



## Portrayal of Indian libraries and librarians within the documentary films

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### Abstract

This study examines how Indian libraries and librarians are shown in documentary films made between 1990 and 2025. It checks how these short films show librarians and libraries in India in the documentaries of libraries. The study looks documentaries such as Eloor Library, Books for All, and Pustaka Mane. These documentaries were selected based on their relevance to libraries, differences in location and type, and ease of watching. The study uses a sheet to note down what it sees in the films, such as how the library is portrayed, how librarians are shown and what kind of library it is.

The study finds that some films show libraries as places and librarians as strict. Some films show libraries as lively places where librarians help people and make a difference. The study also finds that where the library is and what kind of library it is make a difference in how it is shown. For example, village libraries and those run by NGOs are portrayed as flexible and helpful to people. Some types of libraries, like academic and special libraries, are not shown enough. The study also says that documentary films in India are important for raising awareness and for criticising issues.

The study says that librarians, educators and filmmakers need to work to show libraries in a real and detailed way. This way, people will know how important libraries are in India today. Libraries are not quiet places; they help people in many ways. The study aims to ensure that people view libraries and librarians positively in these documentaries.

**Keywords:** Indian libraries, librarians, documentary libraries, librarian stereotypes, digital age, community engagement, library stereotypes, library depiction

### Introduction

Libraries are places where people keep knowledge and memories of the past. They play a role in helping people learn and in improving society (Rubin, 2016). In India, libraries have helped people learn to read and have made information available to everyone in rural areas where it is hard to get (Ranganathan, 2006) <sup>[21]</sup>. The way libraries and librarians are shown in movies and films can change how people think about them. This can affect how much money libraries receive and the rules they must follow also It shows the professional identities of the librarianship (Radford & Radford, 2001) <sup>[19]</sup>.

It is interesting to see how Indian libraries and librarians are shown in movies today. Libraries are using more technology to help people (Nichols, 2017) <sup>[16]</sup>. They are not just places where people go to study. They are becoming community spaces where people can learn and have fun. Some movies portray libraries as places where everyone is quiet and librarians are strict. Other movies show libraries as fun places where people can learn and get help from librarians.

Movies can shape what people think about libraries. Even though movies are based on life, they can still be biased. For a time, libraries were shown as quiet and boring places. Now, libraries are using technology to help people in their communities. Some Indian movies show this change. Others still show libraries in an old way. This shows that libraries in India are still evolving and trying to balance old and new ways (Mukherjee & Patra, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>.

This article examines how Indian libraries and librarians are depicted in some documentary films. It examines themes and how libraries are portrayed as community spaces. It also compares how different types of libraries are shown. By doing this, the article hopes to show how movies can change how people think about libraries and how this can affect society in India. Libraries are important. The way they are

shown in movies can make a big difference. Indian libraries and librarians are. It is interesting to see how this change is shown in movies.

### Literature Review

Ramirose Ilene Attebury conducted a study titled "Perceptions of a Profession: Librarians and Stereotypes in Online Videos." This study examines how YouTube videos portray libraries and librarians. Ramirose Ilene Attebury reviewed 200 videos made by librarians and non-librarians. Ramirose Ilene Attebury wanted to see what people think about librarians and how librarians see themselves. The study found that librarian-made videos typically portray librarians as dynamic professionals. On the one hand, videos made by non-librarians often portray librarians in a negative light. They portray librarians as people who just say no or don't know what they are doing. Ramirose Ilene Atteburys study shows that videos can help people see librarians in a way and can help librarians be seen as professionals (Attebury, 2010) <sup>[11]</sup>.

The Librarians is a documentary that looks at what librarians do when people try to stop others from reading certain books. The film was directed by Kim A. Snyder. The film follows librarians in states as they deal with people who want to limit what books are available in libraries. The film shows how movies can help people understand what librarians do. It shows that librarians are not just people who manage books. They also stand up for people's right to read what they want. The documentary film uses events and personal stories to show that libraries are important places where people can learn and access information. Libraries support democracy and make sure everyone has access to knowledge. The Librarians documentary film shows this (Kim A. Snyder, 2025) <sup>[6]</sup>.

