

# Free Libraries Zindabad

Quarterly Round up of Network News

Issue 4 | Oct- Dec 22

## Behind Walls | Finding refuge in libraries

In our country, even citizens living in freedom are unable to access information and free libraries due to unjust social structures. Adults and children in prisons and childcare institutions often are forgotten, when it comes to access to libraries and the right to read. Caste prejudices and over-policing of certain communities result in significant presence of marginalized groups in jails. Setting up a well-functioning library in these institutions can do a lot for people who want to read - from learning their rights to reading for joy to reading for growth and education. When prison libraries closely work with the local public library system they create access to a wide variety of literature. It also ensures that the state takes responsibility for its most vulnerable citizens.

Our network member, Prayas has established these links successfully in Maharashtra. Reading individually and together can pull people out of despair that they can sink into behind these forbidding walls. Libraries and books can be safe havens for children in childcare institutions who are especially vulnerable, due to various life circumstances. Our network member Adhvan, through their work in childcare institutions in Mumbai, creates much-needed spaces for expression and sharing for young people. It is for this reason that the Free Library Movement stands in solidarity with our members who strive and advocate for libraries for people in institutions, who behind these forbidding walls may find refuge in the libraries.

Poonam Bhonsle  
FLN Core Group Member  
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## 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)

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

and for book distribution:

[booksforallFLN@gmail.com](mailto:booksforallFLN@gmail.com)



# FLN Events and Workshop

## Read Aloud & Library Best Practices Workshop | 15 Oct 2022



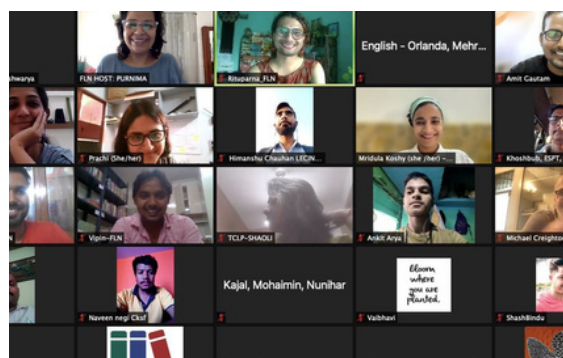
FLN (Poonam Bhonsle, Purnima, Rituparna, The Community Library Project-TCLP) organised and ran the annual 'FLN Read Alouds & Library Best Practices Training'. Attended by nearly 70 members, the session encouraged deep thinking on why Read-Alouds work and why they are necessary. Read Alouds are a starting point to welcome first generation readers. They also help people find their own voices and build confidence to express themselves. The training was in Hindi and English with some segments offered in Marathi, Tamil & Assamese. The training material was made available in Marathi, Assamese and Tamil as well.

Two new fantastic and necessary modules were introduced: 1. Member-to-member read aloud i.e. creating space & building a reading culture where library users can confidently read aloud to each other 2. Leadership development among library members. There were demonstrations of a typical read aloud and videos of peer-to-peer read alouds. The session included breakout rooms for members to engage in smaller groups. Tips, Dos and Don'ts and How and Whys of a Read Aloud were discussed. The session closed with practices in leadership development from TCLP, Bansa Community Library and School for Democracy-Loktantrashala.

For more information on this read aloud training, materials shared in the training and queries reach out to FLN core team member Poonam at [poonambhonsle03@gmail.com](mailto:poonambhonsle03@gmail.com) with your queries. Link to the training material - [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SuTPsV27hF8k-qA-CmffUCFcEBqJ6Obr/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SuTPsV27hF8k-qA-CmffUCFcEBqJ6Obr/view?usp=share_link) Other resources- [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GsYGAhXwZFiD6PgLxzllgJfPflG0gllt/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GsYGAhXwZFiD6PgLxzllgJfPflG0gllt/view?usp=share_link)

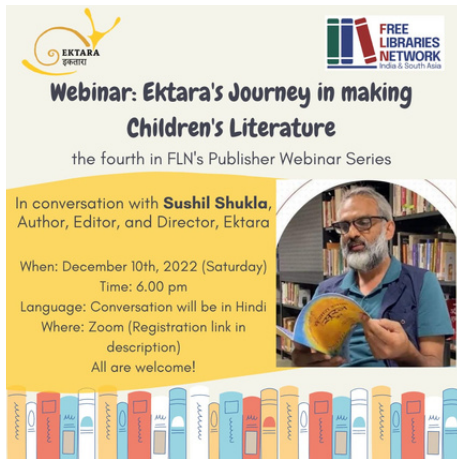
## Open House | 15 Oct 2022

In FLN's second ever open house session, approx 45 FLN Library members talked about a range of issues relating to library practices, challenges in running free community-owned libraries. The session was designed as a space to ask questions, share challenges and solutions evolved. Through google forms distributed before the session, members were invited to share key concerns around free membership, access for all, resources, reading programs, community engagement and ownership.



