

# Free Libraries Zindabad

Quarterly round up of Network News

Jan 2022- Mar 2022

## Hello from FLN!

It is my honour and great delight to be writing the introduction to FLN's very first newsletter. I'm writing at a time when India is fighting an existential battle against divisive forces, where Indian literature is struggling with stagnancy and where Indian education, which was never accessible to all, has experienced irreversible losses with 2 years of lockdowns. In such a time, free libraries & librarians who fight for the right to read against all odds, many with little to no resources and situated in remote and underserved parts of India, are to me, heroes. If there is hope in this country, it is in these free, public-access, community-owned & operated libraries and in the work of library activists working in prisons, with at-risk communities and in marginalised spaces. Through this newsletter we hope to celebrate the work each FLN member does in centering the reader, in breaking barriers to accessing books and in creating a thinking & empowered people of the future.

I hope you will all contribute to the work of FLN and to this periodic newsletter. Please reach out to Madhumita to share your stories, photographs and more. [madhumita.rajan@gmail.com](mailto:madhumita.rajan@gmail.com)

Purnima Rao  
FLN Director  
March, 2022

## 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 to all and nurture new readers, who may or may not have the means to do so themselves.

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

Twitter: [@FreeLibNetwork](https://twitter.com/FreeLibNetwork)

Insta: [freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com](mailto:freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com)

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/freelibrariesnetwork>  
FLN

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Free Book Program:

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# FLN Events and Workshops

## Open House on Library Practices- 15 Jan 2022

Attended by 53 members from over 14 libraries and facilitated by Rituparna, Purnima, and Poonam (all FLN Core group members) this session discussed various library challenges- like sourcing books, funds etc and good library practices- like need for a library curriculum, books to reader ratio (7:1) etc. Several members shared the challenge of keeping the library a discrimination free space, the difficulty of insulating the library from the communities; discriminatory practices. Members shared their stories and solutions. The session was informative, fun and helped the network members learn about and from each other. *Suggestions and topics for the next open house are welcome.*



## Read Aloud Workshop -15 Jan 2022

The Free Library Network along with the Community Library Project conducted a training on read alouds for all FLN member libraries and volunteers. The objective of the training was to think deeply about why read alouds work in getting library users returning and start them on their independent reading journeys. There was also a demo of a typical read aloud session,

including tips on keeping readers engaged and techniques like scaffolding that make sure of the listeners comprehension. The training was attended by nearly 30 people from approximately 20 FLN network members.



Reach out to the following members for queries on library practices: Infrastructure & Legal Literacy- Jatin, Bansa Community Library ([jatinlalit@basnacommunitylibrary.com](mailto:jatinlalit@basnacommunitylibrary.com))| Rural Community Engagement- Jatin, Bansa Community Library & Saquib, Seemanchal Library Foundation([saquibahmedkamil@gmail.com](mailto:saquibahmedkamil@gmail.com))| Student Leadership- Mridula, The Community Library Project ([mridulakoshy@gmail.com](mailto:mridulakoshy@gmail.com))|Curriculum- Rituparna, Kitape Katha Koi ([neogrituparna0@gmail.com](mailto:neogrituparna0@gmail.com))|General Queries- Purnima, Free Libraries Network ([freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com](mailto:freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com)). Other resources: Building a collection: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVhUAo\\_AP70&t=19s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVhUAo_AP70&t=19s) and <https://www.fln.org.in/>

## Publishers Connect | Conversation with Bijal from Pratham Books, Rajiv Eipe and Deepanjana Pal - 26 Feb 2022

Bijal Vachharajani (Commissioning Editor at Pratham books) Deepanjana Pal (author) and Rajiv Eipe (illustrator) spoke to FLN library members as part of FLNs initiative to build deeper relationships with publishers. Bijal spoke of Pratham Book's vision, the importance of access to books and the role of libraries and librarians. Rajiv and Deepanjana illustrator and author of the Puchku books (among others) spoke to us of why they write and illustrate and the story behind the creation of Puchku. They spoke about the need for libraries and "Very Tall Librarians"\* i.e. ones that help children access books by not just literally picking them up and but also by breaking down barriers that keep readers from reading. Rituparna - from FLN Core Group spoke about how librarians do this on a daily basis and added what libraries need from books and publishers to help the mission of reading for all. FLN members also actively participated in the Q and A session enlivening the session with impromptu poetry and much more. Aarti, from FLN core group facilitated the session and moderated the wonderful free flowing conversation on our collective dreams for the free library movement

