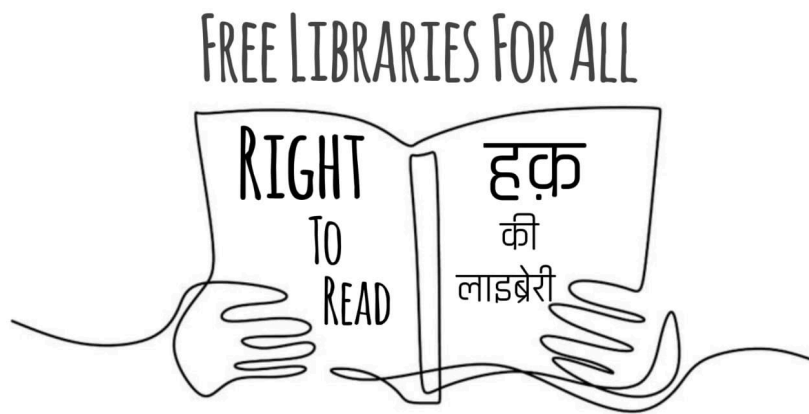




People's National Library Policy 2024 Draft Document



DRAFT

Support for FLN's People's National Library Policy 2024

"We strongly commend the efforts of the Free Libraries Network to place the work of public libraries in India on a more solid footing, so that in turn they can realise their potential to drive inclusive and sustainable development. The draft policy provides a great basis for bringing together decision-makers and the wider library community in order to develop both legislation and practical action plans."

– Stephen Wyber, Director-Advocacy & Policy, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

"We extend our wholehearted support to the commendable endeavours of the Free Libraries Network aimed at fortifying the role of public libraries in India, thereby unleashing their capacity to foster inclusive and sustainable development. The proposed policy framework offers a promising foundation for fostering collaboration between policymakers and the broader library ecosystem, facilitating the formulation of comprehensive legislative measures and actionable strategies."

– Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC)

"We endorse the People's National Library Policy and support it as we believe that libraries should be free and accessible to all specially the marginalised communities. This proposed policy calls for an inclusive policy and must be implemented at all costs"

– Beena Pallical, General Secretary, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights

'In a country as demographically diverse as ours, especially economic, with almost invisible state infrastructure, FLN's unrelenting efforts to provide comfortable, safe, and well thought-out curated libraries is incredible. They are bridging an invaluable learning and development gap. This much needed new policy recommendation which promises a solid blue print for the library ecosystem - across public, digital, community and including spaces like prisons - which normally aren't part of public discussions, shows how deeply invested FLN are in placing the role of books and reading as a primary need for development of children, individuals, the community and as a consequence our country. At HarperCollins, we value, cherish and promote the idea of reading for everyone, and are thankful to FLN for taking this lead to change India through a library revolution.'

– Ananth Padmanabhan, CEO HarperCollins India

"We extend our full support to the Free Libraries Network in their endeavour to establish a public library system in India that champions user rights, including privacy and data security. The Policy's commitment to provide public access to ICT resources is commendable and we hope that it greatly enhances digital literacy across the nation."

– Internet Freedom Foundation

Libraries embody magical spaces filled with wonder, curiosity, and exploration. They supply the building blocks for social architecture and construction. Unfortunately, in India, we have seen these spaces plagued by exclusion. Designed according to social and educational privileges, they exclude large sections of Indians from accessing a crucial environment for personal growth and introspection. For this reason, I strongly connect on a moral and emotive level with the efforts of the Free Libraries Network. This network actively dismantles the gatekeeping of knowledge. It welcomes everyone—young and old, poor and privileged, and all people regardless of their gender, caste, disability, and sexuality. I believe this inclusion humanizes those different from us through the common bonds of shared space and a love for reading. It builds social trust and practically realises the pluralistic values of our republic. If you ever feel cynical about our democratic future or doubt people's capacity for altruism, I urge you to visit a center.

– Apar Gupta, Founder, Internet Freedom Foundation & Digital Rights Activist

"Strong public Library system with free access to books is an essential part of Public life. Free Libraries support life long learning, promote community engagement and social inclusion . They help to break down social barriers. They empower people of all generations and promote knowledge."

– Jyoti Mhapsekar, President- Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Mumbai and Former Librarian

"PNLP24 sets the stage for the people's collective voice toward building library policy and public libraries through FLN's efforts. More power to FLN's effort"

– Preedip Balaji, Academic Librarian and Researcher

(For a full list of FLN supporters, please see the list at the end of this document.)

The People’s National Library Policy 2024: Reforming the Indian Public Library System

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	6
Introduction.....	10
History of Public Library System and Policy in India.....	11
Early Beginnings.....	11
Early to Mid 1900s: First Attempts at National Policy.....	12
1980’s-1990s: Draft Library Bills, State Legislations, and the Rise of Advocacy.....	12
2014: National Mission on Libraries and Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation.....	13
Present Scenario and Challenges.....	13
Looking Ahead.....	14
1. Need for Public Libraries.....	15
2. Defining Library Policy.....	18
3. Goals and Objectives.....	21
3.1. Promotion of literacy and numeracy among users of different age-groups.....	21
3.2. Universal and responsible internet access.....	23
3.3. Other learning programmes.....	24
4. Minimum Standards for Libraries.....	26
4.1. Free membership (all services are free).....	26
4.2. Non-discrimination on the basis of any identity marker.....	28
4.3. What are library standards and guidelines?.....	31
4.4. Why do we need standardisation of various library models?.....	33
4.5. Provisions for Persons with Disabilities.....	34
4.6. Knowledge Resources: Books, audio-video and other digital resources, periodicals etc... 36	
4.7. Information resources and services.....	38
4.8. Dynamic and Member-Oriented Library Curriculum.....	39
4.9. Documentation and library records.....	40
4.10. Archiving.....	42
4.11. Privacy of users’ data and cybersecurity of digital public library infrastructure.....	44
4.12. Safety and inclusion of staff and members.....	45
4.13. Compliance with intellectual property rights of creators and publishers.....	48
4.14. Funding and Sustainability.....	49
5. Types of Libraries.....	52

5.1. Public Libraries.....	52
5.2. School Libraries.....	52
5.3. Academic and Research Libraries.....	53
5.4. Community Libraries.....	53
5.5. Digital Libraries.....	53
5.6. Prison Libraries.....	53
6. Library Education.....	54
Some Key Areas for Reform.....	54
7. National Education Policy and National Library Policy.....	56
8. Governance.....	56
8.1. Union Government:.....	56
8.2. State Governments:.....	57
8.3. Local Self-Governments (Panchayats and Municipalities):.....	57
8.4. National Digital Library and Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation:.....	58
9. Recommendations for action.....	58
9.1. Quantitative and qualitative survey of public libraries across India.....	58
9.2. Audit of implementation of state library laws.....	60
9.3. Implementation of policy.....	61
10. Library Networks, Associations, and Federations.....	63
Appendix A: Supporters of Free Libraries Network.....	65
Appendix B: PNLP 2024 in Media.....	66

Executive Summary

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 the people by providing knowledge, information and education resources to support life-long learning, creativity, innovation, research and development, allowing them to satisfy intellectual hunger & 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. Those who are excluded are glaringly Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasis, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities. This glaring gap goes against the ideas of equity & justice enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

A national library policy is essential to define and guarantee equitable access to information & 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 acts to undo both historic and present day exclusion of people, specifically Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasis, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities. This universal access fosters an environment conducive to achieving the democratic ideals of our society.

The policy envisages a robust anti-caste public library system across the country that not only provides access to books & builds a widespread culture of reading, but also

promotes literacy and numeracy among citizens of all age groups & identities, apart from other learning programmes. 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 & experts across different contexts in India, within the Free Libraries Network and from other grassroots organisations.

These minimum standards include, among other things:

- Free membership and services
- Non-discrimination in access, with specific focus on historic and present day caste, class, gender, ability based exclusion
- Adequate access for persons with disabilities
- Dynamic and member-oriented curriculum
- Privacy of users' data and cyber security of digital library infrastructure
- Safety and inclusion of staff members
- Innovative and active funding and sustainability practices
- Archiving and documentation of library records
- Localised and diverse knowledge and information resources

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 Union Government leads policy and resource allocation:

- Formulates a national library policy with clear standards and guidelines.

- Allocates dedicated grants and facilitates their convergence with other schemes for library development.
- Leads digitisation initiatives and development of interoperable digital platforms.
- Promotes research in library science and advocates for libraries nationally and internationally.

State governments adapt and implement:

- Adapt the national framework to their specific contexts and develop state-level library policies.
- Establish dedicated library departments or designate responsible entities.
- Allocate state funds to supplement central grants and support local government & non-government bodies.
- Invest in infrastructure development, resource sharing, and personnel training.
- Invest in training and hiring, utilising reservation to undo historic and present day caste-discrimination and to ensure adequate representation for all people from margins.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of library programs and services.

Local self-governments engage communities:

- Actively engage local communities in library planning, development, and programming.
- Utilise the mechanism of reservation to undo historic and present day discrimination.
- Ensure efficient operation and accessibility of local libraries.
- Select and acquire resources based on local needs and cultural context.
- Implement library programs and services addressing community needs.
- Collaborate with local organisations, schools, and NGOs for outreach and engagement.
- Explore innovative ways to generate local revenue through partnerships and fundraising initiatives.

The National Digital Library and RRRLF facilitate and support to:

- Maintain a central repository for digitised library resources accessible across the country.
- Act as the implementation arm for the national library policy, providing financial and technical support.

- Develop and share digital resources, best practices, and training materials.
- Facilitate collaboration and resource sharing among libraries across regions and levels.
- Support research and development initiatives in digital libraries and related technologies.

This approach fosters a decentralised library system that effectively serves diverse communities and contributes to national development.

In order to implement the policy, it is recommended that the Union government first carry out a qualitative and quantitative survey of all public libraries across India. Secondly, state governments must commission independent audits of their library laws.

Effective implementation of the policy hinges on collaboration, resource allocation and stakeholder engagement. This involves widespread stakeholder consultation, official adoption, establishing dedicated implementation bodies with action plans, capacity building for librarians and staff, monitoring progress and impact, fostering partnerships and raising public awareness. By embracing this comprehensive approach, India can strengthen its public library system, improve access to information, and promote learning for all.

Introduction

India is a democracy guided by the values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity we have enshrined in our constitution. Policies are key to framing the intention to live by these values, and policy holds us and our government accountable to our intention. Through policy we create infrastructure and institutions that bring alive the practice of these constitutional values.

A public library system is a critical infrastructure, and libraries are key institutions that provide all people with equal access to information which then allows them to participate in the creation of the society envisioned in our constitution. At present our libraries and library infrastructure function without the guidance of national policy and are effectively unmoored from our constitutional values. This is most evident in the uneven access to libraries afforded the people of India. This uneven access is especially egregious in perpetuating historic and present day exclusion of people from the margins.

National library policy would provide us with the opportunity to articulate the kind of information access that is necessary and important for the people of India to achieve their strength as a society. Without library policy it is not possible for lawmakers and librarians to provide the libraries people need. This has been borne out historically. India has no national library policy and the result is a library landscape that is patched together, and uneven in what it offers people. People in some parts of India enjoy adequate access to vital information but those in other parts lack any access to libraries and information. The vast majority of Indians have **no access** to libraries as a resource for fulfilling their need for information.

Legislation that follows from strong national and local policy can provide adequate support for libraries to fulfil their mission of providing equal access to information for all people, and thereby strengthen people's participation in decision making and society formation. Legislation can secure funds and autonomy for libraries and the people they serve. India already has a broad architecture for provision of such services in other domains such as food, work, education, and even health to some extent at the sub-national level. Public Libraries would add to the existing Rights based architecture of welfare in the country.

“The People's National Library Policy 2024” begins from the premise that a flourishing public library system can support society in maintaining the democratic organisation of political life only if it is free and open to all people. A free library without any subscription or membership fees is the mechanism by which a library can be open to all. Free is also

the mechanism that can undo historic and present day exclusion of marginalised populations from participation in society. And only by being open to all can any library, in any society, aim to help that society achieve its democratic ideals.

The historic exclusion of vast numbers of people in India from equal participation in our society was accomplished through excluding them from knowledge and information. Such exclusion was practised through the caste system, through class and gender and other social divisions. Such exclusion was practised by the colonial government to uphold colonial interests and such exclusion can continue to serve hierarchically organised class and caste based division of society. Free membership in public libraries is the key that opens the gates to knowledge equally for all people. Only once the people have this key, and open this gate, can they actively partake of the constitution's promise of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

History of Public Library System and Policy in India

Early Beginnings

The history of public libraries in India is marked by both a rich tradition and a lack of central coordination. Critically, it has failed to address generational barriers to access due to casteist exclusion of Dalit, Adivasi and Bahujan people.

Early library establishments, like the State Central Library in Kerala (1820), the Asiatic Society Library (1804) and the Assam Library Association (1938), were largely regional initiatives and education was the principal forerunner of modernization.

In 1910, Maharaja of Baroda State, Sayajirao Gaekwad III, inspired by American public libraries, created the Baroda Central Library, whose defining feature was that it was free & open to all. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad was a firm believer of equity in education and would go down in history as one of the earliest allies of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, endowing him with a scholarship to study at Columbia University, USA. However, even as the Maharaja championed free libraries, his efforts remained isolated against the forces of brahmanism. There was no widespread library movement to fight casteist gatekeeping of education and knowledge resources and a vast majority of Indians continued to be kept out of the halls of learning.

Despite this, the idea that free libraries are tools to dismantle oppression, has been shown most powerfully by anti-caste movements. From the 1930's onwards and throughout his life, Dr. Ambedkar undertook the task of establishing & equipping libraries across India, in various organisations which fought for the rights of marginalised people, firmly linking free libraries with the fight for social justice and collective empowerment.

Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, libraries were integrated into the emerging freedom movements. “It was not merely by coincidence that the annual meetings of the All India Public Library Association (AIPL) used to be held in conjunction with sessions of the Indian National Congress.” (The Story of Libraries in India , by Dwarika N. Banerjee, 1996, MIT Press). In post-independence India, Prof. SR Ranganathan, hailed as the Father of Library Sciences, emerged as a champion for defining library missions and standards in India, and campaigned for creating legislative provisions to institute a free public library system that served all sections of society.

Kerala in particular was able to solve the problem of access by provisioning a large number of public libraries that had deep reach into communities, through the early to mid 1900s. These public libraries had a transformative impact on the state’s overall literacy and education and continue to serve as a noteworthy model for the rest of the country to emulate and learn from.

Nevertheless, public libraries in India have never been uniformly free (i.e. free from fees and free from barriers of caste, patriarchy and ableism) since the unresolved question of how, and by whom, public libraries are to be funded and governed has never been decisively addressed through a national library policy in India.

