

# From Books to People: The Changing Role of Libraries

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of the library is evolving beyond its traditional role as a repository of books and written knowledge. One such innovative development is the Human Library, an initiative that allows individuals-referred to as "human books"-to share their personal experiences, stories, and perspectives in one-on-one or small group conversations. Unlike conventional libraries where readers borrow books, in a Human Library, people "borrow" a person for a conversation, fostering direct dialogue and mutual understanding. This concept promotes empathy, challenges stereotypes, and encourages social cohesion by creating a safe space for open, respectful conversations about often sensitive or misunderstood topics. As libraries adapt to the changing needs of society, the Human Library stands as a powerful example of how knowledge-sharing can be made more personal, inclusive, and interactive. It also shows definitions, types, historical background of Human Library, how to start Human Library (HL), its components, how and who are HL resources, goals and relationship with Five Laws of Library Science. At last, the analytical remarks emphasize the urgent need for current bibliographic standards-such as DDC, RDA (including its predecessor AACR2R), data models like FRBR and IFLA LRM, and metadata frameworks-to adapt and evolve. This evolution is essential to accurately reflect the changing role of libraries (i.e. Books (Printed)-Online Books-Human books (People)) in a dynamic, knowledge-sharing society, where traditional information resources now coexist with human-cantered, experiential knowledge formats.

**Keywords:** Traditional Library, Human Library, Books, Human Books, Human Library Organization, Open conversation, Human Library Resource, Paper Book into Human Book. Open Book, Living Library. Knowledge sharing, RDA, IFLA LRM, FRBR.

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## INTRODUCTION

Libraries are no longer just places with books inside four walls. Over time, the idea of a library has changed. Now we have online libraries, digital libraries, virtual libraries, and green libraries that are eco-friendly. A new and unique idea is the *Human Library*. In a Human Library, we don't borrow books-we borrow people. These people, called "human books," share their real-life stories and experiences. At this library, hear stories that we won't find on shelves or in the pages. The goal is to create a safe and respectful space where people can have honest conversations and learn from each other. This helps people understand different ways of life and question their own judgments or biases. The Human Library is a global movement that helps people connect and talk across cultures, beliefs, and life experiences. Instead of reading a story, we talk directly to someone who has lived it. These conversations help break down stereotypes, reduce discrimination, and build empathy. Anyone can come and "check out" a human book to

hear their story. These human books often represent people who face unfair treatment or misunderstanding in society-because of things like their religion, race, disability, illness, social status, or background (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.). As the Human Library Organization explains, it's truly a "library of people," where readers can talk to someone they might never meet in their daily life. The idea encourages open minds and open hearts (A.L., 2017; Humanlibrary.org, n.d.; Gulankar, 2025). Some says Human Library is a 'Living library' and real-life story of the people is 'Open Book' (Pressreader.com, 2023).

## HUMAN LIBRARY (HL)

Human library is "a place where difficult questions are expected, appreciated, and hopefully answered by the books" (Røme, 2018). Here, 'books' are people - living stories that breathe, speak, and share their truths. This is a place where humans are the books, and every person is a library resource of lived experience. So, it is the place where People are the Books- living, breathing stories to be read through conversation.

Human Library Organisation (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.) has described HL as "The Human Library is designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge



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stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue. The Human Library is a place where real people are on loan to readers. A place where difficult questions are expected, appreciated and answered.” In addition, various sources have defined Human Library differently as given below:

- i. "The Human Library has been conceptualised as an arena for intergroup contact with the exact purpose of a direct and extended reduction of prejudice and xenophobia." (Groyecka *et al.*, 2019).
- ii. "The Human Library is an innovative method designed to promote dialogue, reduce prejudices and encourage understanding. The Human Library works exactly like your local Library - readers can borrow a "book". The difference is, books in the Human Library are human beings: "Human books, with whom the reader can have a conversation" (Zhai *et al.*, 2021).
- iii. "Human Library is an emerging concept in the field of Library Science, and conceptually it is quite different from general libraries. This new system conveys information and knowledge to its intended users using face-to-face communication". "humans act as a source of information and they are known as a human book or living book" (Jana and Rout, 2022).
- iv. Global innovative, hands-on learning platform where real people are on loan to readers. It is a learning platform where personal dialogues challenge stigma and stereotypes and create a safe space for dialogue.
- v. HL is a "global innovative, hands-on learning platform where real people are on loan to readers. It is a learning platform where personal dialogues challenge stigma and stereotypes and create a safe space for dialogue" (Schijf *et al.*, 2020).
- vi. Human Library (HL) "also called Living Library previously, is similar to a traditional library where "readers" can read "human books" who share their life experiences and stories about topics that are prejudiced or misunderstood in society" (Lam, Wong, and Zhang, n.d.).