*\*The helpful very tall librarian appears in A Book for Puchku published by Pratham and available in Hindi as Ek Kitab Puchku Ke liye and 50 other languages*



## Other FLN news

### FLN is ready for take off!

This collective existed as a facebook and whatsapp group- the Community Library Network. On 10 Jan 2022, the Core Group voted to change the network's name from The Community Library Network to **Free Libraries Network** complete with new logo and website. The name better reflects us and our belief in providing free access to all the 'right to read'. FLN is also in the process being registered as a society. We have a core leadership group that will change every three years. Head over to <https://www.fln.org.in/announce.html> for current leadership profile and other news

### FLN Publisher Friends

FLN strives to bring publishers, writers, editors and illustrators into the free library movement as partners. Many publishers offer generous discounts to FLN Libraries. Some are Pratham, Ekalavya, Karadi, Jyotsna Prakashan, Karadi. There will be many more. FLN is reaching out to Publishers, authors and illustrators to sign the **Publishers, Writers and Illustrators Compact with FLN**. This Compact is to deepen our relationship beyond purchase of books with library stakeholders, such as Publishers, Authors and Illustrators. The Compact reflects all of our desires to create a vibrant ecosystem of readers and efforts to bring into the fold readers who need support or are otherwise excluded.

This compact has been sent to several publishers and authors for their signature. In this quarter we created a Publisher outreach subcommittee that will work on setting up processes for ordering with publishers already offering FLN special discounts, bringing more publishers, authors and writers into the Compact.

*Be in touch with the core group members or send a whatsapp message in the group if you are planning to order from specific publishers and want to know of discounts offered to FLN members or want a full list of signatories to the Compact.*

## Spotlight on Member Libraries

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

### Conversation with Tolesh Borikar |

**Kalpakta** in Village Sirsi, Nagpur operates out of one library center and also conducts programs with schools. Kalpakta reading room was founded in July 2020 and was registered as a trust in April 2021. Starting with 50 children visiting in the first month, this library quickly grew popular and now has 150 registered members. Facilitators from the local community act as librarians along with the founders. The library keeps children engaged and returning with multiple activities including games



sessions, art workshops (like one on warli painting- where children helped paint the library walls), drama workshops in addition to regular read aloud sessions, talks by authors, poetry writing sessions. **Free means:** Access, equality and inclusion. Scarcity of books in the village makes the library a home. Any fee -even a nominal one creates divisions. **Stand Out Library moment:** When the children started recommending books to stock. Not only have the users turned into enthusiastic readers, but also owners of the library. **Network power:** As a network we can do much, especially with our collective bargaining power to establish relationships with publishers. We can also learn from each other- especially areas like fund raising.

Kalpakta Education Foundation

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**Conversation with Pratap | Gramothan**, a mix of community space , learning center and library runs five reading spaces in one block in Sonapur Odisha. It began in 2017 as a learning center and has grown into circulating libraries with support from the Gram Panchayat which provides a space to house the library activities. The five centers together have approx 500 registered members and many regular walk in members. Gramothan believes in engaging with parents and educators to keep library members returning to the library. The library's youth volunteers found creative solutions to the challenge of helping young children who cannot come to the library unattended. Starting in the pandemic,

volunteers took books from the library to their communities, distributed it among the younger readers and later returned the books to the library. **Free means:** Freedom to access books. Freedom to access a space, freedom to speak their minds. **Stand out Library moment:** Community accepting the library as their own - one example is the youth volunteers changing their role during the pandemic, taking initiatives to not only restore the access to books, but also to spread information about the pandemic and vaccines - going as far as having vaccines administered at homes. **Network Power:** Pratap he would like to learn very much from the other network members experiences and challenges and how they overcame them.