Early to Mid 1900s: First Attempts at National Policy

The first significant attempt at a national library began with the Imperial Library Act of 1902, which established the Imperial Library in Calcutta (now National Library of India in Kolkata). However, the Act did not address broader issues of public library development or how reading could flourish when access to knowledge resources was denied along caste & gender lines. Subsequent decades saw sporadic efforts at policy formulation, including the Model Public Libraries Bill of 1963 and the National Policy on Education (1968), which recognized public libraries as essential for literacy and education. From the 1930s onward the passionate voice of Dr S R Ranganathan was heard arguing for State level interventions in the library question. He presented numerous Model Library Acts, including the one that became the basis of the Tamil Nadu Public Libraries Act. The Act ,while progressive, unfortunately disavows Ranganathan’s First Law of Library Science and restricts membership to paid users. In the *The Five Laws of Library Science* S R Ranganathan’s begins, in the first law, from the premise that books are for use and in order to be used that they must be made free through free library membership.

1980’s-1990s: Draft Library Bills, State Legislations, and the Rise of Advocacy

In the 1980s and 1990s, several drafts for a national library policy were proposed, but none were officially adopted. This period also witnessed the rise of advocacy groups, like the Indian Library Association, pushing for stronger library legislation and resource

allocation. In 1986, the Chattopadhyay Committee gave us a draft 'National Policy on Library and Information System' which defined the task of the government, "to establish, maintain and strengthen the free public libraries in the country" (Chapter III). It made two essential declarations: (1) public libraries are free, and (2) it is the government's responsibility to build and empower them for the people.

Currently libraries are listed as a state subject in the Indian Constitution. 19 Indian states have public library legislation, although only 1 state (Haryana) defines the public library as free from subscription fees. In the absence of a definitive demand for libraries that are free, excellent, and open to all, the Indian public library system has failed to become a relevant and accessible resource for the people. Rather than a focus on people's empowerment and social democracy, there is a danger of public libraries defaulting to the narrow emphasis on libraries as a means to create disempowered workers that serve the interests of the powerful elite, further deepening their marginalisation.

2014: National Mission on Libraries and Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation

In 2014, public libraries came into focus once more with the launch of the National Mission on Libraries (NML) by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. The NML aimed to strengthen and revitalise public libraries across India by providing grants, promoting digital initiatives, and improving infrastructure. NML established the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) as its executive arm, responsible for implementing the Mission's objectives and managing grants. It was charged with (1) Upgradation of existing public libraries, in line with the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission, largely focussing on digitisation and ICT interventions. (2) Development of the National Virtual Library of India. (3) Setting up model NML libraries through collaboration with state governments. (4) Conducting surveys on the existing library scenario and (5) Building librarianship skills and capacities for more sensitised and digitally-empowered library services.

Present Scenario and Challenges

While the NML and RRRLF have made strides in creating the National Virtual Library of India, it has failed to bring about upgradation in the national public library system that extends from central libraries to state, district and village/neighbourhood libraries. It has also failed to address the fundamental issue of access by not responding to the need for free, inclusive, and excellent libraries. Its disproportionate focus on ICT (including disproportionate resource allocation to digitising libraries in the name of modernisation), fails to account for glaring digital inequities such as the lack of high quality internet and smart devices in India. Most critically, without a national library policy the NML and

RRRFL fail to respond to the needs of all people, especially underserved and marginalised communities and be accountable to them.

The existence of a clear and comprehensive policy will add weight to the NML and RRRLF by directing them to make themselves known to, and serve, existing libraries. It will also hold them to their mandate of aiding the creation of libraries that are missing from the Indian library landscape.

Looking Ahead

In order for India's public library system to foster an ethos of free learning & empowerment through books & other knowledge resources, it must think centre the needs of the vast majority of Indians who remain outside the threshold of library institutions, due to their caste & gender identities. The public library must create mechanisms to serve the needs of these teeming millions from Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities. It must cater to the economically disadvantaged and the working classes and it must invite into reading, all those who have been excluded for thousands of years.

Most recently, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism, and Culture in its 310th Report (dated February 2022) on, "Functioning of Central Libraries in the country" has drawn attention to the dismal state of public libraries in India. In its wide-ranging observations the committee noted that, "many public libraries are in a state of despair and remain largely underdeveloped" (para 32). It further said that, "The Committee is of the view that public libraries have been neglected for a long time now and any change would need substantial time and effort from all directions—state, community, private sector, and non-governmental organisations" (para 33). The committee noted several problems with the functioning of the public library system which include the lack of a comprehensive legislative framework and a national policy for libraries (para 40). Crucially, it observed that one of the primary constraints in the development of libraries has been the paucity of financial resources. It notes that, "finance remains the main hurdle for the development of public libraries in India" (para 44). The committee pointed out that, "public libraries are not being attended with adequate funds either by the State government or by the Union Government" (para 41), and that funds collected for libraries are not being spent on library development.

The lack of adequate financing for public libraries is reflected in the figures. India spends a meager 7 paise per person on libraries, as compared with 35 USD and 44 AUD in the United States and Australia respectively. India has just 1 rural library for

every 11,500 people and 1 urban library for every 80,000 people, as against the global norms of 1 library for every 3000 people. Of these, the vast majority are underfunded and inadequately resourced. Most libraries do not follow minimum standards in terms of book collections, trained personnel, access to digital resources, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and facilities such as well-lit reading rooms, internet connectivity, and a safe welcoming environment for all. The public library system must also relook at key processes including admission, outreach, curation, staff recruitment, capacity-building and funding to incorporate reservations for Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities.

Public library reform is thus an urgent demand of India's people, who deserve free and equal access to excellent knowledge and information resources as a matter of right, enshrined in the Indian constitution. This must be delivered through a national library policy that dedicates itself to creating access for all, while addressing the barriers to reading, thinking, and learning freely, and recognises the public library as an institution that guarantees justice by addressing knowledge gaps in society.

In the absence of such a guiding policy framework to scaffold legislation, we run the danger of public libraries becoming a mere tool to enact narrow, exclusionary agendas that serve only the elite, further disenfranchising oppressed people by gatekeeping knowledge, policing information, and denying fundamental freedoms.

1. Need for Public Libraries

“The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making, and cultural development of the individual and social groups. It underpins healthy knowledge societies through providing access to and enabling the creation and sharing of knowledge of all sorts, including scientific and local knowledge without commercial, technological or legal barriers.” ~ IFLA-UNESCO Manifesto - 2022

Public libraries are critical to democracy, delivering the right to read by providing access to quality knowledge, education, and information through books and other reading resources, library programs, curriculum, and policies that foster inclusion. A public library responds to its community's demand for individual growth and collective empowerment and is a community-led institution that evolves dynamically with the changing needs of the people it serves.

The public library occupies a central place in the intellectual, cultural, economic and creative life of any society. It must, by definition, be a space that delivers programs and

resources in a just, and therefore, free and inclusive manner to all. Public libraries that foster and protect the freedom to read, think, share, and learn, lead to the creation of a society that is driven by humanistic values and is unafraid to seek and secure for itself an equitable world.

Free public libraries are essential public goods. They not only contribute to the improvement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by supporting universal literacy and enabling access to information, public libraries generate positive outcomes which have multiplier effects across sectors, including but not limited to contributing to higher R&D, GDP, and more importantly higher HDI.

The case for free and excellent public libraries in India is compelling:

- 1) Community spaces that facilitate reading, learning, and free thinking: The public library is a place for people to collect, commune over, and debate ideas, which serve to further their needs, hopes, aspirations, and imaginations. It is a space where knowledge and information resources are meant to be shared by the collective to drive progress of a society.
- 2) Access to foundational literacies and education resources: Public libraries provide resources, curriculum, and programs to access foundational literacies (reading, numeracy, and digital literacy) to all. Libraries do not replace, rather they compliment and enhance, school-based and life-long learning. This access is essential for improving educational attainment, particularly in underserved and generationally-excluded communities.
- 3) Bridging the digital divide: Public libraries can overcome digital inequities by providing high quality internet connectivity, computer access, digital literacy, and safety for all. This empowers individuals to access information freely and safely, engage in online learning, and participate in the digital economy. In a rapidly digitising world, public libraries are crucial for ensuring digital rights reach all with the goal to empower and enrich them.
- 4) Promoting social inclusion and community engagement: Public libraries are inclusive spaces that welcome people from all walks of life, fostering social cohesion and community engagement. They provide a neutral ground for dialogue, exchange of ideas, and cross-cultural understanding, promoting social harmony and a sense of belonging. They acknowledge historical & current systemic exclusions and create mechanisms for representation of Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities.

- 5) Nurturing creativity and innovation: Public libraries provide spaces for people to explore their creativity, engage in intellectual and artistic pursuits, self-improvement, and collective-growth. They do this by creating opportunities for reflection, new learning, and skill development. They host workshops, seminars, and other events that promote creativity and innovation, fostering a vibrant social and cultural scene and contributing to the development of a well-rounded society. There is a growing discussion on the lack of R&D in India at the level of GDP when compared to other countries. Part of the problem stems from a culture where creativity and innovation are not incentivized from a young age. Public Libraries would complement existing efforts, such as Tinkering Labs and start up promotion funds, in cultivating society level creativity and innovation cultures throughout the country.
- 6) Supporting lifelong learning and personal development: Public libraries serve as lifelong learning centers, providing access to resources and opportunities for continuous growth. They offer a wide range of adult education programs, language classes, and vocational training courses, empowering individuals to upskill and re-skill throughout their lives. A library that is free, anti-caste & feminist can serve a vital role in delivering equitable opportunities for growth by designing programs to serve Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities.
- 7) Preserving cultural and literary heritage, growing new literatures, and knowledge hubs: Public libraries act as repositories of literary and cultural heritage, preserving and disseminating valuable historical documents, manuscripts, and artworks. They play a vital role in safeguarding India's rich cultural heritage, especially in preserving languages and literatures, and passing it on to future generations. They do not just preserve heritage but also create spaces for new cultures, literatures, and languages to thrive. In particular, free libraries, which are owned by the people, can serve to address the erasure of histories, narratives and languages of caste-oppressed, tribal and other marginalised communities. For eg: programmatic interventions for 'Dalit History Month' can be powerful in bringing lost stories back to life.
- 8) Strengthening democracy and civic engagement: Public libraries provide access to information and resources that promote informed people's participation in their society and civic engagement. They host discussions, workshops, and forums on current affairs, encouraging people to participate in the democratic process and

make informed decisions. Above all, public libraries promote equality of access to the information people are seeking and thereby equally empower people's participation in society. They are a great force for an equalising and non-hierarchical organisation of society, and can act as a balance against forces that drive toward hierarchical organisation of society. For this, public libraries must create reservation-based representation of Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities.

Public libraries are essential pillars of a thriving society, providing access to knowledge, fostering lifelong learning, and promoting social inclusion. India needs robust public libraries to empower its populace, bridge social divides, and contribute to the nation's overall development. Investing in public libraries is an investment in the future of India.

2. Defining Library Policy

India, with its vast population, diverse communities, and historical exclusions along lines of caste, class, gender, sexuality, religion, disability amongst others, faces unique challenges in ensuring equitable access to information and knowledge. Public libraries can play a crucial role in bridging the gap. A strong and comprehensive public library policy, with an emphasis on libraries being free, excellent, and inclusive, is essential for this goal. A public library policy should be a people-led responsive vision that:

- 1) Ensures accessibility and inclusion: The policy should prioritise making libraries accessible to everyone, which necessitates not just serving the needs of those who have access to education, knowledge & information resources but building social-inclusion bridges for those who don't i.e. people from Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities. To achieve this goal, special attention is to be given to pedagogical approaches, programmatic interventions, admission & staffing processes, curation and library best practices that reinforce anti-caste, anti-hate, feminist and disability-inclusive values.
- 2) Addresses the needs of diverse communities and acknowledges barriers to access: A public library policy should define the institution as fundamentally free, anti-caste, feminist and disability-inclusive. It must recognize that different communities have specific needs and preferences when it comes to library services. It should take special cognisance of the most vulnerable and excluded sections of society, for whom quality knowledge, information, and education resources remain inaccessible till date. The policy must create specific curriculum

& programmatic bridges by which those who have been and continue to be socially excluded - Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities - are invited into the library, into reading and into digital literacies. It should empower communities to engage as stakeholders, promoting flexibility and adaptability, allowing libraries to tailor their collections, programs, and outreach initiatives to cater to the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic realities of their communities.

- 3) Codifies standards of excellence and guidelines for all public libraries: National library policy must lay out the framework for best practices, infrastructure, curriculum and programs that are enacted across the public library system in order to ensure uniformity and standards of excellence in all services delivered to the people, free from fees and systemic socio-economic barriers. All standards and guidelines must be founded in the universal, humanistic, and constitutional values of equality, liberty and justice. They must be anti-caste, anti-hate, feminist and disability-inclusive in all respects.
- 4) Strengthens local governance, community ownership, and partnerships: A public library policy should emphasise the importance of local involvement in library governance. This could include community representation in library boards, participatory planning processes, and collaboration with local organisations to develop and deliver relevant programs, services, and resources. Accounting for historic & contemporary barriers like caste & gender, community-ownership must also be fostered through reservations in recruitment & funding libraries for Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities. Special efforts must be made to extend the library network to those communities that have never had access to library services & resources before.
- 5) Promotes sustainability and resource mobilization: The policy should address the chronic underfunding of public libraries in India. Funding for a public library system must be sustainable and this can only be ensured through allocation of public funds. This allocation should account for per capita expenditure that meets per capita need for excellent library services, that are in turn tied to standards and guidelines as outlined in this policy. The policy can encourage innovative funding mechanisms like public-private partnerships, community fundraising initiatives, and resource sharing models for additional funding for library operations. When funding new libraries or extending the existing library network, special focus & resource

allocation should be on libraries that serve Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities.

- 6) Fosters digital access, innovation, and technology integration: The policy must address the urgent need to make the Internet, ICT resources, and digital literacies available to all and should acknowledge all current barriers to this i.e. unequal distribution of such resources in rural & remote India, as well as in working class, Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi communities and gender minorities. Besides infrastructure, the policy must address the lack of digital literacies in these same marginalised & underserved communities. It must safeguard the rights of all people to access digital resources freely, without censorship or surveillance, and without fear of losing ownership over their data and privacy. The policy should encourage libraries to integrate technology into their services, offering digital resources, e-learning platforms, and innovative literacy programs that cater to the needs of a digitally connected population.

The policy must address:

- 1) Community engagement and leadership: Mechanisms for community involvement and leadership in library governance, planning, and program development.
- 2) Resource allocation: Strategies for ensuring adequate funding and resource allocation for libraries, including exploring innovative funding models.
- 3) Collection development: Guidelines for building diverse and culturally relevant collections that cater to the specific needs of local communities.
- 4) Services and programs: Framework for providing essential library services and developing innovative programs tailored to community needs.
- 5) Technology integration: Strategies for promoting technology adoption in libraries, including digital resource acquisition, e-learning platforms, and technology-based literacy programs.
- 6) Accessibility and inclusion: Measures to ensure access to library services for people with disabilities, marginalised communities, and those living in remote areas.
- 7) Staffing and training: Guidelines for adequate staffing levels, professional qualifications, and training opportunities for library personnel.

