops, stories, songs etc. SFD is planning libraries in more remote areas to break down physical barriers keeping some communities away. **Stand Out Library moment:** Young members chanting slogans of love and harmony. These same members used to shout communal slogans promoting divisions. They are pushing back, questioning and even educating their parents/ community. **Network power:** Guidance from other libraries on books, infrastructure, and library practices. SFD wants to see FLN to take on larger challenges like engaging with the state to push for creating a free public library network in every Panchayat.



Top 3 books at SFD libraries

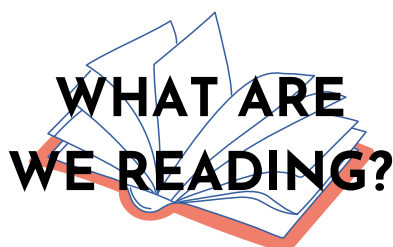
SFD library children love books by Pratham, Ekalavya and Katha. Though each library has its special favorites, over all their top 3 are: a) **Boondon ki Sawari** (Anjali Vaid, Illustrator Shaayan Mukerjee, b) **Aakchhoo** (Deepa Balsawar Illustrator Nancy Raj, c) **Gijigadu aur Timtimate Jugnu** (Gopini Karunakar Illustrator: Atanu Roy)

School for Democracy Website: <https://schoolfordemocracy.org> FB <https://www.facebook.com/loktantrashala> Insta: [sfd_community_libraries](https://www.instagram.com/sfd_community_libraries) Mail: loktantrashala@gmail.com. For Libraries: Uma - uma.sfd@gmail.com



Conversation with Shashbindu Shah| CKS Foundation, a NGO dedicated to Conservation, Knowledge and Service operates two libraries in Uttarakhand, one in Chandranagar (founded in 2014) and another in Pokhri (founded in 2021). They receive 250 children and teenagers. **Reader Engagement:** Games, activities and a curated and diverse collection of books keep young readers returning. The library's physical location -

the school and market area also helps. Parents feel comfortable leaving children unsupervised. **Inclusion means:** To Shashbindu, inclusion means all are free to use the library and share ideas and thoughts. The librarians take care to show all are welcome. **Stand Out Library moment:** Read aloud sessions, when stories and children come alive. Children feel comfortable enough with the librarians to share their life experiences linked to the stories they hear. **Network power:** Finding a tribe. The training and workshops conducted help them find answers to doubts and queries on library practices. Shashbindu would want FLN to spread the message of the right to read to all



What are we reading? | Top 3 books at CKS

In this library, the children love their stories and are happy to read almost anything. The top 3 picks are: a) **Shruti Floats an Idea** (Navin Durairaju Illustrator: Vibha Suryanarayan) b) **Lets go seed collecting** (Neha Sumitran Illustrator: Archana Sreenivasan) and c) **Unni's Wish** (Meryl Gazia, Illustrator: Fahad Faizal)

CKS Foundation Website: <https://cksfoundation.in/> FB: [@FoundationCKS](https://www.facebook.com/FoundationCKS) Insta: [@cks_foundation](https://www.instagram.com/@cks_foundation) Mail: contact@cksfoundation.in

Conversation with Austin Mobley | Qissagadh Active Library founded in 2014 operates three libraries in Delhi-Noida, Savda-Ghevra J.J. Resettlement Colony, and Nizamuddin Sunder Nursery Basti. They serve 250 members, mostly children. **Reader Engagement:** There are targeted reading and language sessions aiding first-time readers to become returning members. An active book club program encourages discussion. Drama and Art are big pulls. **Inclusion means:** Part of a drama and arts organisation (Kutumb Foundation), activities, especially performances are a big part of the library. The performances are designed to break power structures and hierarchies. Peer leadership- making library users into library managers also promotes inclusivity. **Stand Out Library moment:** During a story recreation (on the book Where the Wild Things are- in which a young boy Max leaves home), the library members recreated Max's room from the book with objects in the library. They questioned the characters motivations, created multiple narratives giving the story dimensions beyond the text. **Network power:** FLN has demonstrated different models of free libraries. Qissagadh is part of the Books-For-All programme and believes book distribution is essential to support libraries. Austin would like to FLN to continue to advocate for the free library movement and be a platform for resource sharing.



WHAT ARE WE READING?

What are we reading? | Top 3 books at Qissegadh

Their top 3 picks are a) O Harilal Ped (Eklavya Team, Illustrator: Ranu Titus), b) Chaand Par Khargosh (Indrani Krishnaier Illustrator: Harsha Nagaraju), and c) Annual Hair Cut Day (Rohini Nilekani, Illustrators: Angie and Upesh)

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Email: austin@kutumb.in sushma@kutumb.in. Facebook: <https://m.facebook.com/kutumbfoundation>

Just a Question



A reflection on INCLUSIVITY to think about as library practitioners, educators & facilitators.

Does everyone in my library feel welcome regardless of age, caste, religion, literacy & economic status, gender & sexual identity, disability etc.?

Do my library members feel ownership i.e. can they openly express their needs & expectations from the space and its programs?

How does my library serve the most vulnerable (by caste, religion, gender & sexual identity, economic status, literacy, disability etc.) members' needs & aspirations?