

## Research Article

# Libraries As Agents Of Empowerment: An Empirical Study Of Delhi Public Library And State Central Library, Trivandrum

Afna T<sup>1</sup>, Kadeeja Banu C V<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M.Lib.I.Sc Student, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Library & Information Science

Farook College (Autonomous)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2395.2288.202510>

## I N F O

### Corresponding Author:

Kadeeja Banu C V, Department of Library & Information Science Department of Library & Information Science, Farook College (Autonomous)

### E-mail Id:

[kadeejabanucv@farookcollege.ac.in](mailto:kadeejabanucv@farookcollege.ac.in)

### Orcid Id:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2250-3904>

### How to cite this article:

Afna T, Kadeeja Banu C V, Libraries As Agents Of Empowerment: An Empirical Study Of Delhi Public Library And State Central Library, Trivandrum. *J Adv Res Lib Inform Sci* 2025; 12(3): 23-25.

Date of Submission: 2025-09-17

Date of Acceptance: 2025-10-19

## A B S T R A C T

Libraries have been the gateways that connect people to the world of knowledge. As a social institution, libraries meet the needs and demands of their communities. This study explores the role of libraries in empowering communities such as women, children, and disabled people through their new initiatives and other specific programmes. This paper presents a case study of the Delhi Public Library at the national level and the State Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram, at the state level, focusing on the services they offer to women, children, and people with disabilities. The investigator collected the data through e-mail, and the study explored how the library grew from a mere centre of lending of books to a living organisation devoted to promoting intellectual pursuits and creating community rapport among women, children, and differently abled readers.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Public libraries, Women, Children, Differently Abled

## Introduction

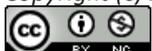
Libraries are not only book repositories, but also they are the learning hubs that foster literacy, lifelong learning, information access, cultural transmission and social inclusion. Edwards, Rausco and Unger (2013).<sup>1</sup> classify the public library's services into five broad categories: (1) Libraries as community builders, (2) Libraries as community centres for diverse populations, (3) Libraries as centres for the arts, (4) Libraries as universities and (5) Libraries as champions of youth. Thus, as a community centre for a diverse population, libraries should contribute substantially to empowering marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and people with disabilities. It always acts as a bridge between to grasp the knowledge. Public libraries

are officially recognised as key players in the emerging information or knowledge-orientated society.<sup>2</sup>

The Delhi Public Library (DPL) was established in 1951 by the then Ministry of Education, Government of India, with financial and technical assistance from UNESCO. Since then it has been developed into a premier public library system in the country, covering the entire metropolitan city. It has a network of zonal libraries, sub libraries, mobile libraries, etc. It is the largest public library network in India. It also acts as a depository library under the Books and Registration Act 1954. At present, the Delhi Public Library is functioning under the administrative control of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. DPL provides free library services to the children and adults irrespective of any distinction of

*Journal of Advanced Research in Library and Information Science (ISSN: 2395-2288)*

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sex, caste, creed, and religion. DPL also looks after their recreational needs to harness the latent potential of the members of the public by providing a suitable platform for socio-cultural activities.<sup>3</sup>

The State Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram, established in 1829, is one of the oldest public library systems in India, serving as a major centre for knowledge and cultural development in the capital city of Kerala. It was initially founded during the reign of the Travancore Maharaja and has since evolved into a significant institution promoting literacy, education, and cultural awareness. The library comprises a central library and several branch libraries, offering a wide range of services including book lending, reference services, digital resources, and community programmes. It plays a pivotal role in providing free access to knowledge for people of all ages and backgrounds without any discrimination. In addition to traditional library services, the Trivandrum Public Library actively organises cultural events, workshops, and exhibitions, aiming to promote intellectual growth and social engagement among the public.<sup>4</sup>

The investigator collected data through e-mails sent to respective library authorities.

## Analysis and Findings

### Delhi Public Library:

Delhi Public Library provides free library services to the people, children and adults alike, irrespective of any distinction of sex, caste, creed and religion. Delhi Public Library also looks after their recreational needs and harnesses the latent and potential of the children, women and differently abled of the public by providing a platform for social education.

### Children's Engagement

With 22,064 registered child readers, DPL organises separate cultural programmes for children like storytelling sessions, drawing competitions, essay writing, debate and poetry sessions. These programmes help in adopting creative thinking and encourage them to develop early reading habits.

### Women empowerment

In 2023-24 DPL had an enrolment of 36,057 women readers. It maintains a committee for the welfare of women staff called "Mahila Shikayat Samiti" and organises "International Women's Day" every year. These initiatives of DPL demonstrate gender inclusion of both users and staff.

### Support for differently abled persons

DPL has special provision for visually impaired readers and has an enrolment of 1,152 visually handicapped Braille readers. The Braille Department of the library adds Braille

books every year. Mobile library service is being provided in 12 blind schools & institutions all over Delhi. Magazines are being subscribed for the visually impaired in the Braille Library. Internet and email facilities are being provided to visually impaired readers. Annual competitions like debate, speech, essay writing, music & poetry recital are being organised for visually impaired readers.

For disabled & handicapped persons, ramps and toilets are constructed in the Central Library and Sarojini Nagar Library.

### State Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram

State Central Library, Thiruvananthapuram, provides free library services to the people, children, and adults alike, irrespective of any distinction of sex, caste, creed, and religion. It actively promotes reading habits and knowledge dissemination by offering a wide range of books, periodicals, and digital resources. This library also looks after the recreational and educational needs of the public and harnesses the latent potential of children, women, and differently-abled individuals by providing a platform for social education, cultural activities, and skill development programmes.

### Childrens' engagement

State Central Library has a separate children's library comprising more than 60000 books. This library is specially designed for children and provides books, journals and other resources of their interests. The library has a user-friendly environment, including comfortable seating for children, a television and a clear signage system to locate books. No separate membership is provided for children. Children below the age of 14 can only take books with their parents. Membership cards and use the library between 8 am and 8 pm on normal working days. The library organises reading and storytelling competitions frequently and also conducts workshops on drama, public speaking, story writing, etc. It also conducts quiz competitions and painting exhibitions on important days like Gandhi Jayanthi, Children's Day, etc. It has a separate multimedia room for children, and they can access games and other informative content. The children's park is also well maintained in the library premises. The library organises Summer School every year during the months of April-May. A variety of interesting programmes, like talks by eminent persons, informative and entertaining sessions, games, etc., are the main attraction of this programme. The State Central Library plays a vital role in creating and fostering reading habits among children.

### Women empowerment

The library organises seminars and book exhibitions on women's rights, gender equality, health, violence against women and other issues on special occasions like Women's Day. It also acts as a platform for women writers to introduce their newly published works and to deliver book

talks. Library staff offer digital literacy skills to the women and help them to use the library effectively. State Central Library is the first library in Kerala to provide a separate membership for the transgender community.

### **Support for differently abled persons**

The library maintains a user-friendly atmosphere for the differently abled persons. Ramp facilities are provided in each building so that they can reach the library without much effort. There is a Braille room for visually impaired people, and they have a good collection of Braille books. Librarians of all sections prioritise the needs of differently abled people and senior citizens who reach the library.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can easily say that these two libraries stand as a valid example of how public libraries can act as active agents for empowering socially marginalised groups. Beyond the traditional role of libraries as repositories of books, it serves as a community-fostering institution. Through different programmes and services for women, children and differently abled people, it helps in the intellectual and community engagement of these people. It is the model that emphasises the vital role that libraries can play in the empowerment of society, and this study really helps the policymakers, educators and library professionals to rethink and reimagine libraries not just as places of reading but also as spaces of community hubs, resource centres and learning.

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