

Free Libraries Zindabad

Quarterly Round up of Network News

Issue 3 | Jul- Sep 22

PUTTING THE PUBLIC IN LIBRARY

A library is more than a repository of books and reading materials. When properly curated, it can become a space for critical thinking, reimagination, and collective deliberation on the status quo. When such spaces are accessible to the masses, even those with limited financial means, and especially those who are kept out of other spaces for participation in civil society, it instills in them a spirit of democracy - of participating in the matters that affect their present and shape their future. Communities are energized and participate in building the society they want. We, at FLN, recognize the need for libraries that allow the minds of the citizens and residents of this country to be, in Tagore's words, 'without fear' and led 'into ever-widening thought and action.' Having recently stepped into our new legal identity, we are mindful of the challenges that await us in our endeavour to offer reading materials, programs, knowledge resources, and information at zero membership fees. But the inspiration that we have gained from the heart-warming efforts of our members - as you will read in this newsletter - encourages us to hope, dream, and aspire!

Jatin Lalit Singh- General Secretary FLN
Abhishek Vyas- Core team, Bansa Community Library

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](https://twitter.com/FreeLibNetwork)

Insta: [@freelibrariesnetworkfln](https://www.instagram.com/freelibrariesnetworkfln)

Facebook: [@freelibrariesnetworkFLN](https://www.facebook.com/freelibrariesnetworkFLN)

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FLN Events and Workshop

Indian Policy on Public Libraries |Talk with Preedip Balaji -17 Sep 22

In this session with over 65 participants, FLN invited Preedip Balaji, Senior Librarian from IHS to speak about Indian policy and legislation with respect to Public Libraries (Government aided, funded, managed or run) Links to Preedip's research and other resources below. The session revealed the lack of national or central policy /legislation for public libraries. Libraries are a state subject and Preedip gave a broad overview of state legislations and funding models. He pointed out gaps in legislation like an unclear definition of public library and lack of teeth for local library departments to collect, use and deploy public money for library infrastructure. The session also brought home how little data we have. There are contradictory numbers on basic things like number of public libraries in India, per capita spend on libraries, little information on state library

budgets etc. The latest survey by the National Mission on Libraries has done little to demystify this area. In an active Q and A session, members filled gaps in the discussion and shared their stories on working with local governments. The Session highlighted the need to view this lack of policy and lack of urgency to establish excellent public library services in India in the backdrop of exclusion.

Some Links: [Paper published by Preedip Balaji : Policy review of Public Libraries in India](#) (contains link to download PDF) 2. [How much does India spend on its libraries?](#) 3. [How can India spread the joy of reading to all National Mission on Libraries reports- 1. Quantitative and Qualitative Survey.](#) See also : <http://rrrlf.nic.in> - under tabs NML (see schemes) and tab Public Library system. You tube link to the talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31sNW0mOOwI>



PUBLIC LIBRARY POLICY IN INDIA - TALK WITH PREEDIP BALAJI


★ **BOOKS ARE GREAT! LIBRARIES ARE GREAT! FREE IS GOOD! ALL SHOULD READ!** ★

Everyone agrees. Then

- Where are our Public Libraries?
- What is our national policy on libraries?
- What does the Government spend on Libraries?

Lets talk on **Sep 17th. Time: 4:00 pm.**

Special Guest: Preedip Balaji, Librarian at IHS and Author of "Policy review of Public Libraries in India" and "How much is India spending on its Libraries"



Other FLN News

FLN All Member Meet | 27 Aug 22



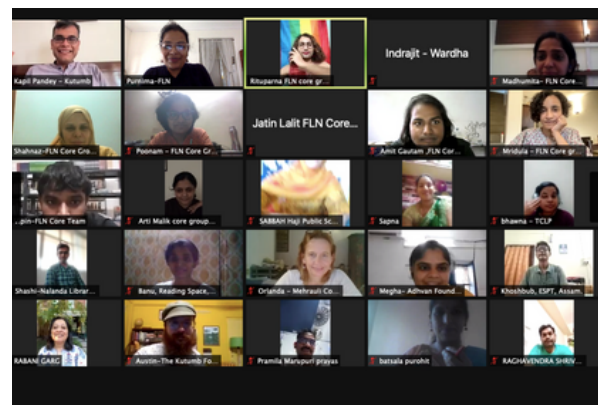
Attended by nearly 71 members, in the first FLN all member meet everyone re-committed to FLN- what it is, what it seeks to do - to establish free libraries and advocate for access to information to all. FLN members' work is to demolish the myth that reading- for education, for pleasure or intellectual pursuit is limited to an elite community, barricaded by caste, class, religion, gender, ability and sexuality.