Gramothhan

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facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/kalpakta.rr/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/kalpakta.rr/?ref=page_internal)

## Conversation with Prashant | Abdul

**Kalam Library** was founded in March 2019, in Rajauli Bihar, coinciding with the first lockdown. Situated in a converted rice mill, Prashant set up this space, when he realized how difficult it was to access books in his hometown, a gnawing gap that he became aware of only after his education in other cities and access to libraries in other cities. The library has issued over 208 books since it was set up and has 250 registered members. He relied on word of mouth, facebook and social media to connect with readers. The library is frequented by teenagers who use it as a library space and for their studies. The library book collection ranges from fiction, non fiction books, Hindi literature and poetry and was built through donated books and contributions from friends and family. **Free means:** Bridging gaps of access to knowledge **Stand out Library Moment:** For Prashant a moment that stays captured was when



a young child visited the library - Even when there was no librarian at that time, the young child picked up a book on Gautham Buddhas life and spent time perusing it on his own with intent concentration. **Network power:** The network can share know how on how to run a library with limited people, how to get community to take ownership, what kind of resources a librarian needs etc.

Abdul Kalam Library

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facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/abdulkalamlibrary>

## Conversation with Ruchi Dhona | Let's

**Open a Book** works in Spiti Valley, a remote high-altitude sub district of Himachal Pradesh. It started out as an initiative to build reading corners in schools in 2017. In 2021, LOAB piloted a free community library project, which amassed 65 members within 2 months. This community library is expected to operate between May-Oct in 2022. The library offers story time with authors, art sessions, workshops to introduce children to birds of Spiti, teachers' development sessions in addition to regular read alouds.

**Free means:** Removal of barriers- removing barriers to reading, removing barriers between people. Ruchi Dhona believes a free library provides a space for children to be themselves and interact with children from different classes, castes and backgrounds. **Stand Out Library Moment:** When parents tell her that the children call it "humara library" and not as "the library" or by its name. The children take pride in displaying their canvas bags with the library logo which were made to help children carry their books home more easily. **Network Power:** Ruchi has found great benefits from the collective: - including other members relationships with publishers, learning from other library practices, and feels such training and shared resources can help all individual libraries grow.

Lets open a Book

email: [teamloab@gmail.com](mailto:teamloab@gmail.com)

facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/letsopenabook/>. website: <https://www.letsopenabook.org/>



## Conversation with Banupriya | Reading

**Space**, founded in July 2020 in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, hosts 150 students from two government schools who attend weekly classes and issue books. In addition they have 5 regular members as well. One challenge faced is in having children visit the library independently. The library has tried to draw in adult members too and this has been challenging. The weekly programs with schools have gained favour with the schools and community, with teachers from other grades also wanting the programs. Now the library provides programs to all children irrespective of grades. This has been a huge turn around.

**Free means:** For Banupriya, free libraries matter as everyone has the right to knowledge and free libraries give access. They remove barriers like caste, class/money, religion, language, nationality, gender, disability, etc. **Stand Out Library Moment:** Banupriya had put up a notice about the library in a nearby bustling provision store. A whole year later, a person called to inquire and then brought his children the next day. Now they return every week! **Network Power:** Can provide each other guidance on library practices such as pooling resources on maintaining records, including circulation records, good methods for book labeling and arrangements, and fundraising and allocation of funds.

Reading Space

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# Random Roundup

## *Library news from India and around the world*

- [Fine Free libraries in the US see membership rising](#): Public libraries in the US have been going fine free since 2017 and data has shown increased membership with this move. This is something FLN member libraries have known. This [2018 study](#) also provides data to support the case for fine free libraries.
- [This article](#) summaries a [study](#) by two American universities that show financial investments in the public library system- does not simply increase readership and community engagement, but that these increases persist for at least ten years after capital investment and should be considered an investment in children.
- [Mysore library rebuilt with donations from world over and elected representatives](#): 63 year old Syed Isaaq's library burned down last year and received media attention and promises of support from Civic Authorities. However, when the civic authorities did not or could not step in the library was rebuilt and opened with over 1800 books with donations from around the world and from local MLAs.
- [Micro Libraries as community libraries](#): Belakoo Trust setting up micro libraries (essentially small cupboards filled with books) on various footpaths in Bangalore taken over and cared for by local communities.

## Just a Question



A reflection for us and to think about as we run our libraries. Why should everyone, not just the member libraries be concerned about Free Libraries? What can we do to in our libraries that demonstrates the need for everyone to participate in establishment of free libraries?