- 8) Monitoring and Evaluation: Mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the policy and evaluating its effectiveness in meeting community needs.

By addressing these critical areas, a robust public library policy can empower libraries to become vibrant hubs of learning, knowledge sharing, and community engagement, contributing significantly to India's social and intellectual development.

3. Goals and Objectives

3.1. Promotion of literacy and numeracy among users of different age-groups

One of the most important roles of the public library is to promote literacy and numeracy.

- 1) Literacy and numeracy are essential skills for success in school, in the workplace, and in life. Without strong literacy and numeracy skills, individuals are more likely to struggle in school, have difficulty finding and keeping a job, and to be unable to fully participate in society.
- 2) Public libraries are one of the most accessible and affordable ways for people to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Libraries are open to everyone, regardless of their income or background. They should offer a variety of free or low-cost programs and services.
- 3) Public libraries can play a role in reducing poverty and inequality. Literacy and numeracy are key factors in economic development. By promoting literacy and numeracy, public libraries help to create a more equitable society.

Here are specific strategies for how public libraries in India could promote literacy and numeracy among users of different age groups:

3.1.1. Early Childhood Literacy

- 1) Storytelling sessions: Libraries could conduct regular storytelling sessions for young children, using engaging narratives and interactive techniques to foster a love for reading and storytelling.
- 2) Early literacy programs: Libraries could implement early literacy programs that introduce children to the alphabet, phonics, and basic reading skills through fun activities and games.
- 3) Read-aloud programs: Libraries could organise read-aloud programs where volunteers read aloud to children, exposing them to a variety of genres and authors.

3.1.2. School-Aged Children

- 1) Reading clubs: Libraries could establish reading clubs for school-aged children, encouraging them to discuss books, share their thoughts, and develop their reading comprehension skills.
- 2) Book fairs and exhibitions: Libraries could host book fairs and exhibitions, showcasing a wide range of books that cater to the interests and reading levels of school children.
- 3) Literary competitions: Libraries could organise literary competitions, such as story-writing contests, poetry slams, and essay writing competitions to encourage creativity and engagement with literature.

3.1.3. Adults and Seniors

- 1) Literacy programs for adults: Libraries could offer literacy programs for adults who may not have had the opportunity to learn to read or write in their youth.
- 2) Numeracy workshops: Libraries could conduct numeracy workshops for adults, teaching them essential numeracy skills for everyday life, such as budgeting, financial management, and basic mathematics.
- 3) Book clubs for adults and seniors: Libraries could establish book clubs for adults and seniors, providing opportunities for discussion, analysis, and intellectual stimulation.
- 4) Financial & Digital Literacy workshops: As Digital Public Goods Infrastructure of India becomes the primary mode of interaction of economic and social transactions among institutions and communities, public libraries can become important spaces for carrying out localised financial and digital literacy workshops
- 5) Misinformation Literacy: As a large number of Indian adults take to digital media, increasingly management and curbing of spread of misinformation and disinformation is key. Public Libraries can play an important role in supporting communities in curbing the spread of misinformation.

3.1.4. Promoting literacy and numeracy in rural and remote communities

- 1) Mobile libraries: Libraries could operate mobile libraries that travel to rural areas, providing access to books and educational resources for communities with limited access to traditional libraries.

- 2) Community literacy and numeracy initiatives: Libraries could collaborate with local organisations and community leaders to organise literacy and numeracy initiatives tailored to the specific needs of rural communities.
- 3) Partnerships with schools and community centers: Libraries could partner with schools and community centers in rural areas to provide literacy and numeracy support programs.

By implementing these strategies and adapting them to the specific needs of their communities, public libraries in India could play a transformative role in promoting literacy and numeracy among users of all ages, empowering individuals and contributing to a more educated and informed society.

3.2. Universal and responsible internet access

Public libraries in India should provide universal internet access for the following reasons:

- 1) Bridging the digital divide: In India there is a significant gap between those who have access to the internet and those who do not. By providing universal internet access, libraries can help to bridge this digital divide and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the digital world.
- 2) Promoting education and learning: The internet is a powerful tool for education and learning. By providing access to the internet, libraries can help students of all ages to research school projects, learn new skills, and stay up-to-date on current events.
- 3) Supporting economic development: The internet is essential for economic development. By providing access to the internet, libraries can help entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses, and they can help job seekers to find new employment opportunities.

There are a number of ways in which libraries in India can provide universal and responsible internet access:

- 1) Partner with internet service providers (ISPs): Libraries should partner with ISPs to offer free internet access to library patrons.
- 2) Provide Wi-Fi access: Libraries should provide Wi-Fi access in their facilities, allowing users to access the internet from their own devices.
- 3) Offer internet training: Libraries should offer internet training classes to help patrons learn how to use the internet safely and effectively.

- 4) Develop online resources: Libraries should develop online resources that provide information and support to patrons.
- 5) Promote digital literacy: Libraries should promote digital literacy by hosting workshops, seminars, and other events.
- 6) Protect user privacy: Libraries must take steps to protect the privacy of their patrons when they are using the internet. This includes using secure networks and providing clear privacy policies.
- 7) Filter inappropriate content: Libraries must filter inappropriate content from the internet. However, it is important to do so in a way that does not block access to legitimate information.
- 8) Provide access to assistive technologies: Libraries should provide access to assistive technologies that can help people with disabilities use the internet.
- 9) Promote responsible internet use: Libraries should promote responsible internet use by teaching users about online safety and cyberbullying.

By providing universal and responsible internet access, libraries in India would play a vital role in promoting education, economic development, and social inclusion.

3.3. Other learning programmes

Libraries in India should develop and introduce a wide variety of learning programs for their members, catering to different age groups, interests, and learning styles. Here are some examples of effective learning programs that libraries can implement, based on successful models of these already in place in India:

3.3.1. Skill Development Programs

- 1) Computer literacy courses: Teach basic computer skills, such as word processing, email, and internet usage.
- 2) Digital literacy workshops: Provide training on digital access, online safety, and critical thinking in the digital age.
- 3) Vocational training courses: Offer vocational training courses in areas such as hospitality, retail, and IT.

3.3.2. Creative and Cultural Programs

- 1) Creative writing workshops: Provide opportunities for individuals to explore their creativity and develop their writing skills.
- 2) Art classes and workshops: Offer classes and workshops in various art forms, such as painting, drawing, and photography.

- 3) Music and dance classes: Teach music and dance lessons for individuals of all ages and skill levels.
- 4) Fostering innovation at a young age: Fostering innovative thinking cultures among young children will support start up india, make in india, and broader R&D initiatives.

3.3.3. Lifelong Learning Programs

- 1) Book clubs and discussion groups: Facilitate book clubs and discussion groups on various topics, promoting intellectual engagement and critical thinking.
- 2) Language learning groups: Provide opportunities for individuals to practice and improve their language skills in a conversational setting.
- 3) Lectures and seminars: Organise lectures and seminars by experts in various fields, offering insights and knowledge on current topics.

3.3.4. Programs for Specific Needs

- 1) Programs for children with disabilities: Develop tailored programs that address the specific needs of children with disabilities, promoting their learning and development.
- 2) Programs for seniors: Offer programs that cater to the interests and needs of older adults, providing cognitive stimulation and social engagement opportunities.
- 3) Programs for marginalised communities: Design programs that address the specific needs of marginalised communities, promoting literacy, numeracy, and skill development.

Libraries should also consider the following factors when developing learning programs:

- 1) Target audience: Determine the age group, interests, and needs of the target audience.
- 2) Program format: Decide whether the program will be offered in person, online, or in a hybrid format.
- 3) Program duration: Determine the length of the program, whether it will be a one-time event, a series of sessions, or an ongoing program.
- 4) Program instructors: Recruit qualified and experienced instructors to lead the programs.

- 5) Program resources: Secure the necessary resources, such as books, computers, and equipment.
- 6) Program promotion: Promote the programs through various channels, such as flyers, social media, and local media.

By developing and implementing a diverse range of learning programs, libraries in India can cater to the varied interests and needs of their members, empowering individuals to acquire new skills, expand their knowledge, and foster a lifelong love of learning.

4. Minimum Standards for Libraries

4.1. Free membership (all services are free)

Providing free membership to public libraries in India is a non-negotiable requirement for the following reasons:

- 1) Promoting literacy and education: Free membership ensures that everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic background, has equal access to the library's resources. This is particularly important in India, where a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line and may not be able to afford to pay for library membership. By removing the financial barrier, libraries can play a pivotal role in promoting literacy and education across all social strata.
- 2) Enhancing social Inclusion and equity: Free membership fosters a sense of inclusivity and promotes social equity by ensuring that library services are accessible to everyone. This helps to break down social barriers and creates a level playing field for individuals from all backgrounds to access information, knowledge, and opportunities for personal growth.
- 3) Empowering marginalised communities: Free membership establishes that the library is not a favour to be doled out and withdrawn but is a basic right, intrinsic to people's identity as human beings and participants in their society. Free membership empowers underprivileged & historically oppressed communities by providing them with access to essential resources for learning, skill development, and personal advancement. Libraries can serve as hubs for information, training, and support, enabling individuals from marginalised groups sDalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities to improve their lives and contribute to their communities.

- 4) Promoting civic engagement: Free membership encourages civic engagement and informed participation by providing access to information and resources related to current affairs, public policy, and social issues. Libraries can serve as platforms for dialogue and debate, fostering a well-informed and engaged people capable of participating actively in the democratic process.
- 5) Nurturing a culture of reading and lifelong learning: Free membership cultivates a culture of reading and lifelong learning by making books and other learning materials easily accessible to everyone. This can lead to increased literacy rates, improved educational outcomes, and a more intellectually stimulated society.
- 6) Promoting community development and social cohesion: Free membership strengthens communities by providing shared spaces for interaction, learning, and cultural exchange. Libraries can serve as catalysts for community development, bringing people together to address common challenges and promote social cohesion.
- 7) Fulfilling the public service mandate: Free membership aligns with the public service mandate of libraries, recognising their role as essential institutions for democratic societies. By providing free access, libraries fulfil their responsibility to serve the public good and promote the well-being of all people.
- 8) Optimising resource utilisation and return on investment: Free membership allows for more efficient resource utilisation and a greater return on investment in public libraries. By eliminating membership fees, libraries can focus their resources on acquiring and maintaining a diverse and comprehensive collection of resources, providing high-quality services, and expanding their outreach to underserved communities.
- 9) Demonstrating commitment to equity and social justice: Free membership reflects a commitment to equity and social justice by ensuring that access to knowledge and information is not limited by financial constraints. This aligns with India's efforts to promote inclusive development and create a more equitable society for all. Universal provision of services will make it accessible to the large number of households, including those who have no documentation, who would benefit immensely from public libraries.
- 10) Enhancing India's global competitiveness: Free membership contributes to India's global competitiveness by fostering a well-educated, informed, and engaged citizenry. By providing access to knowledge and opportunities for lifelong learning,

libraries empower individuals to contribute to the nation's economic, social, and cultural development.

Providing free membership to public libraries in India is essential for promoting literacy, education, social inclusion, and civic engagement. It aligns with the constitutional principles of equity and social justice, and it contributes to the overall development and competitiveness of the nation. By making libraries accessible to all, India can foster a more informed, empowered, and engaged society.

4.2. Non-discrimination on the basis of any identity marker

One of the most important roles of public libraries is to promote social inclusion. It follows from Article 14 of the constitution, Libraries should be welcoming places for everyone, regardless of their caste, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or socioeconomic status.

When libraries discriminate against any group of people, they are failing to fulfil their mission and are doing a disservice to their communities. Free membership is the means for inclusion and therefore the means to end discrimination.

4.2.1 Non-discrimination on the basis of Caste

Egregious historic and present day discriminatory exclusion of specific marginalised groups, including SC, ST women and non-binary people, trans people and persons with disabilities has to be recognised for the creation of anti-caste inclusive libraries. In so far as the public library system in India has not provided free of cost membership, it has practised discrimination, including discrimination against those who were previously marginalised; thus the public library system has continued to perpetuate such marginalisation and has participated in discrimination of various kinds including casteism.

Affirmative action for inclusion of Dalit, Tribal, Backward, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Bahujan people must include socialisation strategy in the library to enable access. Such a strategy will begin with individual library level requirements to have policies to welcome all people, especially Dalit, Tribal, Backward, Scheduled Caste, Schedule Tribe and Bahujan people. Such policy will make provision for non-discrimination of members. Such policy will also provide for interventions to ensure socialisation of library members to a culture of equal participation through the stipulation that collections and curriculum affirmatively welcome Dalit, Tribal, Backward, Scheduled Caste, Schedule Tribe and Bahujan people

An annual assessment of participation, access and representation of Dalit, Tribal and deprived communities can ensure affirmative action to include all communities.

In India, there is a long history of discrimination against marginalised groups. This discrimination has also been present in the provision of library services. In the past, libraries in India have often been discriminatory based on caste, religion, and gender. For example, Dalits were often denied access to libraries, and women were often discouraged from using library services.

There are many reasons why it is important for libraries in India to not discriminate in the provision of their services:

- 1) People have a right to library services and a nondiscriminatory free library system as a means to exercise their right to information: There is a rights based argument for people's access to information and library services. Previously, we have determined in India that people have a right to Information. In 2005 the RTI Act was passed in India. For this Act to be realised, people need libraries in which to find the information that they have a right to access.
- 2) People have a right to library services and a nondiscriminatory free library system as a means to exercise their right to education: In 2009 Parliament passed the Right to Education Act. The goals of the Act cannot be fully realised unless libraries, which the National Education Policy 2020 sees as a component of the education system, are empowered by policy to provide non discriminatory library services to all who are covered by the Act.
- 3) Ensuring equal access to information: Libraries are repositories of knowledge and information, and they should be accessible to all people, regardless of their background or circumstances. When libraries discriminate against certain groups of people, they are denying them the opportunity to learn and grow.
- 4) Promoting social inclusion: Libraries can play a powerful role in promoting social inclusion by creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for people from all walks of life. When libraries discriminate, they reinforce existing social divisions and make it more difficult for people to come together and build a more just and equitable society.
- 5) Upholding human rights: The right to access information is a fundamental human right, and libraries have a responsibility to uphold this right. When libraries discriminate, they are violating people's human rights.

- 6) Fostering a love of learning: Libraries can help to instil a love of learning in people of all ages. When libraries discriminate, they are sending the message that some people are not worthy of learning, which can have a negative impact on their education and future opportunities.

In addition to these reasons, there are also many practical benefits to non-discrimination in libraries. For example, when libraries are open to all people, they are more likely to have a diverse and engaged user base. This can lead to a more vibrant and dynamic library community, with a wider range of perspectives and ideas.

Today, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that all Indians have access to the information and services that libraries can provide.