A recap of the discussion in the meeting:

- **FLN programs:** Books for All Program, the 'Publishers, Writers & Illustrators Compact', Workshops & Webinars, and FLN's quarterly newsletter were introduced.
- **Librarianship Standards of Excellence:** Jatin, from Bansa library talked about why it is important for FLN members and free library activists to create excellent library services- to demolish the myth that free means subpar and that access to reading is a right and not an act of benevolence. Jatin shared a primer that laid out the key features of a free community library. FLN members can use this framework to situate themselves and plot how their library can grow (see FAQs section on the FLN website)
- **Solidarity:** Shanaz, from Reading Stars India, spoke of the loneliness of a library activist and free community library librarian. She shared examples of past conversations on the WhatsApp group where small and big problems were discussed and FLN members supported each other. She stressed the importance of members amplifying each other's voices. She also underscored how FLN is a collective that gets its strength from individual members' generosity with their time, knowledge, energy, and resources.
- **Structure and Leadership:** Aarti introduced FLNs structure and current leadership. Amit shared a future where FLN leadership will consist of elected representatives from the members.

PARTICIPATE!

If you have ideas for a workshop or webinar, if you can translate english documents into vernacular (or vice-versa), if you can help introduce new publishers, authors, and creators to the FLN fold or if you want to mentor a new library please write to us at freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com. You can also write in with your struggles, issues where you need help, thoughts on what FLN should be doing as a collective.



LINKS

- [Youtube link](#) - Recording of the All Member Meet.
- <https://www.fln.org.in/>- Take a look at FLN's website and use it as a calling card to introduce FLN to all. Some useful sections: Resources Page: Collection of FLN (and TCLN) workshops and webinars; some useful library practices documents. FAQs Page: This is an especially useful section answering questions like "What is FLN membership? How to support free libraries?" etc. Do look at the checklist for model free libraries in this section. Find fellow members and info on leadership on the Members' Page. Read the FLN Compact for Publishers, Writers & Illustrators in the FLN Advocacy Page, along with information on other FLN advocacy efforts.
- booksforallfln@gmail.com - For more information on the Books for All program
- Whatsapp group: Write to freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com. to be added

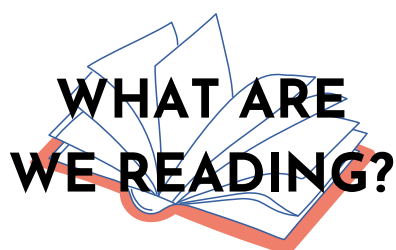
Libraries in Spotlight

An introduction to some of Free Libraries Network members. Watch this column to know more about FLN Libraries



Conversation with Chaitra TS| Buguri Library Program- An initiative of Hasiru Dala, these libraries in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh serve the waste picker community. Founded in 2017, it operates in Bangalore, Tumkuru, Mysore, Hubli-Dharwad, and Rajahmundry. The Buguri libraries reach over 1500 readers- mostly children. **Reader Engagement:** Readers are engaged with a variety of programs-drama, games, workshops, etc. Children participate in decorating their space and also

managing the library with inputs on selection of books and library practices. **Community engagement:** The library holds events, workshops, and vocational training programs for the larger community. One example is book pop-ups which library users run in common areas for a day or two. Children display their favourite books, conduct read-alouds, and activities for younger children. Inputs are sought from the community on the library programs. **Stand Out Library moment:** Chaitra is moved by the story dramatizations and conversations after a book reading - the children's interpretations and how they integrate the story with their lives. (Ismaïl ki Eid, Mukund and Riaz, The mountain that loved a bird standout for her) **Network power:** Buguri has benefitted from knowledge and resource leads from FLN members and workshops. Buguri would like more workshops on library practices, book discussion sessions, or talks on policy issues (e.g. education policy) Chaitra suggested that the collective can create ready-to-use templates/modules on specific topics that each member can utilize.



What are we reading? | Top 3 books at Buguri

While individual libraries have their own favourites, drawing from all Buguri libraries, their top 3 are:

1. *The Mountain that loved the Bird* (Author : Alice McLerran, Illustrator: Stephen Aitken);
2. *Lost and Found*. (Author and Illustrator : Oliver Jeffers);
3. *Bibiloburro* (Author and Illustrator : Jeanette Winter)

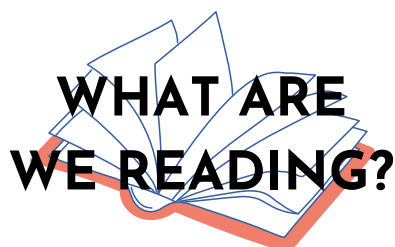
Special Shout out Children from Buguri library have turned authors and bookmakers creating two lovely books as part of a library exercise. Aye Reena on local practices and customs around menstruation and Oota Aitha, a recipe book. These are available in all Buguri libraries. Another book based on the children's visit to historic Belur and Halebid is in the works