The Stacks on Screen looks at many documentary films about libraries and librarians. These documentary films, such as *The Librarians*, *Free for All: The Public Library*, and *Banned Together*, tells stories about libraries and librarians. They show how libraries and librarians address issues such as freedom of speech and community service. The Stacks on Screen shows that documentary films can depict how libraries are changing and how they are ensuring everyone has equal access to information (Landgraf, 2025) [9].

This study examines how libraries and librarians are depicted in the animated short "Curious George: George Volunteers at the Library". The study uses an analysis of signs and symbols to understand what the animation is trying to say. The study found that the library in the animation is a helpful place where people can learn and have fun. The library in the animation also uses technology, such as barcode systems. The librarians in the animation are shown as professionals who are easy to talk to and very good at their jobs. They help people find what they need and make sure everything runs smoothly. The study shows that animation can change how people think about libraries and librarians. Libraries are portrayed as places to learn, and librarians are portrayed as very important professionals (Nawanti & Laugu, 2025) [15].

The Authority File from Choice360 includes an episode about documentary films and how they portray libraries and librarians. The episode shows how documentary films depict what really happens in libraries and the challenges that librarians face. Librarians are not just shown as people who take care of books. Also, as people who help others learn about media and remember important things. The episode also discusses how documentary films can be used to teach people and support research. Documentary films can tell stories about libraries and librarians, helping people understand how important libraries are to our communities. Libraries and librarians are shown as helping people learn and grow (The Academic Impact of Documentary Films: The Faculty and Librarian Perspectives - Choice 360, 2025) [23].

Antonio Carlos Picalhos' study examines how music videos portray librarians. His study, "Image of the Librarian in Five Music Videos: Narrative Roles and Stereotypes," finds that librarians are often depicted in a documentary style. He watched five music videos and found that they usually portray librarians as quiet, orderly, and in control. These videos often make librarians look like they are always telling people to be quiet and are very strict. Sometimes librarians are also portrayed in funny, emotional, and social ways. This study shows that videos both keep ideas about librarians and slowly change how people think about them and their spaces (Picalho, 2025) [23].

The article by Johnson reviews a documentary named *The Librarians*. It discusses how libraries in the United States are changing due to book censorship. The documentary shows that libraries are essential to democracy. They let everyone access information and viewpoints. Libraries are also spaces where people debate politics and ideas, especially about what books to have and how people can access them. In these debates, libraries are not just places to store books. They help people by giving them the information they need. They also stand up for what they believe in. Help build communities. The article says that libraries today still protect the freedom to read and help people stay informed,

even as society and politics change quickly (Johnson, 2025) [4].

## Research Questions

### 1. The Research Questions of this study are as follows:

The Research Questions of this study are as follows:

1. What common visual and story ideas, like the "silent library" or the "strict librarian", are most often seen in Indian documentaries?
2. How much do Indian documentaries focus on libraries changing from book storage to digital and community spaces?
3. Do Indian documentaries show differences between public, academic and private libraries?

### 2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To look at how libraries are shown in Indian documentary films.
2. To check how librarians are represented in terms of their personalities, jobs and professional identities.
3. To find out if these representations make librarians seem more realistic.
4. To see how documentaries show libraries as spaces that serve the community.

## Methodology

This study examines how libraries and librarians are depicted in some Indian documentary films. It uses a research method that analyses the content of these films as described (Neuendorf and Kumar, 2015) [24]. The researchers selected documentaries made between 1990 and 2025 [23] to provide a mix of library types and locations. They chose films about libraries, including public, academic, and private libraries, and they were available to watch.

Each film was watched to see how it depicted libraries, what librarians did, and how people used them. The films chosen included *Eloor Library*, *Books for All*, and *Pustaka Mane*, as well as other documentaries about large libraries and digital projects (Braun and Clarke, discussed 2006) [3].