So, the Human Library is a global, innovative, and interactive learning platform that functions like a traditional library, but with real people-referred to as "human books"-available for readers to engage in open, respectful, and meaningful conversations. Its core aim is to challenge stereotypes, reduce prejudices, promote dialogue, and foster mutual understanding through direct, face-to-face communication in a safe and inclusive environment.

## Types of Human Library

Human (or Living) Libraries can be broadly categorized into two types:

- i. Open; and
- ii. Dedicated

An open Human Library is accessible to the general public, allowing anyone interested to participate, while a dedicated Human Library is specifically organized for a targeted group, such as students, police officers, or teachers (Groyecka *et al.*, 2019; Abergel, 2005).

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HUMAN LIBRARY

The Human Library began 25 years ago as a social experiment aimed at challenging prejudice and fostering dialogue through personal storytelling. A historical journey in brief is as follows.

### International Level

The Human Library, known as "*Menneskebiblioteket*" in Danish, is a global movement that started in Copenhagen, Denmark, in the year 2000. It was created by Ronni Abergel, his brother Dany, and their friends Asma Mouna and Christoffer Erichsen (Human Library Organization, n.d.). They were all part of a Danish youth group called "Stop the Violence," meaning stop violence, inspired by which was inspired by a similar idea from the United States based organization the 'American Stop Violence Movement' (Maisal, 2018). The first Human Library event lasted for four days, with 8 hr of conversations each day. More than 1,000 people took part. The next Human Library event happened in Oslo, Norway, during a youth program by the Nordic Council "Unge I Norden". It was organized by Ronni Abergel and Terese Mungai-Foyen, and this event led to the start of the Human Library in Norway in 2003. The first permanent Human Library was opened in Lismore, Australia, in 2006. All activities conducted under the Human Library initiative prior to 2010 were originally known as the 'Living Library'. In 2010, the name was officially changed to 'Human Library' in English-speaking countries, although the Council of Europe has continued to use the original term 'Living Library' for programs within continental Europe. In 2011, the European Youth Centre in Budapest launched a pilot project aimed at introducing the Living Library concept into schools throughout Hungary. Since its launch, the Living Library School Project has steadily expanded and continues to thrive. By 2019, the Human Library had grown into a worldwide network, with partners in more than 80 countries (Wikipedia, 2025; Monaghan, 2021; Parmar, 2024). Today, the Human Library has thousands of volunteers around the world. It is also a registered trademark, which means you need written permission from the Human Library Organization to use the name or run official events (Human Library Organization, n.d. Maisal, 2018).

### Indian Perspectives

The Human Library movement began in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2000, founded by *Ronni Abergel* with the aim of challenging prejudice and breaking down stereotypes through dialogue. The movement gradually spread worldwide, reaching India in 2016. Since then, Human Libraries have been established in

cities across the country, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Kolkata during 2017-2019 (Røme, 2018; Sharma, 2018; Das, 2017; Humanlibrary.org, n.d.; The Hindu, 2017; Indian Express, 2017; The Times of India, n.d.; Singh, 2019; Maisal, 2018).

In India, the idea of Human Library events is still not as well-known or widespread as it is in some other countries. However, librarians, researchers, and educators are working to change this. A few Human Library-style meetings have been held in Indian cities like Delhi, Hyderabad, Indore, Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Visakhapatnam. According to Jana, India's first Human Library event took place on June 26, 2016, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. It was started by Amrita Goel with the goal of challenging social discrimination and encouraging better understanding among people.