One of the main challenges is the weight of historic discrimination which has left many people with a bitter sense that there will be no inclusion. The continuing practice of charging membership fees or the excessive formalities required of people when enrolling for membership, including excessive requirement of documentation/proof of identification, is not only prohibitory to their participation in the public library system as it is formulated at present, it also acts as a deterrent and makes people cautious of trusting in change and the possibility of inclusion.

Alongside, many people are unaware of library services. This is especially true among marginalised groups, but is often true of other groups as well who lack generational familiarity with the concept of a library. Many people in both these groups are simply not aware that they could be welcome to use libraries

Another challenge is the lack of resources in libraries that are specifically designed to meet the needs of marginalised groups. For example, there may be a shortage of books in languages that are spoken by minority groups, or there may not be enough computers with internet access.

It is important for libraries in India to take steps to address these challenges, and to ensure that they are providing equitable access to all potential members. Once libraries are free and open to all, they can undertake affirmative action toward non-discrimination through:

- 1) Outreach to all communities, and especially marginalised, historically excluded & caste, class & gender-oppressed communities: Key changes to library services designed to welcome people to membership such as the provision of free membership or the acquisition of culturally relevant collections can be communicated through outreach & dialogue. Such outreach can occur at a national, state, local, and hyper local level by employing all means available for

communication, from national media to door to door outreach efforts and must be a consistent and constant endeavour. Libraries should make special efforts to reach & invite marginalised groups and let them know about their services, while surveying what their needs & aspirations are from a space like the public library. Information gained from outreach efforts must be brought back to the library and integrated into its programs & policies.

- 2) Developing culturally responsive collections: Libraries should develop collections that reflect the diversity of their communities. This includes providing books and other resources in a variety of languages, as well as materials that are relevant to the cultural traditions of different groups.
- 3) Providing training for library staff: Library staff should be trained to be culturally competent and to provide inclusive services to all patrons. This training should cover topics such as unconscious bias, cultural sensitivity, and how to provide services to people with disabilities.

By taking these steps, libraries in India can help to create a more equitable and inclusive society. Libraries can be powerful tools for social change, and they can play a vital role in promoting understanding and respect between different groups.

4.3. What are library standards and guidelines?

Minimum standards and guidelines for libraries are a set of established criteria that outline the essential requirements for a library to function effectively and provide adequate services to its community. These standards cover various aspects of library operations, including:

4.3.1. *An adequate ratio of libraries per capita:*

UNESCO recommends a ratio of one library per 10,000 capita, which would translate to 140,000+ public libraries in India. The website of the RRRLF states they are uncertain of how many libraries there are in India, and speculates that there are fewer than 54,856, perhaps even fewer than 50% of that number. Even the National Mission on Libraries concluded that they could not determine how many public libraries there are in India. What is key in this policy is that India needs to make provisions for adequate number of libraries according to UNESCO standards and we are far from doing so; we must survey and understand the gap to make provisions to fill that gap

4.3.2. Physical Facilities and Accessibility:

Standards may specify requirements for building size, layout, accessibility for people with disabilities, safety and security measures, and environmental conditions (lighting, ventilation, etc.).

4.3.3. Resources and Collections:

This may include minimum requirements for the size and diversity of the collection (books, periodicals, multimedia materials, etc.), selection and development policies, preservation and conservation practices, and resource sharing arrangements.

4.3.4. Services and Programs:

- 1) Standards may define the minimum range of services offered, such as reference services, circulation, interlibrary loan, user education, literacy programs, community outreach programs, and technology access.
- 2) curricular interventions to strengthen reading for critical thinking so that those who for any reason have not had access to such curriculum in a school setting can then find access to it in their library

4.3.5. Staffing and Personnel:

Qualification levels for librarians and other staff, staffing ratios, professional development opportunities, and training requirements may be outlined in the standards. Proportionate representation of Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities in the recruitment process and hiring of staff.

4.3.6. Governance and Management:

Standards may address aspects of library governance, such as legal framework, funding mechanisms, planning and budgeting processes, and performance evaluation measures.

Benefits of Minimum Standards and Guidelines:

- 1) Ensure a basic level of quality and service across libraries within a region or country.
- 2) Ensure diversity and representation of membership and staff proportionate to the makeup of the population; right historic and present day discrimination whilst building inclusive community within the library.
- 3) Guide library development efforts and resource allocation.

- 4) Promote consistency and comparability among libraries.
- 5) Enhance accountability and transparency in library operations.
- 6) Provide a framework for evaluating and improving library services.

Types of Minimum Standards and Guidelines:

- 1) National or regional standards: Set by a central government or authority for libraries across a country or region.
- 2) State or local standards: Developed and enforced by individual states or local governments, which expand upon national standards or go into greater depth or detail or add nuance to national standards, but which do not fall below these standards.
- 3) Professional association guidelines: Recommendations and best practices developed by library associations or other professional bodies.

It is important to note that minimum standards are not meant to be restrictive but rather serve as a foundation for building strong and effective libraries. Libraries can exceed these minimum requirements and tailor their services to the specific needs of their communities.

4.4. Why do we need standardisation of various library models?

Standardisation of library models in India is vital for the following reasons:

- 1) Improved efficiency and effectiveness: Standardisation would lead to more efficient and effective use of resources, both financial and human. By establishing common standards and procedures, libraries would streamline their operations, reduce duplication of effort, and improve service delivery. This would free up resources to be used for more innovative and impactful programs and services.
- 2) Enhanced user experience: Standardisation would improve the user experience by making it easier for users to find what they need and access services across different libraries. By adopting common standards for cataloguing, classification, and signage, libraries would make their collections and resources more discoverable and accessible. This would lead to increased library usage and satisfaction among users.
- 3) Promote resource sharing and collaboration: Standardisation could also promote resource sharing and collaboration among libraries. By adopting common standards, libraries would make it easier to share resources, such as books, periodicals, and electronic databases. This could help to improve access to

information and services for all users, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status.

- 4) Support the development of digital libraries: Standardisation is also essential for the development of digital libraries in India. By adopting common standards for metadata, digital libraries would make their collections more interoperable and accessible. This would lead to the creation of a national network of digital libraries that could provide access to a vast collection of resources to all users.
- 5) Facilitate the professional development of library staff: Standardisation would also facilitate the professional development of library staff. By establishing common standards and guidelines, libraries would provide their staff with the training and resources they need to provide high-quality services to users.

Overall, standardisation of library models would help to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of library services in India. It would also promote resource sharing, collaboration, and the development of digital libraries.

By investing in standardisation, India can create a world-class library system that provides access to information and services for all people in India.

4.5. Provisions for Persons with Disabilities

(this section needs further input from individuals and organisations with expertise and a stake in the matter).

Libraries in India should strive to become inclusive towards persons with disabilities (PWDs) for the following reasons:

- 1) Promoting equal access to information and knowledge: PWDs have the same fundamental right to access information and knowledge as any other person. By becoming inclusive, libraries can ensure that PWDs are not excluded from the vast resources and opportunities they offer.
- 2) Fulfilling constitutional responsibility and human rights: Making libraries inclusive aligns with India's constitutional commitment to social responsibility and the principles of human rights. By providing accessible services and environments, libraries can uphold the dignity and rights of PWDs.
- 3) Enhancing literacy and educational attainment: Inclusive libraries can play a crucial role in improving literacy rates and educational attainment among PWDs. By providing accessible materials, assistive technologies, and specialised services, libraries can empower PWDs to learn, grow, and achieve their full potential.

- 4) Promoting social inclusion and community engagement: Inclusive libraries foster social inclusion by creating welcoming and accessible spaces for PWDs to participate in community life. By breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of belonging, libraries can promote social cohesion and integration.
- 5) Contributing to economic empowerment and livelihood opportunities: Inclusive libraries can empower PWDs to participate in the workforce and pursue meaningful livelihoods. By providing access to information, training resources, and career guidance, libraries can help PWDs achieve economic independence and contribute to society.

To achieve inclusivity, libraries in India should implement several strategies:

- 1) Physical accessibility: Ensure that library buildings and facilities are designed and maintained to be accessible to PWDs, including ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and signage in Braille and large print.
- 2) Accessible materials and technologies: Provide a diverse range of accessible materials in various formats, including Braille books, audiobooks, and large print materials. Implement assistive technologies such as screen readers, magnifiers, and text-to-speech software.
- 3) Specialised services and staff training: Offer specialised services tailored to the needs of PWDs, such as sign language interpretation, audio description, and tactile signage. Train library staff to provide empathetic and knowledgeable assistance to PWDs.
- 4) Outreach and community engagement: Actively reach out to PWD communities to understand their needs and preferences. Collaborate with organisations serving PWDs to promote library services and organise inclusive events and programs. Maintain and access local and national census or other tools that inform library leadership and staff of the presence of PWD in the area served by the library, and set goals for their inclusion in the library
- 5) Policies and procedures: Develop and implement clear policies and procedures that promote inclusivity and address accessibility concerns. Regularly review and update these policies to ensure they remain effective.

By implementing these strategies, libraries in India can create inclusive environments where PWDs can access information, learn, grow, and participate fully in society. This commitment to inclusivity will not only benefit PWDs but also contribute to a more just, equitable, and prosperous India.

4.6. Knowledge Resources: Books, audio-video and other digital resources, periodicals etc.

A national library policy addressing knowledge resources should lay out the following:

4.6.1. Collection Development

- 1) Guidelines for building relevant collections in terms of size and diversity: This includes curation of books, audio-visual materials, and digital resources in various languages, formats, and subject areas, reflecting the needs and interests of the communities served. Regarding collection size, we can consider IFLA's Public Library Service Guidelines (2nd edition, 2010, page 84) - *"Collection size is determined by many factors, including space, financial resources, catchment population of the library, proximity to other libraries, regional role of the collections, and access to electronic resources, assessment of local needs, acquisition and discard rates, and policy of stock exchanges with other libraries."* Regular need-assessment and frequency of acquisition must ensure the regular update of collections to reflect current contexts, latest publications, and current use. It must replace outdated or worn out materials periodically.
- 2) Emphasis on local content and languages: The policy should encourage libraries to acquire and preserve materials specific to their communities, including local history, language, and socio-cultural traditions, trends, and aspirations.
- 3) Accessibility and inclusion: The policy should promote measures to ensure all knowledge resources are accessible to people with disabilities, including providing alternative formats and assistive technologies. It should also take cognisance of the needs of people who have been denied access to knowledge, information, and education resources due to socio-economic barriers, and create collections and repositories to acknowledge their needs and aspirations.

4.6.2. Book Procurement

The responsibility and decision making for selection of books and other resources must rest with the library professional staff with contributions and recommendations from library patrons. To ensure a collection which is diverse, inclusive, current and caters to the changing needs of the library community, book procurement and weeding out must be carried out periodically and systematically. At the same time, the books must be from a wide range of

themes and subjects, of different genres, published in different regions and by different publishing houses.

4.6.3. Resource Sharing and Collaboration

- 1) Interlibrary loan programs: The policy should encourage collaboration among libraries to share resources and ensure wider access to knowledge and information resources.
- 2) Digital resource sharing platforms: The policy should promote the development of centralised platforms for sharing digital resources among libraries, facilitating resource discovery, and access.

4.6.4. Digital Literacy and Technology Integration

- 1) Public access to ICT resources: Public libraries should provide free access to computers, internet and digital tools, supporting digital literacy development in the community. This access should be provided in a manner that ensures the safety and privacy of library members, especially protecting the most vulnerable sections of society.
- 2) Digital literacy: Public libraries should have library programs and curriculum that guides and instructs people to use digital resources in an empowering, responsible, and safe manner.
- 3) Digital safety and privacy: Public libraries must, through programs and policies, ensure that all members' rights to privacy and safety are protected, including data-privacy, protection from data-theft, and freedom from surveillance.
- 4) Librarian skill development: The policy should emphasize the importance of training librarians and library staff in digital literacy skills and technology integration.
- 5) Developing digital collections: The policy should encourage libraries to digitize their own collections and acquire digital licences for relevant online resources.

4.6.5. Preservation and Conservation

- 1) Developing preservation policies: The policy should outline best practices for preserving physical and digital knowledge resources, ensuring their longevity and accessibility for future generations.

- 2) Disaster preparedness: The policy should address disaster preparedness measures to protect libraries and their valuable collections from natural disasters and other threats.

4.6.6. Funding and Resource Allocation

- 1) Dedicated funding mechanisms: The policy should advocate for dedicated funding mechanisms to ensure adequate resources for purchasing and maintaining knowledge resources.
- 2) Sustainable resource acquisition: The policy should encourage libraries to explore alternative resource acquisition models, such as partnerships with publishers, community fundraising, and resource sharing initiatives.

By focusing on these critical areas, a national library policy can ensure that libraries in India have access to diverse and relevant knowledge resources

4.7. Information resources and services

Public libraries perform the critical role of being information hubs for the people. They play a crucial role in bridging the information gap by providing timely, relevant, and accurate information (local, national, and global) as per the needs and aspirations of the people. By becoming a node for accessing free, reliable, and up-to-date information, public libraries play a vital part in democracy, in ensuring the delivery of rights to all.

Public libraries must ensure that information is provided freely, accurately, and without restrictions. However, with diverse communities and limited resources, effective management of information resources and services is crucial for their success. Coordinated management across public libraries strengthens their impact and offers several benefits:

4.7.1. Information Resources - Curation and Optimization:

- 1) Public libraries must provide the people with the latest newspapers, periodicals, and reference materials which are in line with the latest trends, innovations, and local, national and global realities. The collection should reflect the diversity of the community and should include all sections of society.
- 2) Public libraries must provide facilities like: information desks, free-browsing internet programs, workshops, seminars, and outreach programs to connect the right information to its seekers.

- 3) Libraries must take care to remove outdated or inaccurate sources of information or any resources that perpetuates bias of one interest group over the other.
- 4) Coordinated resource-sharing allows libraries to avoid duplication of efforts, maximizing the impact of available resources. Shared databases and acquisition strategies can optimize collection development, ensuring access to a wider range of materials for all users.

4.7.2. Librarians As Information Workers:

As per the preamble of the IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers: *“The core mission of librarians and other information workers is to ensure access to information for all for personal development, education, cultural enrichment, leisure, economic activity, and informed participation in and enhancement of democracy.”* Their role as information workers and specialists includes:

- 1) Creating access to vital, relevant, and up-to-date information free of cost and free of restrictions and censorship.
- 2) Resolving barriers to access and enact practical solutions so that socially disadvantaged people are not excluded.
- 3) Building awareness about library collections and information services through robust community outreach efforts.
- 4) Ensuring that information materials are made accessible to all. For instance by ensuring that the websites of information institutions comply with international standards for accessibility and access to them is not subject to barriers.
- 5) Responding to the immediate information needs of the people, especially during times of crises.