Buguri Childrens Initiative Website <https://hasirudala.in/initiatives/buguri/> Email info@hasirudala.in Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Hasirudala/> Twitter https://twitter.com/Hasiru_Dala

Conversation with Saquib Ahmad | *Seemachal Library Foundation* consists of three libraries (i) Fatima Sheik Library, Damalbari village, (ii) Rukeya Sakhawat Library, Janta Kanhaiyabary, Kochadhaman, and (iii) Savitribhai Phule Library, Madaru Tola Belwa Haat- all in Kishanganj district in Bihar. They have been operating informally for several years and formally from 2021. These libraries serve around 1000 members



largely young and adolescent girls. **Reader Engagement:** Activities like read-alouds and games keep the readers engaged. Saquib believes members engage and return when they feel heard and respected. **Community engagement:** The library regularly engages with the larger population by having book fairs, events, and workshops. They maintain cordial relations with community leaders and have navigated sticky situations -like objections to certain books being in the library or attitudes the library encourages. They believe in facing these challenges head-on with constant and respectful dialogue. **Stand Out Library moment:** Saquib remembers when a 14-year-old girl read a booklet on caste and had an awakening. She developed a new understanding of discrimination. Actions and behaviours she had thought of as normal or correct were now visible as unjust. This led to a conversation on how to work together to create a more equitable society. **Network power:** Saquib learned from FLN members about book curation, library practices, etc. Together FLN can do a lot more, including increasing access to local language books, especially Hindi. Saquib suggested physical regional meet-ups to build solidarity.



What are we reading? | Top 3 books at Seemanchal

Books by Ekalavya are popular as is Premchand. The top 3 picks are 1. *Premchand ki Kahaniyaan*; 2. *Panchatantra ki kahaniya* 3. Picture books- like *Akbar Birbal ki kahani*, *School Mast hai*

Seemanchal Library Foundation Facebook: [seemanchallibraryfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/seemanchallibraryfoundation) Instagram:

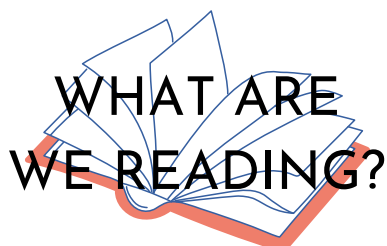
@seemachal_library_foundation Twitter [@libraryBihar](https://twitter.com/@libraryBihar) Email: semanchallibraryfoundation@gmail.com Ph: +91 9771070709



Conversation with Mahima| *Rang Kaarwaan* is a free library operating in Champavat, Uttarakhand informally running since 2020 with 6-10 adult members, but from February 2022 has reinvented itself and has now close to 60- 100 children who visit regularly. **Reader Engagement:** Dance, music, theatre

and other arts programs help readers engage more with the books. Mahima has seen members turn up again and again and each time with a new friend in tow as soon as the library started introducing these programs. **Community engagement:** The library believes in active dialogue with community members, understanding what they need. Initially they toured different village panchayats and had short performances and activities to familiarise the community with Rang Kaarwaan **Stand Out Library moment:** Seeing library membership double and triple almost overnight.

Read alouds where children reveal a side of themselves they had repressed, children learning to become comfortable with expressing themselves. Network power: Mahima found advice on reader engagement and book curation invaluable. She also believes that the publishers compact helped greatly- giving them quality books at reasonable rates. She would love for FLN to strengthen its activities with one physical meet up of all members. Please write in with ideas of how we can make this happen.



What are we reading? | Top 3 books at Rang Kaarwaan

The top 3 books requested books are 1. *Mayil will not be quiet* (Author: Niveditha Subramaniam and Sowmya Rajendran. Illustrator : Niveditha Subramaniam) 2. *I wish/ Meri Arzoo* (Author: sixteen children from around India- sharing their wishes; published by Pratham Books) 3. *Clumsy/ Bedhangi* (Author: Ken Spillman, Illustrator : Manjari Chakravarti)

Rang Kaarwaan Website: <https://www.rangkarwan.org/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RangKarwanOnline>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/rangkaarwaan/> Email: hi.rangkarwan@gmail.com

Just a Question



A reflection for us and to think about as we run our libraries.

Why are some groups denied access to reading? How does my library challenge the lie that art, books and thinking is allowed only for 'deserving' people? How does my library demonstrate that free membership can co -exist with vibrant, active and high quality library services?