



PRESS RELEASE

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Ambedkar Jayanti Marks a Milestone: Release of Draft Policy for Strengthening Public Libraries in India by the Free Libraries Network

[Delhi, April 2, 2024]: On the auspicious occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti on April 13, commemorating the birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar, the Free Libraries Network proudly announces the release of a landmark draft policy aimed at fortifying India's public library system.

Dr BR Ambedkar, a towering figure in India's history, revered for his intellect and commitment to justice, was an ardent advocate for education and social equality. His profound advocacy for reading and libraries underscores the importance of knowledge dissemination and equitable access to information. As we celebrate his legacy on this momentous day, the Free Libraries Network pays homage to his vision by unveiling a comprehensive draft policy aimed at addressing the critical need for a robust public library system in India.

The draft policy, aptly named "People's National Library Policy 2024," recognises the pivotal role of public libraries in empowering communities and fostering societal progress, especially amongst those excluded throughout India's history, including Dalit, Adivasi & Bahujan people, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people, undocumented & refugee communities and persons with disabilities. Rooted in Dr Ambedkar's ideals of equity and justice, the policy envisions a public library system that is freely accessible and relevant to all segments of society, transcending barriers of caste, class, gender and disability.

A core piece missing from the discourse around India's development trajectory is a strong public library system, which is freely accessible and relevant to all communities. Public libraries empower people by providing knowledge, information and education resources to support lifelong learning, creativity, innovation, research and development, allowing them to satisfy intellectual hunger and desire for self-improvement and to drive the upliftment of entire societies.

Presently, the number of public libraries, which are within the reach of all people, is grossly insufficient in India. Additionally, those that are available aren't uniformly guided by nationally-recognised standards that make for an inclusive, welcoming and excellent library experience. This means that only a small percentage of India's population has easy access to libraries, with socio-economic factors like caste, class, gender and disability proving to be significant impediments for the vast majority. This glaring gap goes against the ideas of equity and justice enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the drafting of which was led by Dr Ambedkar.

A national library policy is essential to define and guarantee equitable access to information and knowledge, empowering all people to contribute to India's societal strength. It will provide a framework for librarians and all stakeholders, including lawmakers, to build a library system that meets the diverse needs of the population, fostering informed communities empowered to steer collective progress.

The "People's National Library Policy 2024" recognises that a robust public library system, freely accessible to all, is a cornerstone of a healthy democracy. By doing away with subscription fees



and other entrenched social barriers to entry, public libraries can empower the people to engage in informed decision-making and participate actively in their communities. This universal access fosters an environment conducive to achieving the democratic ideals of our society. The policy envisages a robust public library system across the country that not only provides access to books and builds a widespread culture of reading but also promotes literacy and numeracy among citizens of all age groups and identities, apart from other learning programs. All public libraries will also provide universal internet access.

In order to achieve this, the policy focuses on the planks of standardisation of public libraries and decentralisation of their governance. To achieve standardisation, the policy suggests minimum standards that all public libraries must adhere to. These are derived from evidence-based international standards, validated by the experience of varied library practitioners, educators and experts across different contexts in India, within the Free Libraries Network, and from other grassroots organisations. Additionally, the policy recommends updating the curriculum for librarians that envisages them as community leaders and repositories for delivering constitutional rights, rather than as merely library record keepers. To decentralise governance of libraries, the policy outlines a collaborative framework for fostering a robust and decentralised national library system in India. It emphasises shared responsibility, local autonomy and effective resource utilisation through distinct roles assigned to various stakeholders.

The draft policy document will be available for public review and feedback starting from April 13, 2024, inviting stakeholders and citizens to contribute their insights and suggestions towards shaping the future of public libraries in India.

For media inquiries and further information, please contact: Purnima Rao, Director, Free Libraries Network (9871826895, freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com)

About Free Libraries Network: The Free Libraries Network (FLN) is a coalition of free libraries, librarians and library activists across India and South Asia. A member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), FLN believes in universal access to reading materials and information. FLN offers a platform for sharing resources, best practices and insights about free libraries in India. Although it does not own or operate libraries, FLN plays an integral role in coordinating and acting on policy issues related to access to knowledge resources.

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