4.8. Dynamic and Member-Oriented Library Curriculum

In an increasingly information centric society and economy, anyone who is unable to access information stands at a disadvantage on the personal, educational, professional, social, and political front. Libraries serve this deep-rooted need and desire for information, and librarians have the significant task of enabling access to vital information. Towards this end, libraries need a systematically designed curriculum for the users and potential users of the library, particularly aimed at supporting those who have been marginalised and thus excluded from reading and educational pursuits. Such

curriculum must be informed by a pedagogical approach that takes into account historic to present day oppression of Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasis, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities. A well-designed curriculum aims at equipping users to utilise the library and its resources for information and other interests libraries serve, for example for learning to read, reading for leisure, research, academics, exploring literature, building relationships with books, and so on. The curriculum should be dynamic, so it is able to respond to changing social, political, and environmental needs, and it must be member-orientated, so it serves the needs, aspirations, and expectations of library members and potential members of all ages. The curriculum would include detailed plans responding to the specific requirements based on the nature of the library, its context, purpose, and membership.gram

4.9. Documentation and library records

To ensure efficient operations and optimal service delivery, proper documentation and maintenance of library records are essential. Systematic documentation serves several critical functions.

- 1) Accountability and transparency: Accurate records document library activities, resource utilization, and budget allocation. This fosters transparency and accountability towards stakeholders, including funders, government agencies, and the community.
- 2) Efficient management: Proper record-keeping facilitates resource tracking, staff performance evaluation, and service optimization. This allows libraries to identify areas for improvement and allocate resources effectively.
- 3) User satisfaction and engagement: Well-maintained records enable efficient user assistance, resource retrieval, and program participation. This enhances user satisfaction, promotes engagement, and builds trust in the library.
- 4) Legal compliance: Many libraries operate under specific regulations and need to maintain records for legal compliance purposes, such as financial audits and resource copyright documentation.
- 5) Preservation of history: Library records document the library's evolution, community needs, and resource utilisation over time. This serves as a valuable historical resource for future generations.

How:

- 1) Develop a documentation system: Implement a clear and consistent system for documenting all library activities, including resource acquisition, service delivery, program execution, financial transactions, and user interactions.
- 2) Standardize record formats: Define standard formats for recording information, ensuring consistency, and ease of retrieval. This could involve templates for resource cataloguing, user registration forms, financial records, and program reports.
- 3) Utilize technology: Leverage digital tools like library management software and online databases for efficient record-keeping, data analysis, and reporting. This improves accessibility, security, and searchability of records.
- 4) Regular training: Train library staff on the documentation system, data entry procedures, and record management best practices. This ensures accuracy, consistency, and adherence to established guidelines.
- 5) Regular backup and archiving: Implement a regular backup and archiving system to safeguard records from loss or damage. This ensures data security and historical preservation.
- 6) Conduct audits and reviews: Regularly audit and review library records to identify errors, inconsistencies, or areas for improvement in the documentation system. This ensures the system's effectiveness and data integrity.

Additional Considerations:

- 1) Adapt the documentation system to the specific needs and resources of each library.
- 2) Ensure data privacy and user confidentiality by implementing appropriate security measures.
- 3) Utilise records for data-driven decision making to improve library services and resource allocation.
- 4) Advocate for resources and infrastructure to support efficient documentation and record maintenance.

By prioritising documentation and record maintenance, public libraries in India can operate efficiently, deliver high-quality services, build trust with their communities, and contribute significantly to education, development, and knowledge sharing across the nation.

4.10. Archiving

Public libraries in India play a vital role in preserving and sharing local history, culture, literatures, and knowledge. Archiving serves as a powerful tool for libraries to fulfil this mission and contribute to the nation's rich and diverse heritage.

Archiving, in particular, must endeavour to preserve and share histories, voices, and narratives of historically marginalised and oppressed people so that they do not face the danger of extinction. Here is why and how community libraries in India should conduct archiving:

Why:

- 1) Preserves cultural heritage: Local communities often possess unique stories, traditions, and experiences that deserve preservation. Archiving documents, artefacts, scripts, and oral histories ensures their survival for future generations, fostering cultural identity and understanding.
- 2) Supports research and education: Researchers, students, and historians rely on archived materials to conduct research, write local histories, and gain insights into the past. Well-maintained community archives are invaluable resources for academic pursuits and educational initiatives.
- 3) Empowers local communities: Archiving empowers communities to document their own narratives, reclaim their histories, and celebrate their unique contributions to the nation's cultural tapestry. This fosters a sense of ownership and pride in local heritage.
- 4) Promotes learning and engagement: Archived materials can be used to develop engaging exhibits, educational programs, and community events. This fosters a deeper understanding of local history, traditions, and cultural practices, promoting lifelong learning, and community engagement.
- 5) Enhances the library's institutional value in society: Strong archiving efforts can enhance the reputation of public libraries as valuable repositories of knowledge and cultural resources. This attracts wider user engagement and strengthens the library's role within the community.

How:

- 1) Develop an inclusive archiving policy: Establish a clear policy outlining the types of materials to be archived, selection criteria, preservation practices, access restrictions, and protocols for user interaction. Special care must be taken to ensure the inclusion of those literatures, narratives, and manuscripts that are under threat of extinction.

- 2) Train staff and professional archivists: Train library staff on proper archiving techniques, including document handling, digitization procedures, metadata creation, and security measures. Archiving is a specialised domain of knowledge and archivists are knowledge professionals specifically trained to handle and organise historical materials. History departments across the country can introduce special courses to train archivists. A robust public library system can thus provide employment opportunities for history graduates.
- 3) Identify and collect materials: Collaborate with community members to identify valuable materials for archiving, such as historical documents, photographs, oral histories, traditional artefacts, and local publications.
- 4) Catalog and organize: Organize archived materials with clear labelling, cataloguing systems, and metadata creation for easy retrieval and access.
- 5) Preserve and digitize: Implement appropriate preservation techniques to protect materials from damage and deterioration. Consider digitizing valuable documents and artefacts for wider accessibility and long-term preservation.
- 6) Promote access and engagement: Make archived materials accessible to the community through exhibits, online platforms, educational programs, and research initiatives. Encourage community engagement in the archiving process through volunteer opportunities and collaborative projects.

Additional Considerations:

- 1) Address language diversity and cultural sensitivities when selecting and interpreting materials.
- 2) Involve and take the lead from communities that have a direct stake in the preservation of particular archives.
- 3) Foster partnerships with local historical societies, universities, and archives to share expertise, resources, and best practices.
- 4) Advocate for funding and resources to support ongoing archiving efforts and infrastructure development.
- 5) Regularly evaluate and update archiving policies and procedures to ensure effectiveness and adaptability.

By actively engaging in archiving, community libraries in India can become vital custodians of local heritage, empower communities, and contribute significantly to the people's collective memory and cultural richness.

4.11. Privacy of users' data and cybersecurity of digital public library infrastructure

Public libraries collect vast amounts of data pertaining to their users, which includes personal information, reading histories, and other vital information. It is the responsibility of all libraries to safeguard the privacy of library users, in line with constitutional provisions, where individuals have a fundamental right to privacy and protection of their personal information. A strong cybersecurity infrastructure to protect inadvertent breaches of citizen privacy would also act as a bulwark against malicious third-party attacks from local and international threat actors.

Why is user privacy important in libraries?

- 1) Protecting personal information: Libraries collect various kinds of personal information about their users, including names, addresses, contact details, and borrowing histories. This information must be protected from unauthorized access, misuse, or disclosure.
- 2) Upholding user trust: Maintaining user privacy is essential for building and maintaining trust between libraries and their users. Users must feel confident that their personal information is safe with the library in order to fully engage with its services and resources.
- 3) Complying with data protection laws: The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 mandates the responsible handling of personal data. Libraries must comply with these laws to avoid legal consequences.

Libraries in India can adopt various measures to protect user privacy, ensuring that their data is handled responsibly and securely.

How can libraries in India safeguard user privacy?

- 1) Data minimisation: Collect only the minimum amount of personal information necessary for library operations. Avoid collecting sensitive data unless strictly required.
- 2) Data security: Protect against unauthorised access, data breaches, and cyberattacks.
- 3) Privacy policy: Develop a clear and comprehensive privacy policy that informs users about how their personal information is collected, used, and shared. Obtain user consent before collecting or using their data.
- 4) Data retention and disposal: Establish clear data retention policies and dispose of personal data securely when no longer needed.

- 5) Staff training: Train library staff on privacy principles, data handling procedures, and the importance of protecting user information.
- 6) Third-Party services: When using third-party services for library operations, carefully vet these providers and ensure they have adequate privacy safeguards in place.
- 7) User awareness: Educate users about their privacy rights and how they can protect their information when using library services.
- 8) Continuous improvement: Regularly review and update privacy practices to adapt to changing technologies and legal requirements.

By implementing these measures, libraries demonstrate their commitment to protecting user privacy and fostering a culture of trust and transparency. Safeguarding user data is not just a legal obligation but a fundamental responsibility.

4.12. Safety and inclusion of staff and members

Equity & social justice is at the heart of all libraries. It follows that social inclusion must be at the core of the Indian public library system. This can only happen by dismantling barriers to access and affirmative action. By making the public library free, anti-caste, anti-discriminatory and feminist, we can remove major obstacles to entry. By infusing all curriculum, practices, programs & policies with these fundamentals, we can ensure a warm, safe, and welcoming environment. By creating mechanisms for equitable representation (through reservations etc.) of all excluded groups, we can make the library truly free in every way and for everyone.

In order to be a safe, inviting and trustworthy space of reading and thinking for all, public libraries must create policies that welcome all and focus in particular on those groups that have been systematically excluded from learning and education.

Therefore it is the mandate of all public libraries to:

- 1) Focus on services and curriculum that cater to vulnerable and underserved groups: People from marginalised castes, classes, genders, and religious backgrounds face a greater risk of discrimination, harassment, and violence. Libraries need to address these vulnerabilities to ensure their safety and access to services.
- 2) Create integrated safe spaces for reading and thinking through inclusion policies: Libraries can act as bridges for marginalised groups, providing access to information, resources, and opportunities that can help overcome social and economic barriers. Public libraries must create policies in line with constitutional rights including affirmative action, anti-discrimination policies, caste reservations,

child safety policies, gender-inclusion policies, and policies in line with laws like POCSO and the Vishakha guidelines.

- 3) Create opportunities through reservations, diversity hiring, library leadership, and consultation programs: Only when all sections of society are represented in library leadership and decision-making, will public libraries truly be able to overcome historical obstacles and imagine equitable and inclusive spaces for all. Public libraries should take affirmative actions to do this through their hiring policies, library leadership, and community-consultation programs to ensure there is equal and proportionate representation from all socio-economic groups that comprise the population within the library's radius.

By creating a safe and inclusive space for all, libraries can challenge discriminatory social norms and contribute to broader efforts for social change. When excluded and oppressed socio-economic groups are welcomed into the library and empowered to feel ownership in its programs, resources, and policies, it promotes the idea of an equitable and just society and creates a space to address structural imbalances that hinder access to knowledge and information.

Specific measures for inclusivity and integration of all people:

- 1) Representation: Ensure library staff, local library leadership structures, and the library's collection reflect the diversity of the community in which the library is located. Staff, leadership, materials, and programs should affirmatively cater to the specific needs and interests of marginalised groups. Reservations for Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities should be integrated into all recruitment processes. An annual assessment of hiring and retention can provide an updated picture of hiring from Dalit, tribal and deprived communities.
- 2) Community engagement: Integrate the library with the community in which it is located through active engagement with community leaders and representatives of marginalised groups in order to understand their concerns and tailor library services accordingly.
- 3) Accessibility measures: Implement accessibility features like ramps, gender-neutral restrooms, and assistive technologies to ensure physical and informational access for people with disabilities or specific cultural needs.

- 4) Trainings: Conduct sensitivity training for library staff on caste, gender, and religious discrimination to ensure respectful and inclusive interactions with marginalised groups.
- 5) Safe spaces: Create designated safe spaces within the library where individuals from marginalised groups can feel comfortable seeking support or reporting incidents.
- 6) Code of conduct: Implement a clear code of conduct that prohibits discrimination and harassment based on caste, gender, religion, or any other marginalised identity.
- 7) Grievance procedures: Establish clear and accessible grievance procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment. Ensure prompt and effective investigation and resolution of complaints.
- 8) Zero tolerance policy: Adopt a zero-tolerance policy for any discriminatory or offensive behaviour within the library.
- 9) Partnerships: Partner with NGOs and other organisations working with marginalised communities to offer support services and resources within the library.
- 10) Data collection and monitoring: Track data on library usage and incidents of discrimination or exclusion to identify areas for improvement and ensure equitable access for all.

Additional considerations:

- 1) Put up clearly visible, audible, and tangible policy-statements of inclusion, welcome, and safety in key areas and platforms of the public library, including library entrances, websites, and in outreach materials.
- 2) Encourage open communication and dialogue within the library community about issues of safety and inclusion.
- 3) Regularly review and update policies and practices to ensure their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by marginalised groups.
- 4) Advocate for broader social change through educational programs, community outreach, and partnerships with advocacy organisations.

By implementing these strategies, public libraries in India can create truly inclusive spaces where everyone feels safe, respected, and empowered to access information and opportunities regardless of their background. This can contribute significantly to building a more just and equitable society for all.

We must remember that ensuring safety and inclusion is an ongoing process that requires consistent commitment and effort. By actively working towards creating a welcoming and inclusive library environment, we can empower marginalised groups and contribute to a more inclusive and vibrant future for communities across India.

4.13. Compliance with intellectual property rights of creators and publishers

Ensuring compliance with the intellectual property rights of book publishers is crucial for libraries in India. Intellectual property (IP) rights protect the creations of authors and publishers, and libraries must respect these rights to avoid legal repercussions and maintain ethical practices.

Why is IP compliance important for libraries?

- 1) Respecting authorship and creativity: IP protection recognises and rewards the creative efforts of authors and publishers. Libraries have a responsibility to uphold this principle by respecting IP rights.
- 2) Avoiding copyright infringement: Unauthorised copying or distribution of copyrighted material, such as books, could lead to copyright infringement lawsuits, damaging the reputation of libraries and potentially incurring significant financial penalties.
- 3) Supporting the publishing industry: A healthy publishing industry relies on the protection of IP rights. By adhering to IP regulations, libraries contribute to the sustainability of the book industry and the continued production of new works.
- 4) Ethical conduct and legal obligations: IP compliance is an ethical imperative for libraries, ensuring that they operate within the bounds of the law and maintain a high standard of professional conduct.

How can libraries in India ensure IP compliance?

- 1) Acquiring authorised materials: Libraries should only acquire books and other materials from authorised sources, such as publishers, distributors, or reputable bookstores. Avoid obtaining materials from unofficial or unauthorised channels.
- 2) Understanding copyright laws: Familiarise themselves with India's copyright laws and regulations governing the use of copyrighted materials. This includes understanding the limitations of fair use and the restrictions on copying or distributing copyrighted works.
- 3) Implementing copyright policies: Develop clear and comprehensive copyright policies that outline the library's procedures for handling copyrighted materials and educate staff on these policies.