The second major event happened on March 25, 2017, at Phoenix Arena in Hi-Tech City, Hyderabad. It was organized by a book critic named Harshad Fad under the name Chapter. He invited 10 human books and about 60 readers attended. His next event was held at the British Council in Hyderabad, where there were 20 human books and 100 readers, and in just one year, it engaged over 5,000 readers, inspired the creation of more Human Libraries, and even participated in Microsoft's Confluence Conference in April 2018. After that 2020 onwards, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several Human Library chapters transitioned to virtual events i.e. Online Shift. These events gained popularity and inspired similar ones in cities like Pune, Chennai, Indore, Surat, and Bangalore. Another event took place on June 18, 2017, in Connaught Place, Delhi. It lasted for 5 hr, from 2 PM to 7 PM, and featured 11 human books. According to a report by The Indian Express, Neha Singh, the manager of the Delhi Human Library, said that the books were chosen from 11 different categories based on their life experiences and knowledge. These included a history storyteller, a female solo traveller, a cancer survivor, a Buddhist practitioner, a recovering drug addict, a bullying victim, and a tea-seller turned author. Visitors could speak with the human books on a first-come, first-served basis. In 2018, another event was held in Mumbai by a well-known chemical engineer, Andaleeb Qureshi (Parmar, 2024). It was called Title Waves, named after the bookshop where it took place. Around 300 readers between the ages of 20 and 60 attended. Kolkata hosted its own Human Library event on January 13, 2019. It was led by Deblina Saha, who works at a communication firm. She selected 14 human books from different backgrounds and life experiences for the event. As the movement continues to grow, the Human Library in India remains a living platform for real stories, real people, and real change.

### Location of Human Libraries Worldwide

The Human Library is a Danish idea from 2000 and is now available in more than 80 countries worldwide (Humanlibrary.

org, n.d.; Parmar, 2024; Maisal, 2018). Specific location wise these are:

■**Denmark:** The organization's headquarters are in Copenhagen. There are also four book depots in Denmark: Copenhagen, Esbjerg-Varde, Arhus, and Odense.

■**UK:** The Human Library has hosted events in the UK, including a series called "Open Your World".

■**USA:** The concept reached the USA in 2008 and has been growing, according to Southern Connecticut State University.

■**Canada:** The concept reached Canada in 2008 and has been growing, according to Southern Connecticut State University.

■**India:** The Human Library has been implemented in various cities across India, including Hyderabad, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Bengaluru.

■**Other notable locations:** Australia, Iceland, Finland, Romania, Slovenia, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

## HUMAN LIBRARY RESOURCES (HLRS)

HLRs stands for Human Library Resources. Someone described HLRs as "living books that can breathe." Shoaff (2016) said, "There are libraries being created around the world where the books can breathe. We can see them blink, cry, laugh, and think. We can ask them any question and get a real answer." In simple terms, at a Human Library, the "books" are actually people. These people volunteer to share their personal stories and life experiences, often about topics that are hard to talk about. The "readers" or listeners can ask them anything and get honest answers (Shoaff, 2016; Røme, 2018; Amudha, Kumar, and Raj, 2016). The organisation uses a library analogy of lending people rather than books.

Human libraries are event-based programs and are generally organised in different locations. These events of the human library are documented in various electronic forms like photographs, videos, reports, newsletters, social media, etc. These informative documents could be a part of knowledge sharing and have a wider impact on society. Hence, these useful documents need to be archived for future use (Jana and Rout, 2022).

### Types of Human Library Books (HLRS)

In a Human Library, people volunteer to become "books" and share their real-life stories. Listeners, called "readers," can "borrow" these people to have honest conversations, ask questions, and learn more about lives different from their own (Shoaff, 2016; Pressreader.com, 2023). Here are some examples of Human Books:

#### a. A person with autism

This person talks about their life with autism. You can ask questions, and they will explain how they experience the world.

Example: “What challenges do you face in school or work?”

#### b. A refugee

Instead of hearing news reports, you can listen to a refugee's real story. They talk about leaving their country and starting a new life.

Example: “Why did you have to leave your home?”

#### c. A transgender person

This person explains what it's like to be transgender and how it has affected their life. Example: “When did you realize you were transgender?”

#### d. A homeless person

You can talk to someone who has lived without a home and hear what that experience is really like. Example: “How did you end up homeless?”

#### e. A person with deaf-blindness

This person shares how they communicate and manage life with both hearing and vision loss. Example: “How do you get around or use technology?”

#### f. A person who is obese

You can speak with someone who is very overweight. They may talk about their health, how others treat them, and their feelings.

Example: “What challenges do you face in public places?”