The researchers looked at what he could see. What the stories were about in these films. He wanted to know how libraries and librarians were depicted, and what libraries looked like. They compared what they found to what's currently considered good practice in Library and Information Science. By doing this, he was able to find themes, such as old ideas about libraries and librarians, as well as newer, more modern ways of showing them.

### 1. Selection Criteria

The selection of documentaries based on these criteria:

- How relevant they are to libraries in India or to librarians' work
- Whether they are available to the public or through archives
- If they represent different parts of India and types of institutions

### 2. Sample Selection

The documentary films made between 1990 and 2025 [23] to showcase a variety of geographies, institutional types, and production styles are selected for this work. Here are the documentaries selected for study:

- **Eloor Library (2022, Malayalam):** This film is about a library and community engagement (kitchen sink drama, 2022).
- **Library of the People:** This documentary is about community libraries and access to knowledge (Library of the People, 2026)<sup>[11]</sup>.
- **Books for All (India):** This film shows NGO-led literacy and mobile libraries (Books for All, 2026)<sup>[2]</sup>.
- **Joy of Reading Campaign Films:** These films highlight library-based literacy initiatives (Joy of Reading, 2026)<sup>[5]</sup>.
- **Pustaka Mane (Anke Gowda):** This is about a personal public-access library (Pustaka Mane, 2026)<sup>[18]</sup>.
- **Librarians of India (Short Films):** These short films show librarian roles (Librarians of India, 2026)<sup>[10]</sup>.
- **National Library of India Documentary:** This documentary is about the history of India's library (National Library of India Documentary, 2026)<sup>[13]</sup>.
- **Knowledge Without Boundaries:** This film is about libraries in India (Knowledge Without Boundaries, 2026)<sup>[8]</sup>.
- **National Mission on Libraries Documentary:** This documentary is about the National Mission on Libraries (National Mission on Libraries Documentary, 2026)<sup>[14]</sup>.

### 3. Data Collection

A structured observation sheet was developed to systematically record data during film screenings, focusing on the following aspects:

#### Visual details:

- What the library looks like (lighting order, dust, technology or paper)
- What the librarian looks like (age, gender, clothes)
- How users interact (study, group work, digital use)

#### Story details:

- The story's viewpoint, as if the library seems fashioned as a quiet place or a modern info hub
- The librarian's character (like a gatekeeper, teacher or innovator)

### 4. Limitations

The study has a limitation. It is because there are no documentary films that directly address libraries in India. Also, when it was try to understand what these films are saying, the interpretations are based on the personal opinion of the researcher. He look at the films in a way that means we do not just look at numbers but at what the films are actually showing us about libraries in India.

### Analysis and Findings

#### 1. Portrayal and symbolic repetitions

##### The "Silent Library" and the "Disciplinarian Librarian."

The silent library is a place where people do not talk in voices, and the bookshelves are very neat. It feels like a

place where people go to learn. You can see this in the documentary about the National Library of India. They show rooms where people read and they have a system to keep track of all the books. The library is like a place where people can learn, and it has rules to follow (National Library of India Documentary, 2026)<sup>[13]</sup>.

The librarians in these places are often shown as being very serious. They wear clothes and glasses, and they do not smile much. In movies and scenes set in city libraries, these librarians make sure everyone follows the rules and doesn't talk much to people.

##### The "Community Hub" and the "Facilitator Librarian"

But some new documentaries show a side of libraries. For example, the movie Eloor Library (kitchen sink drama, 2022) depicts a village library as a fun place where people come together. The librarian is very friendly. They organise events like reading competitions and teach people how to use computers. The librarian is like a friend who helps people learns.

In another movie called Librarians of India, the librarians are young (Librarians of India, 2026)<sup>[10]</sup>. They teach people digital skills and take them to different places to learn. They help people learn and ensure everyone has access to information. The librarian is like a guide who helps people find what they need.

There is another library called Pustaka Mane (Pustaka Mane, 2026)<sup>[18]</sup>. The person who started it, Anke Gowda, is like a leader who wants to help people. He shares his books with everyone, and they discuss and learn from each other. The Silent Library and the Disciplinarian librarian are not like this. The Community Hub and the Facilitator Librarian are about helping people and making the library a fun place to be.