- 4) Seeking permission for reproductions: When necessary to reproduce copyrighted material for specific purposes, such as educational or research needs, obtain permission from the copyright holders.
- 5) Educating users: Inform users about copyright laws and the importance of respecting IP rights. Encourage them to use library materials responsibly and avoid unauthorised copying or distribution.
- 6) Staying updated on IP developments: Keep abreast of changes and developments in IP laws and regulations to ensure compliance remains consistent.
- 7) Maintaining records: Maintain accurate records of acquisitions, usage, and permissions related to copyrighted materials for transparency and accountability.

By following these guidelines, libraries in India can effectively manage their use of copyrighted materials, safeguard the intellectual property rights of book publishers, and maintain their reputation as responsible and ethical institutions.

IP compliance is not just a legal requirement but also a reflection of the library's commitment to supporting the creative industry and promoting responsible access to information.

4.14. Funding and Sustainability

The effectiveness of public libraries hinges on adequate and sustainable funding. Libraries are expenditure inclined and are growing entities/institutions, with recurring financial requirements. As libraries are not major sources of direct revenue generation but have other direct and indirect socioeconomic and educational cultural gains for communities, they are an important responsibility of the state. Libraries are critical public infrastructures for any country trying to attain a frontier role in the age of Artificial Intelligence and thus the state must make provisions for the financing of public libraries. Here's why securing funding is crucial and how libraries can achieve it.

Why funding matters:

- 1) Resource acquisition: Libraries rely on funding to acquire books, periodicals, digital resources, and other materials essential for their services.
- 2) Infrastructure development: Maintaining and upgrading library facilities, technology, and accessibility features requires consistent financial support.
- 3) Staffing and training: Skilled library staff are vital for effective service delivery, but adequate funding is necessary for salaries, training, and professional development.

- 4) Program development: Engaging and impactful programs require resources for materials, equipment, and personnel. Secure funding ensures the sustainability of such initiatives.
- 5) Community outreach: Building partnerships and engaging with the community requires resources, such as staff time, transportation, and program expenses.
- 6) Funding to drive Inclusivity: At all levels – Central, State, District, Gram Panchayat, funding can drive inclusivity through allocation of funds for creation of libraries with specific focus on inclusivity, be it through membership drive to increase proportionate representation of membership or through hiring or training of librarians from marginalised backgrounds, or for creations of collections or programs addressing diversity equity and inclusivity. An example of this might be funds made available in a Gram Panchayat for the creation of a library celebrating Adivasi writing and culture or for the creation of a City Library with a focus on outreach and training of Dalit Bahujan Youth for Leadership and Librarianship.

Strategies for sustainable funding:

Government Support:

- 1) Increased government allocations: Depending on what is most appropriate for the demands of local communities, the state government may choose statutory or non-statutory based financing mechanisms. In the case of the statutory approach, state governments may enact Public Libraries Act/s and put in place adequate financing mechanisms, such as a library cess, Value Added Tax or other forms of financial support from taxes, with the provision to adjust the rates as per inflation and need for expansion and modernization of infrastructure and services from time to time. For non-statutory approaches, state governments would still need to put in place budgetary provisions for the permanent funding of libraries. Where the Acts and financial instruments for funding public libraries already exist, states must earmark larger budget allocations for public libraries at national and state levels. Where applicable, state governments may put in place an enabling policy environment for local bodies to utilise FC grants/funds and other Own Source Revenue for public library development and maintenance. The Union government should provide additional funds to state governments to meet gaps in funding as appropriate, to account for regional imbalances in meeting the needs of local communities by the respective local bodies and state governments.
- 2) Comprehensive government grant programs: In addition to adequately funding public libraries, the union and state governments must provide

relevant public grants designed to support library development and initiatives of various community organisations so that they may apply for them.

- 3) Convergence across existing Government programmes: Funds from across the spectrum of government schemes should be possible to be made available for supporting public libraries. For example the use of MNREGA works for construction where appropriate; provisions for skill programming.

Community-Driven Funding:

- 1) Fundraising events: Organise fundraising events like book sales, charity auctions, or community talent shows to generate income.
- 2) Resource sharing and partnerships: Collaborate with other libraries for bulk discounts on resource acquisition, sharing staff expertise, and joint fundraising initiatives.
- 3) Public-private partnerships: Explore partnerships with private companies or NGOs for sponsorship, resource provision, or joint programs.

Innovative Funding Models:

- 1) Social entrepreneurship: Develop income-generating activities within the library, such as cafes, bookstores, or rental spaces, to generate revenue and diversify funding sources. These activities may be tied to existing programmes such as NRLM and other SHG promotion programs and schemes, as well as entrepreneurship promotion activities
- 2) Crowdfunding: Utilise online crowdfunding platforms to raise funds for specific library projects or initiatives.
- 3) In-kind donations: Encourage donations of books, equipment, or furniture to reduce costs and support library operations.

Sustainability Strategies:

- 1) Financial planning and budgeting: Develop a comprehensive financial plan that outlines income sources, expenses, and resource allocation strategies.
- 2) Cost-effective management: Implement cost-saving measures like energy efficiency practices, resource sharing, and volunteer engagement.
- 3) Data-driven decision making: Track library usage, program impact, and funding sources to make informed decisions about resource allocation and service development.

- 4) Transparency and accountability: Regularly communicate with stakeholders about the library's financial health, resource utilization, and funding efforts.

By diversifying their funding sources, implementing innovative approaches, and prioritising sustainability, public libraries in India can secure the resources necessary to thrive and serve their communities effectively. This will ensure the long-term impact of these vital institutions in promoting literacy, knowledge, and social development across the nation.

Securing sustainable funding is an ongoing process. Public libraries must continuously adapt, innovate, and demonstrate their value to stakeholders to ensure their financial health and long-term success.

5. Types of Libraries

Based on the purpose that a library serves, the services it renders, the audience it caters to and the resources it curates for the use of its members, libraries can be classified into several categories. A good library system would have these various types of libraries to serve the diverse needs of a population as diverse as India has. Some types of libraries that this policy envisions for India's library system to have are as follows:

5.1. Public Libraries

Public libraries are intended to serve the information, educational and recreational needs of the general public of the area or region the public library is located in. They thus have a wide range of collections and services to cater to a diverse membership of all ages. Public libraries thus respond to the different needs of the people in the area or region it is located in. In India, public libraries must design services and programs that expand access of libraries to children, women, people of all caste and tribal communities, and other minorities for whom access to libraries have either been very limited or none at all.

5.2. School Libraries

School libraries are located inside schools and play a very significant role in supporting the school curriculum and programs for all the grades in the school. They shall have books and other educational and learning resources for students, teachers, administrators and parents, and also have a diverse collection of non-academic and extra-curricular books and resources.

5.3. Academic and Research Libraries

These libraries are typically located inside institutions of higher education (Universities and colleges) and research institutes. These libraries shall house rich collections of books, journals, documents and digital and other resources on all the subjects and disciplines that the institutions cater to. These libraries shall strive to serve the academic needs and intellectual curiosities of all students, teachers and researchers in their coursework and research.

5.4. Community Libraries

Community Libraries exist in locations typically underserved by public libraries and are otherwise an addition or stop gap measure in the public library system. In present day India, an enormous gap in the people's library needs are being met by small informal and formal/registered non profit efforts, which meet the definition of community libraries. Community libraries are community owned and operated with librarian roles and skills residing in the community and decision making residing with these librarians and other elected councils of library leaders who contribute time, energy and effort to the operation of the library. Community libraries are by definition those libraries which are populated by the full diversity of the community and serve the diverse needs of the community through diversity in collection and program offerings as well as diversity in membership and diversity in participation in the circulation and other programs of the library.

5.5. Digital Libraries

Digital Libraries consist of repositories of objects that are stored through digital technologies, the supporting services and programs for people to access and engage with the repositories, and the infrastructures that make it all possible. These objects can be e-books, texts, films, videos, e-magazines, journals, music, podcasts, art and illustrations, and various other emerging forms of multimedia material and archives. The development of digital libraries must take into consideration the reality of how access to the internet and digital technologies is highly restricted and limited in the country. Digital libraries are no replacement for the physical spaces of community and interaction but rather must be seen as an important tool to help broaden and strengthen access to information, knowledge resources, and participation in a democratic society.

5.6. Prison Libraries

Prison libraries are a kind of specialised library located inside prisons, detention and juvenile homes. These libraries support incarcerated individuals in continuing or pursuing educational opportunities, and preparing them for reintegration into society and/or the workforce. Prison libraries, by providing opportunities to access information

and learning beyond the confines of prisons, also reduce possibilities of recidivism. To facilitate these crucial services in prison libraries, they must be equipped with a range of reading and learning resources and programs, as well as digital resources.

6. Library Education

By reforming library science and education to focus on community engagement, inclusivity, and innovation, we can unlock the tremendous potential of libraries to empower individuals, strengthen communities, and drive positive change in India. This requires a collaborative effort from educators, librarians, policymakers, and community members to create a future where libraries are not just places to borrow books, but thriving hubs of knowledge, connection, and possibility for all.

The future of libraries lies not just in stacks of books, but in the connections they foster, the opportunities they provide, and the communities they empower.

Some Key Areas for Reform

Curriculum

- 1) Shift focus: Move beyond traditional book-centric learning to emphasise the library's role as a community hub. Integrate modules on community engagement, social development, program planning, and outreach strategies for diverse populations.
- 2) Skill development: Teach practical skills like project management, budgeting, fundraising, communication, conflict resolution and collaboration to equip librarians to effectively lead and manage community initiatives.
- 3) Technology integration: Train librarians on using tech to create inclusive digital spaces, manage online communities, and develop interactive programs.
- 4) Entrepreneurship and innovation: Encourage exploration of non-traditional funding models, partnerships, and innovative services like co-working spaces and digital literacy programs to make libraries relevant to diverse communities.
- 5) Critical thinking and advocacy: Equip librarians with critical thinking skills to analyse social issues, identify community needs, and advocate for policies that promote equitable access to information and resources.

Pedagogy

- 1) Active learning: Replace passive lectures with interactive workshops, simulation, field visits, and community based projects that connect students with real-world challenges and opportunities.

- 2) Community partnerships: Integrate community engagement into coursework through collaborations with local organisations, non-profit organisations, and marginalised groups to create inclusive library programs and services. A pedagogical approach must be adopted that emphasises socialisation strategies to enable Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, women, non-binary & trans people and persons with disabilities to access the library .
- 3) Interdisciplinary learning: Encourage collaboration with other university departments like social work, public policy, and education to learn from diverse perspectives and develop holistic perspectives to community development.
- 4) Mentorship and role models: Connect students with experienced librarians and community leaders working in inclusive spaces to provide practical guidance and inspire them to become changemakers.

Outside the classroom

- 1) Library design and space planning: Integrate modules on accessible design principles, diverse needs of communities, and creating flexible spaces that can adapt to different activities and programs.
- 2) Networking and collaboration: Facilitate networking opportunities for students with librarians, community organisations, local political leaders, and potential donors to build partnerships and foster knowledge exchange.
- 3) Research and innovation: Encourage research on community engagement models, inclusive library practices, and innovative solutions to address specific challenges faced by marginalised groups.
- 4) Advocacy and policy development: Equip librarians with advocacy skills to influence policy changes at local, state, and national levels that promote inclusive library development.

Changing mindsets

- 1) Librarians as community leaders: Reframe the librarian's role from bookkeeper to community catalyst, emphasising their ability to connect people, resources, and opportunities to empower communities.
- 2) Libraries as community hubs: Promote the library as a platform for social cohesion, cultural exchange, and knowledge sharing, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

- 3) Lifelong learning and development: Position libraries as centers for lifelong learning, offering diverse programs and resources that cater to the evolving needs of individuals and communities.

7. National Education Policy and National Library Policy

(this section needs further input from individuals and organisations with expertise and a stake in the matter).

8. Governance

The following framework proposes a collaborative approach where each level of government plays a distinct role, while the National Digital Library and RRRLF act as facilitators and resource providers.

While the State has to take responsibility for supporting a rigorous public library system, libraries themselves must be autonomous and locally governed and managed to protect them from political interference by the government of the day. Only if the autonomy of libraries is protected can they be spaces for critical and free thinking. Kerala is a model library policy in this regard.

By respecting autonomy, promoting community engagement, and fostering collaboration, this system can pave the way for a vibrant and decentralised library system in India.

8.1. Union Government:

- 1) Policy and framework: Work with various State governments and facilitate the development of a national library policy which lays out an overall vision, standards, and guidelines for library development.
- 2) Resource allocation: Allocate grants and funding to states and local bodies for library infrastructure development, resource acquisition, and staff training. In addition to dedicated funds, the Union government may develop guidelines for enabling the use of funds in various centrally sponsored schemes such that they can be used in convergence with other available finance.
- 3) Technology integration: Lead initiatives for facilitating the digitization of library resources and development by the State level Departments/Directorates of Public Libraries for ensuring interoperability across digital platforms
- 4) Research and development: Promote research in library science, best practices, and innovation for efficient library services.

- 5) Advocacy: Advocate for libraries at national and international levels.

8.2. State Governments:

- 1) Policy implementation: Adapt the national policy to their specific contexts and needs, formulating state-level library policies.
- 2) Enabling Governance mechanisms: State Governments may develop locally appropriate instruments of implementing the library legislation. In some states, a dedicated Public Libraries Department or Directorate may be appropriate, whereas in others the Culture Department would have to work in convergence with the Rural Development Department. Provision of enabling administrative environments for implementation is key.
- 3) Financial support: Allocate funds to local bodies for library development and supplement the central government grants.
- 4) Infrastructure development: Support construction, renovation, and maintenance of library buildings across the state.
- 5) Resource sharing and collaboration: Foster resource sharing and collaboration among libraries within the state and with other states.
- 6) Personnel training and development: Provide training and capacity building programs for library staff at all levels.
- 7) Monitoring and evaluation: Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of library programs and services at the state level.

8.3. Local Self-Governments (Panchayats and Municipalities):

- 1) Community engagement: Identify local needs and preferences, actively engage the community in library planning and development.
- 2) Library management: Establish and manage local libraries, ensuring their efficient operation and accessibility.
- 3) Resource acquisition: Select and acquire resources based on local needs and cultural context.
- 4) Program development: Develop and implement library programs and services catering to the specific needs of their communities.
- 5) Outreach and partnerships: Collaborate with local organisations, schools, and NGOs to promote library services and engage the community.

- 6) Financial resource mobilisation: Explore innovative ways to generate revenue locally, such as partnerships and fundraising initiatives.

8.4. National Digital Library and Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation:

- 1) National Digital Library: Serve as a central repository for digitized library resources, providing access to information from across the country.
- 2) RRRLF: Act as the implementation arm for the national library policy, providing financial and technical support to libraries at all levels.
- 3) Resource development: Develop and share digital resources, best practices, and training materials for library personnel.
- 4) Collaboration and partnerships: Facilitate collaboration and resource sharing among libraries across different regions and levels of government.
- 5) Innovation and research: Support research and development initiatives in digital libraries and related technologies.

