

Meet the 12-year-old Kerala girl who runs a free library in Kochi

Yashoda learned about library dues and decided to start a free library after she thought about the poor who would not be able to access books to read.



It's noon on Sunday and Yashoda has climbed down the stairs of her house in Mattancherry in Kochi for lunch. She has to hurry back upstairs - there is, on the upper floor, a library to run. By now, her story has been written about. Young Yashoda D Shenoy - all of 12 - has been interviewed and hailed for being perhaps the youngest librarian around, and running it free for all in Kochi.

"It is open every day, from 9 am to 7 pm. When I go to school, my mom or dad or brother is there," Yashoda says. Nearly six months ago, the library - Yashoda's Library - was opened on the top floor of her house, converting the gallery of her artist dad to a library-cum-gallery. On one side, there is her father Dinesh R Shenoy's paintings, which have been kept aside to make space for the many racks of books, and chairs and desks to read them on.

Yashoda, who read books from the age of eight with the help of her elder brother Achuth and mother Brahmaja, had no idea there was a cost one has to pay to read. "I saw dad pay money when a library book was due. When I asked him about it, he said no book came free. I wondered then how people without money would read. What about those who didn't even have ten rupees with them," she asks, innocently.



It didn't take much longer for the thought to turn into action. For the child, it was simple. If there were no free books so far, she would just have to start giving them. She told her dad about it, he published a post on Facebook and books came from many places.

"We began with about 2000 books, now there are more than 3500. We have separated them into fiction - stories, novels and poems among them -

and non-fiction. There are books in English, Malayalam, Konkani, Hindi and Sanskrit," says the young librarian.

Her favourite is Basheer books, she says. But the books in the library are for both children and grownups. Her classmates and even her teachers at school have taken membership at the free library. "There is no fine but a book is to be taken out for 15 days and then brought back. For the unwell and the aged who cannot come to the library, we deliver the books they want at home if we have it in the library," Yashoda says.



It is her dream to own a very large library, she says. "If you are a librarian, you'd need to retire one day. But if you own your library, you don't need to go anywhere," she says, with a very long-term foresight.