

Temple of hard copy
EASWARI LENDING LIBRARY

THEMATICS



autumn



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Questions pop into my head: How old is this place? What kind of books do they have? Where did the name 'Easwari' come from? The man who founded the library, Mr. Palani, is there to answer my questions, as well as his sons, and a grandson. It is a family enterprise now.

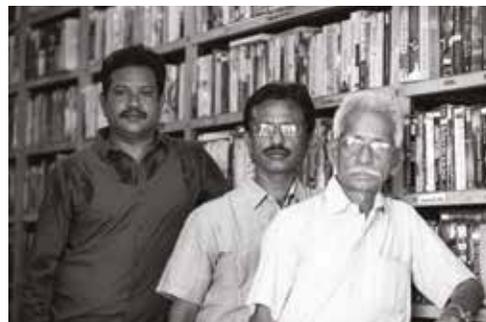
The library was started over 60 years ago by N Palani (in 1955) when he was 16. Before the library was started, he was running an old paper shop, buying and selling old books and newspapers. As the interest in magazines (Anandha Vikatan, Kumudam, etc) grew, he would bind them and let people read them, for a small fee (4 anna, 2 annas, 1 anna). After a while, it became the main business. When he started, there were not too many libraries around. Initially, he would buy books at Moore Market and bring them here in a cycle. A friend advised him on which books were popular and which ones people were more likely



On the busy Lloyds road (now Avvai Shanmugam salai), in the ground floor of an apartment complex, resides one of the gems of the city. If you were to go to the vegetable sellers shop across the road and look across to this ground floor apartment and look up, you would see, over the car parking, a sign declaring the place as 'Easwari Lending Library'. Here is the headquarters of one of the oldest library chains in the city. The room extends deep, and each shelf is layered with books.

to read. After a while, he started buying straight from the publisher. At first, clients were mostly adults. As time went by, children also got curious and it started expanding, to English books, children's books, professional and educational books.

Mr. Palani's family deity is the Nagathamman Kovil (Kuladeivam), in Kadalur. In that temple is a shrine for Easwari. The library was named after that Goddess. As a mark of gratitude, he invested money to renovate the temple.



As an ardent devotee of Lord Murugan, the branches are named Senthil, Kumaran, Murugan and so on.

About 10 years after this main branch was started, the library began to branch out. There are 10 branches now.

Mr. Palani's sons purchase books and deliver it to the branches.

The most popular branch is Murugan Lending Library, in Adyar. The main branch, in Royapettah has about 65,000 books.

All branches are interconnected online and managed from the head office.

They buy about 1-1.25 lakh books per month for the branches.

As to opening new branches, it depends on the readers, and the local population. There is door delivery too.

The internet has proven very useful in that it allows readers to borrow from any branch. It shows which books are available as well.

Now they have begun setting up libraries in townships. If there are more than 500/600 flats, a fully functioning library is set up

for them. This has been done for DLF, Casa Grande, Metro Zone ... as well as clubs, like Mylapore and Gandhi Nagar clubs.

The age of members ranges from 5 years to about 90 years old. Second and third generation members continue to borrow books from here. The most popular language in which people read is Tamil, followed by English. A few Telugu readers as well. Children's books are the most popular. In that, Geronimo Stilton is what most children read. Followed by Enid Blyton, Hardy Boys and Percy Jackson. Boys are more into fantasy, while girls prefer humour, and horror (Vampire Books). Mills & Boon is very popular among women of all age groups. The reading habit has dwindled in older readers, but fresh readers are coming in. From detective novels earlier, the reading trend has moved towards horror and fantasy. 80-90 new members join each month.

Easwari has come up with a new scheme, called 'Soulful homes'. A lot of people have an interest in reading, but are unable to set up their own libraries, for various reasons. 'We set up a shelf at their house, and according to their age, we give them 50-70 books, circulating it monthly' says Mr. Palani. The third generation in this business, Mr Palani's grandson,

says he doesn't want to go for a 9-5 job, but wants to help expand family business. He has helped introduce some marketing projects.

A Police Inspector, who is browsing the shelves, adds that he has been a member for over 10 years. He borrows 4 books a month, reading Tamil novels, mostly historical fiction. He hopes the younger generation develops the reading habit as well. As he so aptly put it, you don't need an age to read, you don't need a time to read. You can read, wherever, whenever.

As for their future plan, they want to expand door delivery, which is what customers want. 'It's not possible for them to come here and take the books. They prefer it if the books could be delivered to them'. Also, keep the books up-to-date. "That is the main plan; as long as we can keep our books updated, the library will go well." they say.

Having been a part of the city for so many years, and providing a service that helps broaden the mind, we too hope this Champion of Chennai continues to ignite minds.

Nandan Sankriti Kaushik