By adopting this multi-level governance framework, India can promote the autonomous and decentralised development of libraries, enabling them to serve diverse communities effectively and contribute significantly to the nation's social, educational, and cultural growth.

9. Recommendations for action

9.1. Quantitative and qualitative survey of public libraries across India

Conducting a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative survey of all public libraries across India is crucial for several reasons:

- 1) Understanding the current landscape of public libraries: A comprehensive survey would provide a detailed overview of the current state of public libraries in India, including their infrastructure, resources, staffing, and services. This data would be useful for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the library system and identifying areas for improvement.
- 2) Gathering data on library usage and user needs: The survey would collect data on library usage patterns, user demographics, and user satisfaction levels. This information would help libraries better understand their user base and tailor their services to meet their needs.
- 3) Identifying best practices and benchmarking performance: The survey would identify libraries that are excelling in various areas, such as resource management, community engagement, and program delivery. This information could be used to benchmark performance and inform best practices across the entire library system.

- 4) Informing policy decisions and resource allocation: The findings of the survey would provide the state with a solid evidence base for making informed decisions about the allocation of resources to public libraries. This would lead to more effective and efficient use of funding.
- 5) Promoting accountability and transparency: A comprehensive survey would promote accountability and transparency within the public library system. Libraries would be able to track their progress over time and identify areas where they need to improve.
- 6) Building a strong foundation for future planning: The data gathered from the survey would provide a strong foundation for future planning and strategic decision-making within the public library system. Libraries could use this information to develop long-term plans and initiatives that align with their users' needs and the overall goals of the library system.

To conduct an effective quantitative and qualitative survey of all public libraries across India, the following steps should be taken:

- 1) Develop a comprehensive survey instrument: A comprehensive survey instrument should be developed that includes both quantitative and qualitative questions. The quantitative questions should gather data on library infrastructure, resources, staffing, services, usage patterns, and user demographics. The qualitative questions should gather in-depth information about user experiences, satisfaction levels, and suggestions for improvement.
- 2) Establish a robust data collection methodology: A robust data collection methodology should be established to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. This could involve a combination of online surveys, in-person interviews, and focus groups.
- 3) Engage with relevant stakeholders: Relevant stakeholders such as library administrators, librarians, library staff, and library users, should be engaged throughout the survey process to ensure that their perspectives are considered.
- 4) Analyse and interpret data: The collected data should be carefully analysed and interpreted to identify trends, patterns, and key findings. This analysis should be guided by clear objectives and research questions.
- 5) Disseminate findings and recommendations: The findings and recommendations of the survey should be disseminated to policymakers, library administrators, and library staff in a clear and accessible format. This will ensure that the results of the survey are used to inform decision-making and improve the quality of public library services across India.

By conducting a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative survey of all public libraries across India, the government and library stakeholders can gain valuable insights into the current state of the library system, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions about resource allocation and strategic planning. This will ultimately contribute to the development of a robust and effective public library system that meets the needs of all people.

9.2. Audit of implementation of state library laws

Conducting regular audits of the implementation of library laws in different states in India is crucial for ensuring that these laws are being effectively implemented, and in understanding how effective these laws are in meeting the needs of their respective states' communities.

Here are some of the key reasons why such audits are necessary:

- 1) Assessing compliance with legal requirements: Auditing the implementation of library laws helps to assess whether states and library administrators are adhering to the provisions of the law. This includes ensuring that libraries are providing adequate resources, staffing, and services to their users.
- 2) Identifying gaps and discrepancies: Audits can identify gaps and discrepancies between the legal requirements and the actual practices of libraries. This information can be used to address any shortcomings in different states' laws and improve the overall quality of library services.
- 3) Promoting transparency and accountability: Auditing fosters transparency and accountability within the library system. It helps to ensure that libraries are using their resources effectively and providing services that are responsive to the needs of their communities.
- 4) Informing policy reviews and updates: The findings of audits can inform policy reviews and updates, ensuring that library laws remain relevant and effective in addressing the changing needs of society.
- 5) Promoting continuous improvement: Regular audits encourage a culture of continuous improvement within the library system. States can use the findings of audits to identify areas for improvement and implement changes in their laws to enhance their libraries' services.

To effectively conduct an audit of the implementation of library laws in different states in India, the following steps should be taken:

- 1) Establish a clear audit framework: Develop a clear audit framework that outlines the scope of the audit, the criteria to be evaluated, and the methodology to be used.
- 2) Form an audit team: Assemble an audit team with expertise in library laws, library administration, and auditing methodologies.
- 3) Gather relevant data: Collect relevant data from various sources, including state library reports, library websites, and interviews with library administrators and staff.
- 4) Analyse and evaluate data: Analyse and evaluate the collected data against the established criteria to identify areas of compliance and non-compliance.
- 5) Prepare audit report: Prepare a comprehensive audit report that outlines the findings, recommendations, and action plans for addressing any identified shortcomings.
- 6) Publish audit report: Publish the entire report online, and disseminate its findings to relevant stakeholders, including state governments, library administrators, library associations, and the public.
- 7) Monitor implementation of recommendations: Establish a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the audit report.

Regular audits of the implementation of library laws in different states in India can play a pivotal role in ensuring that these laws are effectively implemented, that public libraries are meeting the needs of their communities, and that the library system continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of society. By promoting transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, audits can contribute to a stronger and more effective public library system in India.

9.3. Implementation of policy

Implementing this draft library policy requires a comprehensive approach that involves collaboration, coordination, and resource allocation. Here is a step-by-step guide to effectively implementing a draft library the policy:

9.3.1. *Wide-Ranging Consultation and Review:*

- 1) Engage in extensive consultation with stakeholders, including librarians, library administrators, policymakers, educators, and community representatives.
- 2) Gather feedback and suggestions on the draft policy to ensure it is inclusive and addresses the diverse needs of the library community.

- 3) Conduct thorough reviews of the draft policy to identify areas for improvement and refinement.

9.3.2. Policy Approval and Official Adoption:

- 1) Present the revised draft policy to the Union government for review and approval.
- 2) Once approved, the Union government may formally adopt the policy as the official guiding framework for library development in India.
- 3) Disseminate the policy widely among relevant stakeholders, ensuring clear understanding and adherence to its provisions.

9.3.3. Establishment of Implementation Mechanisms:

- 1) The Union government must create a dedicated implementation committee or task force to oversee the implementation of the library policy. This body must contain representatives from all regions of India, as well as relevant domain experts.
- 2) Develop clear action plans and timelines for implementing the policy's objectives and recommendations.
- 3) Allocate necessary resources, including financial and human capital, to support the implementation process.

9.3.4. Capacity Building and Training:

- 1) Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for librarians, library staff, and relevant stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the policy's provisions and their role in its effective implementation.
- 2) Empower them with the skills and knowledge to adapt their practices and programs to align with the policy's goals.

9.3.5. Monitoring and Evaluation:

- 1) Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress of policy implementation.
- 2) Regularly assess the impact of the policy on library services, user satisfaction, and overall library development.
- 3) Use evaluation findings to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to the policy or implementation strategies.

9.3.6. Collaboration and Partnerships:

- 1) Foster collaboration and partnerships among libraries, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups.
- 2) Leverage resources and expertise from partners to enhance the implementation of the library policy.
- 3) Create a supportive and collaborative ecosystem for library development and service delivery.

9.3.7. Advocacy and Public Awareness:

- 1) Raise awareness about the library policy and its significance among the public, policymakers, and the media.
- 2) Advocate for increased funding and support for library initiatives aligned with the policy's objectives.
- 3) Promote libraries as essential institutions for education, literacy, and community development.

Implementing the draft library policy would require a sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including government agencies, library professionals, and community members. By following these steps, India can effectively implement a comprehensive library policy that will strengthen the library system, enhance access to information and resources, and promote a culture of learning and lifelong development across the nation.

10. Library Networks, Associations, and Federations

Library associations and federations are key to promoting a uniformly free, excellent, and autonomous public library network. This is especially critical in India with a 1.4 billion population that does not have equal access to knowledge and information resources. The history of public libraries in India presents many examples of library associations and networks bringing people together to mobilise for libraries that are accessible to the public. Assam's Rural Library Movement in the 1930s, for instance, was driven through the Assam Library Association formed by Kumudeshwar Borthakur's efforts to bring together people of the public and engage with them in conversations around the value of libraries. Many other national and state level library associations have similarly played important roles in the growth of public libraries in India. Networks and associations of libraries at national, state, and regional levels must be encouraged and supported to promote public libraries. These associations and federations must support state-run public and non-government libraries to:

1. Deliver standardised best practices, curriculum, and policies that ensure free and accessible delivery of excellent library services to all.
2. Promote literacy, reading, and lifelong learning.
3. Uphold freedoms and rights to information, education, and knowledge, and represent librarians in the demand for the same.
4. Represent libraries in the technological marketplace and in the development of a socially responsible, digitally-forward country.
5. Develop library professionals and promote resource-sharing.
6. Participate in dialogues regarding intellectual property by balancing the needs of library users and IP creators.
7. Preserve intellectual and cultural heritage.

DRAFT

Appendix A: Supporters of Free Libraries Network

(Publishers, writers and illustrators who have extended solidarity with FLN's mission and are collaborating to drive the free library movement)

Zubaan Books ♦ Pratham Book ♦ Tulika Books ♦ Harper Collins India ♦ DK Books India ♦ Penguin Random House ♦ Panthers Paw Publications ♦ Navayana ♦ Ektara Trust ♦ Navarun Publications ♦ Vishw Books ♦ A&A Publishers ♦ Eklavya ♦ Juggernaut Books ♦ Pratilipi Westland ♦ Kalpavriksh (Hindi) ♦ Jyotsna Prakashan (Marathi) ♦ Kalachuvadu (Tamil) ♦ Seagull ♦ Speaking Tiger ♦ Anwasha (Assamese) ♦ Pickle Yolk ♦ DC Books/Ravi DC ♦ Scholastic India ♦ Rajpal & Sons ♦ Katha Books ♦ Tara Books ♦ Vani Prakashan ♦ Adidev press ♦ Tarshi ♦ Sangat ♦ Nirantar ♦ Left Word ♦ Adivani ♦ Karadi (Tamil, Hindi, English) ♦ Rajkamal Prakashan (Hindi) ♦ Rupa ♦ Roli ♦ Simon & Schuster ♦ Bloomsbury ♦ Hachette ♦ Pan MacMillan ♦ Manjul Publishing House (multi lang) ♦ Jaico ♦ Yatra Books ♦ Muskaan ♦ Lokvangmay ♦ ACK Group/Pai Group ♦ Indian Cultural Forum ♦ Githa Hariharan ♦ Arundhati Roy ♦ Varun Grover ♦ Anjum Hasan ♦ Samath Banerjee ♦ Sharanya Mannivannan ♦ Priya Kuriyan ♦ Rajiv Eipe ♦ Deepanjana Pal ♦ Bijal Vaccharajani ♦ Nisha Susan ♦ Annie Zaidi ♦ Anita Roy ♦ Sowmya Rajendran ♦ Aparna Vaidik ♦ Siddesh Gautam (Bakery Prasad) ♦ Amrita Tripathi ♦ Arun Sagar ♦ Maaz bin Bilal ♦ Meena Kandasamy ♦ Raghu Karnad ♦ Samit Basu ♦ Manju Kapur ♦ Meenakshi Madhavan ♦ Janice Pariat ♦ Keki Daruwala ♦ Sudeep Chakravartii ♦ Aruni Kashyap ♦ Kaushik Baruah ♦ Tishani Doshi ♦ Aman Sethi ♦ Tejaswini Niranjana ♦ Preethi Nagaraj ♦ Harini Nagendra ♦ Vivek Narayanan ♦ Parvati Sharma ♦ Shahnaz Habib ♦ Kala Ramesh ♦ CK Meena ♦ Sunetra Chowdhury ♦ Juri Borah Borgohain ♦ Sushil Shukla ♦ Sridala Swami ♦ Zai Whitaker ♦ Amruta Patil ♦ Jeet Thayil ♦ Tabish Khair ♦ Tarana Khan ♦ Taran Khan ♦ Arunava Sinha ♦ Paul Zacharia ♦ Aneela Zeb Babar ♦ Pavithra Sankaran ♦ Shrayana Bhattacharya ♦ Manu Pillai ♦ M. Rajshekhar ♦ Karthika Nair ♦ Vasudha Dalmia ♦ Nidheesh MK ♦ S Anand ♦ Rahul Soni ♦ Sabitha Satchi ♦ Tony Joseph ♦ Rana Safvi ♦ Amlanjyoti Goswami ♦ Anirudh Kaniseti ♦ Vikram Chandra ♦ Amitava Kumar ♦ Ashish Kothari ♦ Manish Purohit ♦ Paranjay Guha Thakurta ♦ Romila Thapar ♦ Tanuj Solanki ♦ Akshaya Mukul ♦ Gillian Wright ♦ Mark Tully ♦ Omair Ahmad ♦ Srividya Natarajan ♦ Benyamin Danial ♦ Abdullah Khan ♦ Arshia Sattar ♦ Deepak Shenoy ♦ Anita Mani ♦ Moupia Basu ♦ John Zubrzycki ♦ Anuja Chandramouli ♦ Tashan Mehta ♦ Maya Dalal ♦ Nivedita Menon ♦ Anu Gupta ♦ Sankat Karkare ♦ Karen Haydock ♦ Joeanna Rebello Fernandez ♦ Ashok Gopal ♦ Amita Kalenkar ♦ Ashwin Desai ♦ Bhanwar Meghavanshi ♦ Douglas Ober ♦ Divya Cherian ♦ Dilip ♦ Amita Kanekar ♦ Imran Kureshi ♦ Goolam Vahed ♦ Gita Ramaswamy ♦ Gogu Shyamala ♦ Laura Brueck ♦ Madhu Singh ♦ Tenzin Dickyi ♦ Shailaja Paik (Pakisa) ♦ Anushka Ravishankar ♦ Adithi Rao ♦ Chatura Rao ♦ Vandana Singh ♦ Orijit Sen ♦ Asha Nemiah ♦ Aishwarya AV Raj (Shourya) ♦ P Sainath ♦ Krish Ashok ♦ Varun Mathew ♦ Raviraj Shetty ♦ Sam Miller ♦ Arefa Tehsin ♦ Likla Lal ♦ Ashok Rajagopalan ♦ Samarth ♦ Geetanjali Shree

Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Mumbai & Navi Mumbai ♦ Avani, Kolhapur ♦ Kagad Kach Patra Kamgar Sanghatana, Aurangabad ♦ Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat, Ahmadnagar ♦ Shramjivi Mahila Samajik Sanstha, Nashik ♦ CARPE, Aurangabad ♦ Centre for Sustainable Development, Nagpur ♦ Aakar, Mumbai ♦ Social Action for Literacy And Health (SALAH), Kalyan

Appendix B: PNLP 2024 in Media

Indian Express, 28 July 2024

[Access Here](#)

The free libraries of India telling stories of hope

Run without government aid, libraries are popping up in under-resourced places around India to help people read, write and learn their rights

Written by [Udbhav Seth](#) , [Sukhmani Malik](#)

Updated: July 28, 2024 08:01 IST

The Wire, 12 May 2024

[Access Here](#)

Fire in Nalanda: The Urgent Need to Reform India's Public Libraries



Purnima Rao

12/May/2024 • 5 min read



A growing grassroots movement of independent libraries is rising to meet the people's hunger to read, learn and think.