FLN Libraries talked about the struggle for financial resources. In this context FLN re-iterated what "free" means - free membership & access as well as freedom from discrimination. Libraries discussed the very real struggle to raise funds and financial insecurity leading to break down in library functioning and programs. A brief discussion was had on funding ideas- such as mobilising funds from local communities, accessing CSR funding, grant based funding etc. Next there was a discussion on Read Alouds gone right and gone wrong and members shared common challenges and their solutions. In the last segment, there was an insightful discussion on inclusion. What it meant to introspect and recognize biases and see how it affects library policies. Why it is necessary to have clear policies in place for child safety and for outreach to members otherwise not accessing libraries etc. Please reach out to [freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com](mailto:freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com) to keep the discussion going.

## Publishers Connect | Ektara | 10 Dec 22



**Webinar: Ektara's Journey in making Children's Literature**  
the fourth in FLN's Publisher Webinar Series

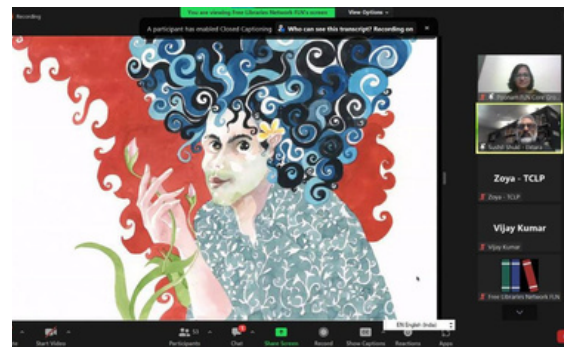
In conversation with **Sushil Shukla**, Author, Editor, and Director, Ektara

When: December 10th, 2022 (Saturday)  
Time: 6:00 pm  
Language: Conversation will be in Hindi  
Where: Zoom (Registration link in description)  
All are welcome!

The poster features the Ektara logo, the Free Libraries Network logo, and a photo of Sushil Shukla holding a book. At the bottom, there is a row of colorful books.

The 4th webinar, in FLN series of publisher webinars, saw over 56 participants joining to listen to Sushil Shukla, author, editor and director, Ektara. Sushil spoke about Ektara's journey into the world of children's literature, their editorial choices and the politics that informs them. Sushil spoke about creating literature that reflects the experiences of children, without shying away from social realities, even when they are uncomfortable. Ektara views children as equals and respects their intelligence. Ektara believes in the power of books and the right to read. We were delighted by Mr Shukla's faith in community libraries make this right a reality. Sushil used powerful images from Ektara's different publications especially the magazines Pluto and Cycle to explain the connection between the text and images.

In the Q&A session, Sushil expressed solidarity to Free Libraries Network stating that a publisher's role is not just to increase sales, but also in ensuring literature is accessible to all. Another heartening connection was forged through the Q and A, where Sushil expressed Ektara's commitment to facilitate writer's workshops in regional languages for young writers in partnership with FLN. We look forward to Ektara being a strong ally of Free Libraries Network and a supporter in making libraries for all and the right to read a reality.



You tube recording of webinar available here- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXkgrv3ZLpY>

## Conversations and visits

FLN member library 'Let's Educate Children In Need-LEGIN' hosted an Instagram Live conversation on the role of free libraries in early childhood education. The talk was anchored by Ankush from LEGIN and the panel included FLN Director Purnima Rao and FLN General Secretary & founder Bansa Community Library, Jatin Lalit Singh. The talk laid out the role of FLN, the need for free libraries in India and the power of 'free' in the context of early readers (3-6 years). The trio also discussed the importance of inclusive read alouds, strengthening reading culture by creating friendly and welcoming reading spaces, allowing children to independently pick and access books and giving a glimpse into the world of books. The need for empathy, understanding and compassion while interacting with children was emphasized. Full conversation on Instagram at [@info.lecin](https://www.instagram.com/info.lecin)



This quarter FLN members also visited each other and learnt from each other's libraries. Swati (Muheen- Varanasi) and Ramya (Chalk Piece Chennai) visited TCLP in Delhi. Jatin (Bansa Community Library) visited Hope Healing Foundation (Sambhal UP). Lecin members are planning a visit to Mehrauli Community Library. One of the joys of being part of FLN is to meet and learn from each other. Do find an opportunity to visit an FLN member near you.

# Other FLN News

**Great Book Giveaway** The Community Library Project's annual fundraiser event Great Book Giveaway took place on Dec 3rd and 4th at the India Habitat Center in New Delhi. In its 4th year, the notable addition was a dedicated FLN Kiosk, helmed by FLN member libraries & practitioners like Bansa Community Library, School For Democracy-Loktantrashala, LECIN, Share A Book India, HHH Foundation, Batsala Purohit, Agaaz Theatre Trust and more. Visitors learnt about the free library movement and the work of network libraries. It was also a wonderful chance for network libraries and their users to come together in an environment surrounded by books, art and camaraderie.