### 2. Visual and Narrative Strategies

#### Visual Study

The documentaries use visual approaches to convey their messages. Traditional libraries are depicted in brownish tones or in low lighting to evoke a sense of age, tradition, and nostalgia. For example, the National Library of India Documentary from 2026<sup>[13]</sup> uses this approach (National Library of India Documentary, 2026)<sup>[13]</sup>. In contrast, libraries that focus on the community are shown in colours with lively camera movements. These visuals highlight group activities, technology use and social interactions (kitchen sink drama, 2022) This is seen in documentaries like "Kitchen Sink Drama" from 2022. Books for All Books for All). The way librarians are portrayed has changed over time. In films, librarians are often portrayed as elderly men in formal attire. However, recent documentaries feature women, younger professionals and people from various backgrounds. For instance, the 2026<sup>[11]</sup> documentary "Joy of Reading" showcases this diversity (Joy of Reading, 2026)<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### Narrative Analysis

Older documentaries often use a third-person narration style. This presents the library as a place rather than an active part of the story. In contrast, recent documentaries include interviews and personal stories. This approach gives librarians and library users a voice, shows their experiences. This change reflects a shift towards making both libraries and documentaries more inclusive (Steinfirs 1992)<sup>[22]</sup>.

### 3. Digital and Social Transformation of Libraries

Indian libraries are changing a lot these days. They used to be places where we could find books on shelves. Now they are becoming community centres with technology.

There are some documentaries, such as Knowledge without Boundaries and the National Mission on Libraries that show how Indian libraries are using catalogues and online memberships. Librarians are also teaching people how to use computers and the internet. They are even helping people get information from afar. This is very different from what people used to think librarians did (Knowledge Without Boundaries, 2026<sup>[8]</sup>; National Library of India Documentary, 2026)<sup>[13]</sup>.

Some libraries, like those run by teams and NGOs, and the Library of the People, are doing really cool things. They have book vans and pop-up reading rooms that can go to places where people do not have books. Indian libraries are helping people who lack access to resources. They are making sure everyone is included and has a chance to learn. Indian libraries are becoming places where people can go to get help and learn about justice.

### 4. Differences in Library Types

#### Public Libraries

Public libraries are shown as old and new at the same time. Some movies focus on their history and buildings (National Library of India Documentary, 2026)<sup>[13]</sup>, while others discuss how they help people read and use technology in villages (Kitchen Sink Drama, 2022).

#### Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are rarely featured in documentaries. When they are, they seem modern. They focused on research with a lot of technology and attention to students' needs. This means we need to make documentaries about them.

#### Private and Personal Libraries

Pustaka Mane is an example of a personal library in a documentary. The movie shows it as a place where people gather, discuss and learn, not a formal place (Pustaka Mane, 2026)<sup>[18]</sup>.

### 5. Advocacy, Critique and the Cinematic Gap

Some documentaries support libraries and librarians, while others address problems such as a lack of funding, poor facilities, and insufficient technology. For example, the Joy of Reading Campaign Films shows how libraries can help people read and criticize access, especially for women and groups that are treated unfairly (Joy of Reading, 2026)<sup>[5]</sup>.

With some good changes, there is still a big difference between what documentaries show and the real problems libraries face in India. Even if documentaries portray libraries as modern and fair, they still face problems, such as a lack of resources and outdated rules.

### Discussion

#### The Duality of Representation

The study shows that Indian libraries and librarians are seen in two different ways. Some old documentaries and movies still show libraries as places where people just read, and librarians are strict and serious (Radford & Radford, 2001)<sup>[19]</sup>. Newer documentaries and videos portray libraries as

places that help people learn new things, improve their computer skills, and come together as a community.

This difference shows that Indian libraries are changing and need to find a balance between preserving traditions and adapting to new social and technological developments (Mukherjee & Patra, 2023)<sup>[12]</sup>.