Hindustan Times, 12 April 2024

Libraries can force the case for liberty, justice

When Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III visited the United States (US), he may have encountered the phrase “palaces for the people,” a term often used to describe US public libraries. He was certainly convinced of the importance of the public libraries system he encountered there; he appointed an American to create one in Baroda in 1910 — and thus, William Alanson Borden, created a system of free libraries in modern India.

A publisher recently told me this about Kerala, which has close to 10,000 libraries: “*Wahan ki baat hi alag hai*” (Kerala stands out from the rest of the country). She reasoned that the state’s near-total literacy came first, and then came the books and the culture of reading. So, if we could just hurtle ourselves forward the Kerala way, then, only a century after Gaekwad and his love of free libraries, we could set about establishing the public library system that India needs.

The publisher is right. Kerala is different from the rest of the country which has an abysmal ratio of one urban library for every 80,000 people and one rural library for every 11,500 people. But she is also wrong because people don’t acquire literacy first and then books. They acquire books first and literacy follows. Kerala’s literacy movement was preceded by a century-long library movement.

And even Kerala may no longer be able to exercise the autonomy of the Kerala way. R Bindu, Kerala’s minister of higher education, at the Union ministry of culture’s Festival of Libraries, voiced her state’s objection to the Centre’s plan to move the library question from the state to the concurrent list. Kerala is worried that if they lose control over their libraries, they will no longer be able to maintain the quality of their system, which provides libraries at a ratio of one per 3,500 people.

The library movement in India has mostly not been led by *maharajas* or government officials. It has been a people’s movement, led by those who undoubtedly understand that people have a right to places where they can meet, talk, read and think together. Leaders in the movement have come from various places and times in India: Motibhai Amin in Baroda, Sir Iyyanki Venkata Ramanayya in Andhra Pradesh, PN Panicker in Kerala, Monindra Dev Rai Mahashaya in Bengal, Master Motilal in Rajasthan, Sant Ram Bhatia in Punjab, Kumudeshar Barhakur in Assam, among others. SR Ranganathan, who conceived of the movement on a

national scale, understood the importance of the connection between free libraries and the nation. Ranganathan is responsible not only for the Madras Public Libraries Act, the first library legislation adopted in India, but also for a Model Library Act, which alas was never adopted nationally.

The present library movement in India is also a people’s movement. It is led by over 300 library practitioners and leaders from around the country and operates over 200 free library organisations. Nearly none of the libraries in the Free Libraries Network have access to the resources that would allow them to do what they do, which is to welcome all people and bar none from free membership in libraries in which literature and community thrive. The seemingly miraculous has less to do with miracles and more to do with a commitment to meet the urgency of people’s need for access to information.

The free library movement describes itself as an anti-caste movement because it recognises the role caste has played in keeping people outside libraries. It recognises the role of libraries in annihilating caste. It begins with the assertion that libraries must be free to be anti-caste.

These are combative words in India, where active exclusion of people from a reading environment occurs when a child in Rajasthan is beaten by his teacher for reaching for the ‘wrong’ container of water.

The People’s National Library Policy 2024 (PNLP24) of the Free Library Network begins with the premise that libraries should be free of cost to all people, of all castes, religions, genders, classes, ethnicities, abilities, and should bar no one whatsoever, and further that people should be free to choose from the ideas curated within the library. The importance of freedom to choose what to read necessarily begins with adequate public funding and adequate ratio of libraries per capita and books per capita, and most importantly with local autonomy over libraries.

We can trust autonomy to create the libraries people need and good national policy, on the lines of PNL24, to ensure a baseline rooted in the Constitution’s promise of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Constitution could as easily have been describing the best public library system as it described the nation we are trying to become.



Mridula Koshy

Mridula Koshy, a writer, is a board member of Free Libraries Network. The views expressed are personal

The Indian Express, 14 April 2024

News / Cities / Delhi / 'Free libraries for all': Here's policy memo on how it is done

'Free libraries for all': Here's policy memo on how it is done

The memo seeks to establish a standard for what qualifies as a decent library and establish a curriculum for librarians so they can become 'repositories for delivering constitutional rights' instead of being 'merely record keepers'.

Written by [Udbhav Seth](#)

New Delhi | Updated: April 14, 2024 12:26 IST



Members of Free Library Network during a press conference at Press Club in Delhi on Saturday. (Express Photo by Praveen Khanna)

Braving a rainswept city, children and teens from all around the country – some virtually, some physically – gathered at Delhi's Press Club Saturday evening to advocate for the right to read, to information, and to a library. The Free Libraries Network (FLN), a collective of more than 250 libraries around South Asia, released a policy memo 'The People's National Library Policy 2024', drawn from years of coordination and activism at the grassroots level, to bolster a movement they believe to be the foundation of the Indian Constitution's ideals of equity and justice – on the eve of Dr BR Ambedkar's birth anniversary. All their libraries are fiercely anti-caste, feminist and disability-friendly, and above all, free.

Why? Won't people steal expensive books? Mustn't there be some entry barriers to maintain security? "The mindset has to change that, oh, there is an excellent library in the centre of the city some of us can access, so why are we caring? There is an anxiety that if we involve and welcome everybody, there will be some kind of downgrading (of quality). That doesn't happen. Yes, when you break caste or gender barriers, issues crop up... but you work with it because that's the world you live in," said Purnima Rao, director, FLN.

The memo seeks to establish a standard for what qualifies as a decent library and establish a curriculum for librarians so they can become 'repositories for delivering constitutional rights' instead of being 'merely record keepers'. It also seeks to decentralise control so individual communities can decide how to start and run their local libraries, with help from union and state governments as well as bodies like the National Digital Library and Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF). It also advocates for robust data collection –according to the union government, of a total of 27,671 government-run libraries in India, only 7,836 exist outside southern states like Kerala, [Tamil Nadu](#) and [Karnataka](#).

"When I went to these libraries, it's not just a place for books. It's a place where we can share our thoughts. A library makes me feel safe and confident. When I first joined as a member, I only went to listen to stories. But over time, I developed a new way of thinking wherein I could see how so much injustice is done to people with my identity," said Rajni, a member of The Community Library Project (TCLP), part of FLN.

The Indian Express, 15 April 2024

To fulfil Ambedkar's vision of inclusivity, every child must have access to a library

India needs a national policy on public libraries which recognises that access to knowledge is not a privilege but a fundamental right

April 15, 2024 18:48 IST

NewsGuard



Fireworks of 'Jay Bhim' during celebration of B R Ambedkar's birth anniversary in Latur. (PTI)

Abhishek Vyas and Jatin Lalit

When Julie, a spirited 8-year-old girl from Bansa village in Hardoi, [Uttar Pradesh](#), first stepped into her village's community library, her curiosity was boundless. The library — the first of its kind in the entire district — had opened amidst the [Covid-19](#) turmoil. It was a modest but colourful building with books, computers, posters, and games. And the best part: It was all free! Julie would frequently visit the library and pick up storybooks, participate in read-aloud activities, and make new friends. She also became intrigued by the [Preamble](#) to the Constitution, which was painted in large letters on the library wall, and wondered what it meant. The library became her sanctuary.

However, when her father decided to migrate to [Ludhiana](#) for work, post-lockdown, Julie was left without her beloved library. In a phone call to the librarian soon after, she spoke about how much she missed it. She wondered why the big and bustling city did not have its own version of the Bansa Community Library.

Julie's story is not unique; she represents many learners and readers across India who are profoundly impacted by lack of access to free public libraries. The Indian public library system has a rich history and some pockets of success; however, it largely remains underdeveloped, underfunded, and unequal. The lack of a comprehensive national library policy has left many communities — especially the marginalised — without access to these essential public goods.

Historically, public libraries have been spaces of resistance, empowerment, and cultural assertion. They have provided access to knowledge and ideas that challenged colonial oppression and ignited the spirit of Independence. The Assam rural library movement of the 1930s, spearheaded by Kumudeswar Borthakur, is one such example. The movement mobilised the masses and engaged them in conversations about the value of knowledge. This laid the foundation for a network of libraries that continue to thrive today. Kerala Grandhasala Sangham and the [Andhra Pradesh](#) Library Association are other such initiatives which have been important in democratising access to reading and learning.

After Independence, public libraries have continued to be significant for advancing literacy, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing informed civic engagement. In 1959, the Sinha Committee recognised the transformative potential of libraries, and advocated for a nationwide network of free public libraries. Institutions like the [Delhi](#) Public Library and the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation have carried forward this vision and promoted the library movement across the country.

The library movement has also been shaped by the vision of leaders like S R Ranganathan, who advocated for a people-centric approach to library services. In his “Five Laws of Library Science”, he emphasised the role of libraries in serving the needs of all users, regardless of their background or social status. His philosophy laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and responsive library system.

However, despite the efforts of library pioneers and the enactment of state-level library legislation, India's public library system remains fragmented and underfunded. The lack of a comprehensive national policy framework has hindered the development of a cohesive and equitable network of libraries across the country. Disparities in infrastructure, resources, and services still persist. These disparities disproportionately impact those who are already historically excluded from equal participation in our society on the basis of caste, class, gender, disability and other barriers.

India urgently needs a comprehensive national library policy that addresses these challenges and reimagines India's library system as a catalyst for social change and democratic empowerment. Such a policy must recognise that access to knowledge is not a privilege but a fundamental right. It is essential for the full realisation of a community's potential and the collective progress of the nation.

By enshrining the principles of free and universal access, the policy should aim to break down barriers that have long excluded marginalised communities from the world of learning and democratic participation. It must envision libraries as inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity, promote social cohesion, and provide a

platform for civic discourse. Through equitable distribution of quality knowledge resources and services, the policy should also seek to support digital inclusion and ensure that no individual is left behind in the knowledge revolution.

Julie's story highlights the transformative impact of free public libraries. By enacting a comprehensive national library policy, we can ensure that every child, like Julie, has access to knowledge and the opportunity to shape India's democratic future. In the spirit of B R Ambedkar's vision of an inclusive and enlightened India, let us make the right to knowledge a reality through a robust public library system that empowers every citizen to read, think, and speak up freely.

ADVERTISEMENT

Vyas is the co-founder and academic coordinator of the Bansa Community Library and a doctoral researcher in Education at Brunel University London. Lalit is the advocate and founder of Bansa Community Library and general secretary of Free Libraries Network

Mid-Day, 21 April 2024

People's National Library Policy 2024: Exploring the future of India's library ecosystem

21 April, 2024 06:29 AM IST | Mumbai | Neerja Deodhar (<https://www.mid-day.com/author-detail/neerja-deodhar-452>)

Fragmented and undernourished, India's library ecosystem is the subject of a new draft policy which imagines a future where caste and gender are not barriers and librarians are community leaders



Mere hours before she can sit down with mid-day to talk about India's library ecosystem, Purnima Rao has been in a meeting with prison officials. The subject of this interaction? Prison inmates' right to read. Though it has been proven that reading books can assist in their rehabilitation, inmates and undertrials have been woefully ignored and excluded. It may seem like an unusual, if unlikely cause, for people to rally behind, and yet state organisations are working hard to make prison libraries a reality.

The People's National Library Policy 2024, drafted by the Free Libraries Network (FLN), wants to enable causes like it. A 200+ grassroots libraries-strong network, led by Rao and other library activists across India, it has produced a 65-page document that it aims to place on the desks of a variety of stakeholders, bringing to their notice alarming statistics. Our country has one urban library for every 80,000 people, and one rural library for 11,500 people. This is a world apart from the accepted global norm of one library for 3,000 readers. What can change the dismal ground reality in India? Rao says there's no magic bullet. "There has to be a people-led movement to demand changes to the ecosystem. A transformation is also needed in the very perception of libraries, which are still seen as study halls where aspirants prepare for entrance tests," Rao explains.

The draft policy is singular in the way it addresses issues of equitable access, as discrimination on the basis of gender, caste and disability continue to remain barriers. "We've been witness to movements in the past - in states such as Assam and Kerala - and comparisons to institutions overseas, but a fundamental question remains unanswered: how do libraries aim to serve those who are left out?" says Rao, "The existential purpose of a library is to build bridges of access for those to whom books, education and knowledge remain inaccessible." It is through access that issues of growing readership and encouraging critical thinking are addressed, she adds.

For Delhi-based advocate Jatin Lalit, building a library in his native Bansa was a personal, nurtured dream. It is the only free, community-oriented institution of its kind in Uttar Pradesh's Hardoi district, welcoming 120 readers per day into its premises and boasting of a membership of 1800. But you could walk into the three-year-old library without a membership card too; such is its ethos. "Volunteering at Delhi's The Community Library Project for three years when I was in college had a huge impact on me. It motivated me to begin a library in my own village, when I had enough resources," says Jatin, who is FLN's general secretary.

The draft policy devotes much space to the need for funding and sustainability; after all, without financial support, the acquisition of books and upgradation of facilities is an uphill battle. Aside from government allocations and grants, it highlights strategies like fundraising or even social entrepreneurship - running cafes or bookstores from within library premises.

The institution in Bansa, for example, has been built - brick by brick - on land lent by a local temple where Jatin's great-grandfather was a sweeper. Its construction, on the other hand, was crowdfunded. "We've tried to keep costs low and ensure sustainability. A monthly patron support system, with payments as small as R250, helps take care of recurring expenses. These payments go towards staff salaries and stationery," says Jatin. An Amazon wish list of books desired by readers is frequently circulated on social media, and orders placed by kind strangers allow new titles to reach the library's doorstep.

Libraries like the one in Bansa, which caters to 36 villages, are the result of "ad hoc initiatives" by individuals with access and social capital, Jatin admits. Rao is of the opinion that the sprouting of grassroots community libraries is itself a symptom of the breakdown of the public library system. While individual efforts are commendable, they don't ensure longevity - a factor that the draft policy addresses. "If we don't devise a framework whereby the establishment and running of libraries is standardised, then such initiatives die out with the people who founded them," says Rao.

With its eyes to the future, the draft policy envisages an evolved library that moves forward with the times - where readers can use the Internet, and librarians aren't merely record keepers, but rather community leaders. The authors of the document emphasise that only trained professionals should be put in charge, because the librarian is a make-or-break force. Their role involves engaging with the community, technical skills like cataloguing and maintaining databases, and pedagogical knowledge about curriculum and reading strategies.

"Very often we see that the librarian's place in the system is bypassed and subverted," says Rao, "On the surface, it can seem like no one wants to pay a librarian's wages, but at a deeper level, there seems to be fear about libraries becoming a place for movements, of people's voices coming together - which a librarian can facilitate."