The two days saw over hundreds of visitors to the fundraiser. Visitors browsed through thousands of books, enjoyed a story telling session by Kapil Pandey of the Kutumb Foundation, visited a pop up library and art exhibition and participated in a theatre workshop. There were also wonderful live musical performances, from Vastav Ek 7, Anubhuti, Katyayani & Shivani and 10Takk.



The event was a chance not just to raise funds but raise awareness among the general public of Delhi about why free libraries matter. Visitors made donations, pledged support to community libraries and walked off with some wonderful books and learnings about community libraries and the Free Library Movement.

## Registration and Compliance

As of November 2022, FLN is eligible to accept donations, funding and more in order to run its programs and support its larger vision.

## IFLA

FLN is now a member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)! This gives us access to world class scholarship, networks of library practitioners and universally-recommended guidelines & standards on library best practices. FLN also hopes to leverage this membership to bring India's Free Library Movement some international attention and to deepen the global understanding of grassroot libraries in the Indian and South Asian context.



# Libraries in Spotlight

***An introduction to some of the Free Library Network members. Please watch this column to know more about our FLN Libraries. Highlighted in this issue are two special library programs that operate with unique challenges- a library in Child Care Institutions and libraries in prisons.***

## Conversation with Sudhakar Marupuri| Prayas,

Prayas, is a social work demonstration project under Tata Institute of Social Science. Established in 1990, Prayas works with prisons on service delivery, training, research and documentation, and policy change with respect to the custodial/institutional rights and rehabilitation of prisoners. Prayas has been instrumental in ensuring library facilities in prisons in Maharashtra. They operate in Mumbai, Thane, Latur in Maharashtra State & Bharuch in Gujarat State. Prayas also works to provide legal aid, family support, research and advocacy in the area of custodial rights

**Unique challenges:** Prisons are overcrowded housing both convicts and undertrials. There are different types of jail facilities:- open jails, convicts only jails, women only jails etc. Children upto 6 years can stay in prisons with their mothers. While prison rules provide for prisoners amenities including libraries, most do not have a full time library due to a shortage of space. Prisoners enter the system at different ages, different stages, with varying backgrounds and abilities. Having lost their right to liberty, prisoners are expected to simply give up other basic rights as well. Prayas's library program has worked to ensure that prisoners have access to books, newspapers and magazines providing them- connection with the outer world, means to continue education and growth and find an escape for their mind. Prayas also advises and advocates in other states, finding ways to educate both inmates and prison authorities to ensure access to information.



**How they operate:** The library program works tirelessly with Maharashtra State Government and State and District libraries to extend library services to prisons. Due to Prayas's efforts, public libraries have recognized prisons as members and provide access to a wide variety of literature. In many prisons, teachers or social workers ferry books to prisons, where prisoners select books on a day assigned to their barrack and are responsible for their return. Naturally book loss and damages are high, given that prisoners have no space or means to safeguard their belongings

Prayas is urging the state public libraries to recognize unique circumstances and not penalise loss or damage. While there has been progress, many district and state libraries still charge prisons membership fees. Sudhakar is constantly working on finding ways and means to leverage other state resources as well. Prayas has petitioned for use of collectors' education funds to include support to prisons libraries. Prayas also looks for means to provide books free of cost through other state bodies for example Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation. Prayas library program also extends to childcare institutions and protective homes for women. Under the larger umbrella of providing a bundle of interventions like legal aid, awareness programs, information and assistance to rehabilitation programs, Prayas brings into its fold socio-economically vulnerable groups and excluded communities.

**Balancing Act:** Sudhakar talked of the need to strike a balance between what the prisoners demand and what is viewed as undesirable. Books that promote sedition, glorify crime etc are black listed. Prison authorities and Prayas have to work in a tense atmosphere where there are directions from MHA to carefully monitor literature in prisons, while High Courts have chastised them and issued directions to make a diverse collection available.

**The Good:** Prayas's work has changed the landscape of Maharashtra prisons. Library services have to cater to a wide group of convicts, undertrials, women, children etc. of different abilities, regions and needs. The state and district library support has ensured that at least a diverse and relevant collection is available. Prayas has seen an increase in demand for educational books.



Sudhakar is working to make informational booklets, newsletters issued by governments, yearly literature digests are available in prisons. He spoke of thriving library prison programs in some jails, where there are passionate District collectors and prison authorities who have demonstrated how books can transform their jails.

