

H T Parekh Foundation hosts the inaugural Harsha Parekh Librarian Awards to honour India's librarians working with children

The Harsha Parekh Librarian Award (HPLA) is a first-of-its-kind, pan-India recognition dedicated exclusively to librarians working with children. Instituted by the H T Parekh Foundation (HTPF), an independent philanthropic foundation based in Mumbai, the Award celebrates librarians and institutions that nurture a love of reading among children across the country.

Marking a significant milestone in recognising librarians who work with children across India, H T Parekh Foundation (HTPF) - a Mumbai-based philanthropic foundation — hosted its inaugural Harsha Parekh Librarian Awards (HPLA) at the Hall of Harmony, Nehru Centre, on 28th February 2026.

Named in honour of the late Professor Harsha S. Parekh, as an ode to her and her enduring legacy in the field of library sciences, the HPLA reaffirms the belief that librarians are educators in their own right, shaping young minds by going far beyond their conventional roles.



The event witnessed Deepak S. Parekh (Chairman, H T Parekh Foundation and Former Chairman, HDFC Ltd), Anant Goenka (Executive Director, The Indian Express Group), Tara Sharma Saluja (Actor & Producer), Ashwin Sanghi (Author) in attendance, along with family, colleagues, and friends of Professor Harsha S. Parekh, HPLA jury, members of the children's literature and library community, partner organisations of Doorbeen—the Foundation's initiative supporting libraries and children's literature—and other education-focused institutions.



The awards drew 275 nominations from across India. It comprised of 153 school librarians, 52 community librarians, and 70 organisations across 16 states. The jury panel included: Chairperson, Jane Helen Sahi (Educator & Author), Prachi Kalra (Associate Professor at Gargi College, University of Delhi), Thejaswi Shivanand (Curator & Library Educator, Champaca Bookstore in Bengaluru), and S.L. Faisal (Award-winning Librarian & Educator - Kendriya Vidyalaya Network).

HPLA 2026 - WINNERS & SPECIAL MENTION

Jai Shekhar Winner, School Librarian Award

Jai Shekhar is a dedicated teacher-cum-librarian at Primary School Dharampur (State Government School), Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh, with 5–7 years of experience serving in primary schools across the district. He has consistently revitalized school libraries wherever he has worked by building book collections, creating active reading spaces, and fostering a culture of reading among children.



Jai Shekhar receiving the award from Deepak S. Parekh, Chairman HTPF and Prachi Kalra, HPLA Jury Member

Saba Khan Winner, Community Librarian Award

Saba Khan is a community librarian and the founder of the Savitribai Phule Fatima Sheikh Library in Naya Basera Basti, a marginalized settlement in south-west central Bhopal. For the past 14 years, she has been working closely with children from marginalised communities, where educational access, especially for girls—remains a challenge due to social and economic barriers.



Saba receiving the award from Tara Sharma Saluja, Actor & Producer and Thejaswi Shivanand, HPLA Jury Member

OELP Winner, Champion Organisation Award

Founded in 2008, the Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP) works with rural communities to build a culture of reading through school and community libraries. In regions where books were once nearly absent, OELP has fostered meaningful engagement with reading by connecting oral storytelling traditions to the written word and bringing local knowledge into wider circulation.



Team OELP receiving the award from Ashwin Sanghi, Author and Jane Helen Sahi, HPLA Jury Chair

Vidyadevi Nimbalkar Special Mention, School Librarian Award

Vidya Devi Nimbalkar is a full-time librarian at Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, Phaltan, run by Pragati Shikshan Sanstha under the State Board. She brings 15 years of experience as a school librarian and has been instrumental in nurturing a vibrant reading culture within the school.



Vidyadevi receiving the award from Ashwin Sanghi, Author and S.L. Faisal, HPLA Jury Member



Alongside felicitation, the event also featured a curated Fireside Chat, where Anant Goenka was in conversation with Tara Sharma Saluja and Ashwin Sanghi. The guests reflected on how reading practices have evolved across generations, the future of children's literature, and the emergence of diverse reading formats that make today's reading culture more inclusive.



Excerpts from the fireside conversation...

"What we are celebrating today is humanity's fight with the algorithm. In fact the sale of books in Nordic countries is actually going up, indicating a huge counter culture trend."

Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group

"I personally love the touch and feel of a physical book. While most of us are privileged to have book collections at home, what really moved me about today's event, is how it celebrates the unknown faces of many librarians across India who are bringing their love for books to children who may not have easy access. And that, I think, is just incredible."

Tara Sharma Saluja, Actor & Producer

"Even though I was educated and grew up in a business family, it was my 'nana' who was the first librarian in my life. He would send me a book every week, and I would read it and write him a letter explaining why I liked or disliked it. I think we must ensure that the next generation builds on this culture of reading, whilst also accepting that it could be in a very different medium or format."

Ashwin Sanghi, Author



The event also witnessed a performance titled 'The First Time I Met a Library', a curated spoken word theatrical performance developed to honour the spirit of librarianship and the enduring social value of libraries.

Presented as part of the Harsha Parekh Librarian Awards, the performance highlighted the quiet yet profound impact that libraries and librarians have on individual lives and, by extension, communities.

Through three interwoven narratives, it demonstrated how access to books and compassionate guidance can shape identity, nurture aspiration and inspire institution-building.

The piece was written by Rutwick Deshpande, directed by Quasar Thakore-Padamsee, and performed by artists Mihaail Karachiwala, Zafar Karachiwala, Tanvika Parlikar, Dharmaj Joshi, and Ritik Agrawal.



Why libraries?

Promoting a joyful and sustained reading culture among children is a key strategic focus for H T Parekh Foundation. The Foundation's special initiative, Doorbeen, aims to enrich children's lives through the transformative power of reading. Doorbeen's work focuses on building and strengthening children's libraries, promoting quality regional-language literature, and supporting the professional development of library practitioners. Through close engagement with organisations and individuals in this space, HTPF has developed a deep understanding of the pivotal role librarians play.

Despite their critical role, many librarians work in resource-constrained settings, often with limited recognition and support. Doorbeen has already begun addressing this through training, and creation of professional development opportunities. The Harsha Parekh Librarian Awards take this commitment a step further; by formally honouring and celebrating librarians as the quiet changemakers they are.