Anyone with a unique or meaningful life story can be a Human Book, such as:

- Doctor - Talks about medical life and patient care,
- Teacher - Shares stories about students and teaching,
- Top student (school or university) - Talks about how they succeeded in studies,
- Police officer - Explains what their job is like,
- Beggar - Tells how they survive on the streets,
- A former prisoner or habitual offender - Talks about jail life and lessons learned,
- Murder convict (if allowed) - May speak about their past and regrets,
- Social worker - Shares how they help others,
- Sex worker - Talks about their life and social challenges,
- Former gang member - Tells how they left crime behind,
- IAS officer - Shares their journey and responsibilities,
- People from poor to honestly richest- shares their story to be a rich man in our society,

■ **People ruined his supremacy**- tells how to lose his supremacy.

At a 'human library' event, such people's real-life stories are an open book.

### Transformation of People into Book

Becoming a Human Book in the Human Library involves a thoughtful and guided process. Here's how people typically become Human Books (Humanlibrarynyc.org, n.d.; McDaniel College, 2025; Humanlibrary.org, n.d.; Wikipedia, 2025; Northern Arizona University, 2019; Resilience.org, 2023):

#### a. Volunteering or Recruitment

- Self-Nomination: Many Human Books start by volunteering-people who have unique life experiences and want to share their stories to promote understanding and challenge stereotypes,
- Recruitment: Organizers may also invite individuals with compelling or underrepresented perspectives to participate.

#### b. Screening and Selection

- Organizers usually conduct *interviews or initial meetings* to understand the potential book's story and assess whether it fits the library's goals (e.g., confronting prejudice, stigma, or misunderstanding),
- Topics often include experiences related to:
  - Mental health,
  - Disability,
  - Religion or caste,
  - Migration or refugee status,
  - Chronic illness,
  - Addiction or recovery,
  - Unique cultural, social, or personal journeys.

#### c. Title and Story Development

- Each Human Book is given a *"title"* that reflects the stereotype, label, or experience they represent (e.g., “Ex-Gang Member,” “Autistic Parent,” “HIV Positive,” “Dalit Woman,” “Transgender Veteran”),
- With support from organizers, the book develops a *narrative* or key talking points to structure the conversation while keeping it genuine and open-ended.

#### d. Training and Orientation

- Human Books receive *training* on how to engage with readers, manage difficult questions, and set personal boundaries,
- They're encouraged to be *honest but respectful*, and they can *decline any question* they're uncomfortable with.



### e. Participation in Events

- During events, readers "borrow" a book for a set amount of time (usually 20-30 min) to have a one-on-one or small group conversation,
- The interaction is guided by curiosity and mutual respect, not debate or judgment.

### f. Why People Become Human Books

- To challenge stereotypes and fight stigma,
- To educate others through lived experience,
- For healing and empowerment-sharing a personal journey can be therapeutic,
- To bridge social divides and promote empathy.

## PURPOSE OF THE HUMAN LIBRARY

The goal is to break stereotypes, promote understanding, and help people learn from real-life experiences. It helps readers ask questions they usually can't ask in public and opens minds by creating a safe space for dialogue.

### How To Borrow Human Book

It's set up just like a normal library. Visitors or readers can choose a "human book" based on their interests or curiosity and engage in a conversation with them, asking questions and learning about their life stories. Readers have an allotted amount of time with it (Shoaff, 2016). It works by "lending" out individuals with unique experiences as "human books" for conversations, rather than traditional books. Readers "borrow" a person for a one-on-one or small group conversation, often lasting 20-30 min (Silvertalkies.com, n.d.). People in the following frame (Figure 1) are Human Books and Librarian (Stony Brook University Libraries, 2024).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN LIBRARY (HL)

Key Features of the Human Library are (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.)

### a. Safe and Open Conversations

The Human Library offers a safe space where people can talk honestly and openly. Readers and human books can discuss topics that are often difficult or sensitive.

### b. Real Stories from Real People

All the human books are volunteers who speak from their own life experiences. They share personal stories related to topics they know well.

### c. Tough Questions Are Welcome

The Human Library encourages people to ask challenging questions. These questions are not only accepted-they are valued and answered honestly.

### d. Held in Many Different Places

Human Library events are held online and in many places like libraries, museums, festivals, conferences, schools, universities, and even for private companies.

## GOALS OF HUMAN LIBRARY

Main Goals of the Human Library are (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.):

### a. A New Way to Learn

The Human Library is a creative and hands-on learning tool used all over the world. It's used in schools, colleges, medical training, and community programs to help people understand diversity and build more inclusive and connected communities, no matter their culture, religion, or background.