**The Bad:** Lack of infrastructure and space are huge challenges. Access to books and information is largely controlled by local prison authorities and rules vary from jail to jail. Prisoners are dealing with mental and physical trauma. Many face abuse inside and outside jails. An overextended judiciary and lengthy criminal trial process magnifies the problem. In this scenario, access to information and library services are sometimes sidelined. Prayas continues to work and make efforts big and small to close this enormous gap.

**FLN Connect:** Sudhakar used the FLN's Books For All Program to source a collection of diverse books. He believes the FLN network can do much- especially in advocating for the transformative effect of libraries. He believes that training of librarians and on library practices are essential and looks forward to collaborating with FLN for this.

Prayas | Website: <https://www.tiss.edu/view/11/projects/prayas/> Email: [prayas\\_1990@rediffmail.com](mailto:prayas_1990@rediffmail.com), and [prayas.rnd@gmail.com](mailto:prayas.rnd@gmail.com)

## Adhvan Foundation | Conversation with Megha Dharnidharka

Adhvan Foundation is committed to empowering children living in Child Care Institutions such as Orphanages, Children's Homes and Shelter Homes through Library interventions that support literacy, enhance life skills and raise readers. Operating since 2019, Adhvan now operates in Asha Sadhan, Mumbai - a children's home and adoption centre. Adhvan also offers training to organisations to strengthen their library initiatives. Adhvan is guided in its practices by Bookworm Goa and learnings from Bookworm's Library Educator Course.

**Unique challenges:** This library program caters to children who have experienced violence, exploitation, abuse or neglect. Child Care Institutions house large groups of children with limited resources and typically have tightly structured days that reward obedience and conformity. This leaves children and young adolescent girls without a space for expression or experimentation. Children enter homes at different points, sometimes with strong memories of life in their families and of traumatic circumstances that led them to the Institution. They come from different regions with

varying levels of reading and writing ability. The library program becomes a space for children and young girls to express themselves, experiment and gain experience without the pressure of results and maybe acquire resources and mechanisms to confront their personal traumas



**How they operate:** A common area in the home is converted into a library for a day. The Library is a safe and stimulating space where children can not only read and engage with stories but also ask questions and exercise autonomy. Children express their choice by choosing what books to read or what activities they engage with. Children issue books for the week and the close knit nature of the institutes means the books get passed around and discussed. Currently the library program serves nearly 30 children

from the ages 3 to 6 and close to 40 young adolescent girls aged 12-18 years.

**Relationship and Trust:** Megha believes that the relationship between the library educator and the children forms the core of the library program. The children feel acknowledged and seen. As much as they read stories, it is also their stories being heard. Children and young girls, carrying rage and grief, find escape and comfort in books. Sometimes, the books help them find ways to understand and express themselves.

**FLN Connect:** Being a part of FLN, gives Megha another group to belong to. She believes FLN can expand its training to include library practices that are informed by children's specific contexts and lived experiences. She believes in the transformative power of books and stories and advocates for the need to establish the right to read for all- especially those who are otherwise excluded or left out in the margins of our society.

**Adhvan Foundation:** Website: <https://www.adhvan.org>, Email: [megha@adhvan.org](mailto:megha@adhvan.org) Facebook: [@AdhvanIndia](https://www.facebook.com/AdhvanIndia)

# Book Nook

FLN Recommends



**Thana, from Muskaan**

A child and his mother are picked up as suspects by Police and kept in the 'thana' for the day. Read the child's account of the day spent in the police station

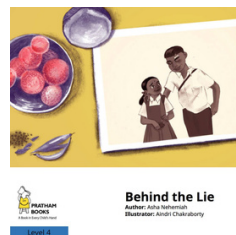


**Mirchi Ka Chura, by Bama from Muskaan**

Witness a day in Pachayamma's life, a courageous woman combatting the daily struggles of being a landless Dalit labourer.



**Beauty is Missing, by Priya Kurian. from Pratham Books**  
Join Inspector Jincy in tracking clues to find Tessamma's missing buffalo - Beauty. .



**Behind the Lie, by Asha Nemiah, Illustrator Aundri Chakroborthy from Pratham Books**

A story about domestic violence, grit and hope.



**'Pujje aur uska School' by Jacinta**  
Illustrator: Priya Kurian from Aug to Sep 2022 issue of Cycle Magazine from Ektara,

Story of 12-year-old who is caught by police and accused of being a Naxalite



**'Ek Din' by 13 year Ashikana ,**  
Illustrator Bhargav Kulkarni from 'Titahari ka Baccha' from Ektara

A child narrates her day at work, picking waste, desire to eat a cake while also showing the trials the community faces due to over-policing and routinely being picked up by the police as suspects.

# Just a Question



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

Are all members of my community using my library? Is my library safe and welcoming for girls, women, other genders, people with disabilities, people from different castes and religions? Does my library have a plan to understand who is excluded and how to invite them?

Are there people in my community who are cut off or excluded from community spaces and public institutions? Can my library play a role in providing library services to them?