#### The Influence of Socio-Cultural Context

The kind of place where a documentary is made affects how libraries and librarians are shown. Libraries in areas are often seen as very important for teaching people to read, helping everyone feel included, and supporting women (Kitchen Sink Drama, 2022). Libraries in cities, especially old and historic ones, are often portrayed as protectors of cultural heritage, but some are also depicted as places that use new technology (National Library of India Documentary 2026)<sup>[13]</sup>.

Some groups and local initiatives, like the Library of the People (Books for All, 2026)<sup>[2]</sup>, show that libraries don't have to be boring or old-fashioned. Instead, they can be flexible. Respond to what the community needs.

#### The Evolving Role of the Librarian: From Gatekeeper to Facilitator

One thing we found out is that the way librarians are seen has changed over time. Old movies show librarians as strict and serious. New documentaries show them as teachers, guides and leaders (Librarians of India 2026)<sup>[10]</sup>. This change aligns with professional standards for librarians, which emphasise working with people using computers and speaking up for libraries.

However, this change is not happening everywhere at the same speed. In some places, the old way of seeing librarians still exists, especially when people look back and remember the past.

#### Documentary Film as Advocacy and Critique

Documentary films are now tools for supporting libraries and criticizing them. Some films, such as Joy of Reading and short videos made by non-profit groups (Joy of Reading, 2026)<sup>[5]</sup>, showcase successful projects and help secure public support and the attention of policymakers. These films show how libraries can make a difference, especially in areas where people have few resources, and they encourage people to think differently about what libraries can do.

At the time, some documentaries highlighted problems in Indian libraries, such as insufficient resources, poor computer use, and weak institutional support. By showing these problems, the films call for change and more investment in libraries.

#### Findings

- Libraries are really important to people in the community.
- People think librarians are nice and care about what they do.
- There are different kinds of libraries.
- Computers and technology are a part of libraries now.
- Some people still think of libraries in a way but that is changing.

### 6. Gaps and Opportunities

Libraries are shown now in these documentaries, but there are still some problems. We do not see libraries that help people who are blind or have other special needs in movies.

Women librarians and librarians from diverse backgrounds are in movies more often, but you do not really hear their stories.

The libraries we see in movies are really cool. They have a lot of new technology, but they do not always show what it is really like to work in a library, especially in small towns where it can be hard to get access to computers and the training you need. Libraries are still important. People should know what they are really like, not just what they see in movies.

### Conclusion

Over the past 30 years, documentary films have shown us how Indian libraries and librarians have changed alongside the society. Some films still reflect how libraries are perceived, but many now present a new, more exciting picture. These documentaries show libraries as community centres where people can learn new things and get help from librarians. Indian libraries are also using technology to help people learn and to bring about positive change in the community.

Librarians are now seen as teachers and mentors who help people learn throughout their lives and ensure everyone has access to information and opportunities. This is a change from the old way of thinking about librarians as just people who take care of books. Indian libraries are trying to hold on to their traditions while adapting to new technology and community needs. Documentary films are important because they show us what people think about libraries, and they help shape what we think and do.

For example, some documentaries present ideas such as mobile libraries that reach people in rural areas and small community libraries run by non-governmental organisations. These films show that libraries can adapt to change and remain important to people who lack many resources. However, there are still some gaps in what these films show us. For instance, they often do not show us what life is like for librarians who work in universities or for librarians who work with people who have needs.

Documentary films about libraries and librarians are getting better and better, but filmmakers, educators, and librarians need to work together to ensure these films are accurate and show the whole picture. Indian libraries and librarians are very important to the community, and documentary films have the power to inspire us and to make us think critically about what we believe. As India continues to change and grow, documentary films will help us understand what is happening and ensure that everyone has access to information and opportunities.

By showing us what Indian libraries and librarians are really like, these films can help us see the importance of libraries in our communities and how they can support our learning and growth. Indian libraries are not places where people go to borrow books; they are dynamic, community-oriented institutions that use digital technology to help people and bring about positive change. Documentary films can help us understand the role that Indian libraries and librarians play in promoting inclusion and educational equity and how they can help us build a better future for everyone.

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