### b. Training for Understanding and Inclusion



**Figure 1:** Some of the Open Books and Librarians at Human Library event at Stony Brook University Libraries, 2024. Photo by John Griffin. (Source: ( collection from Stony Brook University Libraries, 2024)).

The Human Library gives training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). This helps companies and organizations improve how they understand and work with people from different backgrounds. It also helps them build better relationships with clients.

#### c. Safe Space for Honest Conversations

During school or college visits, the Human Library creates a safe and respectful space where people can talk about personal and sensitive topics. These talks help to reduce prejudice, fight discrimination, and bring people together from different social, religious, and ethnic groups.

#### d. Open Dialogue on Difficult Topics

The Human Library sets up a special space for open conversations, where even taboo or uncomfortable topics can be discussed without judgment. It brings together people who might never speak to each other in everyday life and gives them a chance to truly connect.

## RANGANATHA'S FIVE LAWS AND HUMAN LIBRARY

The Five Laws of Library Science, proposed by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan in 1931 (Ranganathan, 1969), are the foundation of traditional library science. We can also connect these laws to the Human Library concept, showing how they still apply, even when “books” are people. Five Laws of Library Science and their relevance to the Human Library may be summarised as follows using Table 1.

## ROLE OF LIBRARIAN

Role of the Librarian in the Human Library are (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.; Resilience.org, 2023):

### Organizer and Coordinator

The librarian helps plan and organizes Human Library events. They make sure everything runs smoothly and that all human books and readers know what to do.

### Selecting and Preparing Human Books

Librarians help *choose and train* the human books. They make sure the volunteers are comfortable sharing their stories and understand how to handle difficult questions.

### Creating a Safe Space

The librarian ensures that the event is a safe, respectful, and welcoming space where everyone feels heard, accepted, and supported.

## Matching Readers with Human Books

Just like recommending books, the librarian helps match readers with the right human book based on interests or topics the reader wants to explore.

## Supporting Dialogue

Librarians guide both readers and human books to have meaningful, open conversations. If needed, they can step in to help keep the discussion respectful and on track.

## Feedback and Improvement

After the event, librarians often collect feedback to improve future Human Library sessions and to better support both the books and the readers.

Shortly, the Human Library librarian is a guide, protector, and organizer who helps connect people, encourages understanding, and keeps the conversation space safe and meaningful. Librarian is also volunteer whose primary role will be to care for the wellbeing of the human book during library events and facilitate and moderate open conversations between readers and the Human Book during the session.

## COMPONENT OF HUMAN LIBRARY

A Human Library consists of three main components (Parmar, 2024):

### Organizer / Manager / Librarian

The organizer is responsible for arranging a Human Library event. This event typically takes place in a library, school, club, or similar venue. In a Human Library, volunteers act as living books (or human books) and engage directly with readers. The organizer coordinates the logistics of the event, ensures appropriate venue selection, and facilitates communication between the human books and readers. A librarian may also serve as an organizer or act as a liaison officer for the event.

### Volunteers (Human Books)

Volunteers in a Human Library take on the role of human books. These individuals share their personal stories, real-life experiences, or subject expertise with readers. Human books can be people from various backgrounds-peers, community members, or experts-who are willing to engage in open dialogue and promote understanding.

### Readers

Readers are the individuals who attend the Human Library event to engage in conversation with human books. They come with the intent to listen, learn, and better understand different perspectives, regardless of religion, race, nationality, caste, or other differences. Avoiding such social elements, Human Library Organization (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.) inspire readers by the

caption that “Don’t Judge a Book by its cover”. Readers play a crucial role by fostering empathy and promoting inclusivity through their interactions with the human books.

## STEPS TO BORROW HUMAN BOOK FROM HUMAN LIBRARY

Human Library Organization (Humanlibrary.org, n.d.; Parmar, 2024) suggests few steps to use human library and shows in a poster (Figures 2 and 3). However, list of steps in use of Human books may be given below:

Step 1: Make a membership card,

Step 2: Choose a Human Book as per requirement or subject topic,

Step 3: Borrow or lend the allotted Human book,

Step 4: Fix up an amount of time for sitting with her or him,

Step 6: Assign silence and safe place where they can talk without any problem,

Step 4: Have an open conversation,

Step 5: Handover him/ her after conversation to the librarian/ manager,

Step 6: Give feedback to the librarian about experiences,

In addition to those above, following steps may include,

Step 7: Re-issue the same Human Book if further needed,

Step 8: Reserve Human Book previously if there is more demand of any human book, etc.

