



How I Started a Library for Kids in Bengaluru When I Couldn't Find Any for My 4-YO

ThinkBox, a lending library in Bengaluru, came into being because Bhakti Shah wanted to encourage her son. Here's how she set it up.

BY [VIDYA RAJA \(HTTPS://WWW.THEBETTERINDIA.COM/AUTHOR/VIDYA-RAJA/\)](https://www.thebetterindia.com/author/vidya-raja/).

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“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go,” Dr Seuss, from 'I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!'

As a parent, what do you do to ensure that your child becomes a reader? Let me share some things that I do – introduce various kinds of books to them, make outings to bookstores a part of their routine, ensure that they see me read as much as possible to set an example.



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Bhakti Shah (51), a resident of Bengaluru, did all this and more. Yet she found that her then three-year-old, Parth Shah, was still not taking to reading as a habit. So she decided to take the ultimate next step in the next few years – start a library!

ThinkBox, a children’s library for books and toys started in 2008 in Bengaluru’s Malleshpalya main road. For more than a decade now, it continues to function, though her son is now 21 years old.



Parth and one of the first library members.

“To start a community library, you don’t need a degree in library science or business management. All you need is an abundance of passion and a desire to get people, especially children, into the habit of reading.” Bhakti encourages. Here is how she did it.

Setting up a library



Playschool students visit the library.

“One of the first few books that I read was ‘Fountainhead’ by Ayn Rand, and this was when I was almost 19 years of age. So, in a sense, I started [reading](https://www.thebetterindia.com/240342/gurugram-book-store-children-adult-nonreader-books-fiction-non-fiction-encyclopaedia-series-mystery-thriller-buy-delivery-vid01/) (<https://www.thebetterindia.com/240342/gurugram-book-store-children-adult-nonreader-books-fiction-non-fiction-encyclopaedia-series-mystery-thriller-buy-delivery-vid01/>) rather late in life, and I wanted to make sure my son started early. I realised how beneficial it would be to start on reading early on in life – the earlier, the better,” she says.

“I would read as much as I could to my child – the voice modulation, the expression, it all left a mark on him. Thinking back, I remember handing him a picture book when he was just six months old, which he would chew on for hours, giving me those few precious moments to finish my book,” she says.

Bhakti believes that if one has to be a reader, there must be ample exposure to books. And libraries are the best place for that to happen. Some of Bhakti’s favourite memories revolve around books and being in libraries with her son. “We would pack a picnic basket, go to the British Council library in Bengaluru and spend at least four to five hours pouring over books,” she says.

It was during these visits that Bhakti understood the importance of letting the child pick their own books.



Bonding over stories.

She says, “It made a lot of difference to take my son to the library and let him pick the books he wanted. Not just to empower him but also let him choose books that interested him, rather than force him into reading what children his age were reading.”

“Having spent some time in the US and Europe, I saw that those countries had wonderful libraries. Six and seven-storied buildings with books of all genres. In fact, a lot of my own interest in reading stemmed from there,” says Bhakti, who came back to India in 2000. And while the British Council was fine, Bhakti wanted more.

“As Parth grew, his school timings increased, and that meant fewer visits to the British Council library for him. I would still go as often as I could and pick books for him as well. What he missed, however, was the freedom to pick what he wanted,” says Bhakti.

With that thought in mind, Bhakti started thinking about starting a library close to her own home in Bengaluru in 2003.

Zero-knowledge of business, but armed with a passion



Armed with a passion for books.

It took a long while for Bhakti to decide on taking this step, and says, “I did not know anything about doing business or library management for that matter. Everything was learnt on the job.” Bhakti did all this with a three-year-old in tow and attributes a lot of the push and motivation she got to her husband, brother, and father.

One of the things that Bhakti wanted to change when she established the library in 2008 was a change in mind-set.

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She says, “When buying a house or looking to rent, people usually check on whether the area has good schools, doctors, or other amenities. How many people ask whether a library exists close by? This is what I wanted to change.”



Storytelling session in progress.

Bhakti was clear of wanting to establish the library in her own neighbourhood and build a community around it. "I wanted to set up the library in a place that would attract people to walk in and check – I wanted to grab their attention," she says.

When asked why it took her so long to set up the library, she says, "I had fear of failure. It took me close to four years to accept that fear and possible failure. It was a quote that ultimately motivated me to start – 'Dreams don't work unless you do.'"

On 28 March 2008, Bhakti started ThinkBox, a small but well-stocked library with about 500 books, to begin with.



ThinkBox – helping create young readers.

"My husband would joke saying even if the library did not take off, the books would be put to good use by our son," she says. She adds here that the initial investment of about Rs 1.5 Lakh came from her own savings, which she had set aside from her years of working as a software

engineer.

The other decision Bhakti took early on was to rent a commercial space to set up the library to ensure that the home and the work were kept as two different entities. Bhakti chose to set up the library in a commercial market area in Bengaluru, once that was frequented by parents, especially mothers.

With about 100 sq ft space at her disposal, Bhakti speaks of how she adopted a very minimalistic approach in furnishing the place. “The USP of the place has always been the books and the toys, everything else, like furniture and décor, was secondary,” she says.



A warm and inviting space.

But it was not all haphazard. “I used bright and vibrant colours and ensured that the books are placed at a height that is easy for children to access. I also ensured that there are no sharp edges and corners in any furniture around the space. The more welcoming the place, the happier the children will feel being there,” says Bhakti.

Bhakti started with children between the age group of 1 to 8 years of age and then kept increasing the age group. “I started with about 500 books and 200 toys and today stock more than 8500 titles and over 650 toys,” she says.

It isn't just about having a well-stocked library. Speaking about some of the early members, she says, "A few of them who were early adopters of the community library are still members," she says. It is also important to stock books that children will like and relate to. To do this, Bhakti says that she visits the publishers and distributors' warehouses and sees the book before she decides to stock them.

"The content, illustrations, and topics make a lot of difference in attracting a child, and therefore some thought must go into it, while you make your purchase," she says.



Parth and Bhakti.

And seems to have all worked out. Other than being a commercial success, Bhakti's son is today a voracious reader, a large chunk of the credit of which goes to Bhakti and ThinkBox.

"It's not easy running a library – given that e-readers are now more accessible," says Bhakti.

This Bengaluru Mom Started a Library to Encourage Her Son to Read!



"However, the charm of reading a book and spending time with your child thereafter discussing it, is something else, and I urge you to do it," says Bhakti.

If you are in Bengaluru or would like to know more about how to start a library, do reach out to Bhakti via ThinkBox's [Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/thinkboxlibrary/\)](https://www.facebook.com/thinkboxlibrary/) page and [Instagram \(https://www.instagram.com/thinkboxblore/\)](https://www.instagram.com/thinkboxblore/) page.

(Edited by Vinayak Hegde)

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