## ROLE OF RDA (RESOURCE DESCRIPTION AND ACCESS) FOR HUMAN BOOKS

The RDA (Resource Description and Access) standard, originally developed for the description and cataloguing of traditional and digital resources, can play a significant role in organizing and describing Human Books are people who share personal experiences and knowledge in Human Library settings. While Human Books challenge conventional notions of information resources, RDA's flexible, principle-based structure can be adapted to accommodate these unique entities (Joint Steering Committee, 2010; Oliver, 2010).

### Key Roles of RDA for Human Books

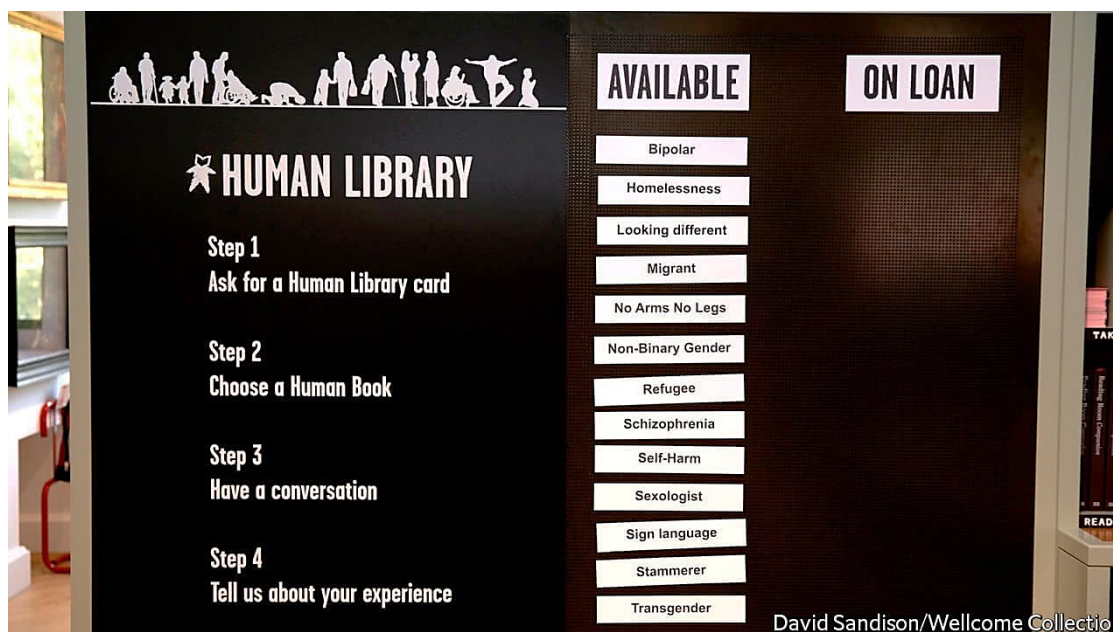
Some necessary key roles of RDA are as follows.

### Standardized Description

RDA provides a structured framework to describe attributes of a resource. For Human Books, this could include fields like:

- Name (Preferred Title of the Human Book),
- Topic/Subject of experience (e.g., “Refugee Experience,” “Living with Bipolar Disorder”),
- Language of communication,
- Cultural background,
- Identity markers relevant to the dialogue (e.g., race, gender identity, religion - with consent).

Such descriptions are in line with RDA's element-based approach to resource representation (American Library Association (ALA), n.d.; Oliver, 2010).



**Figure 2:** Showing steps of use of Human Library. <https://humanlibrary.org/> (Source: collection from Humanlibrary.org, n.d.).



## Authority Control and Access Points

- Human Books may be associated with controlled vocabularies or authority files to ensure consistent access across systems,
- For example, a Human Book titled “Living as a Transgender Teen” can be linked with authority terms under LGBTQ+ identities or mental health,

This mirrors RDA’s role in managing bibliographic relationships and ensuring discoverability through standardized access points (IFLA, 2017; Baca, 2016).

## Relationship Mapping

RDA allows for the documentation of relationships between entities. Human Books could be connected to:

- The institution hosting the event (e.g., a university library),
- Related topics or other Human Books with similar or contrasting themes.

This is supported by the IFLA Library Reference Model (IFLA LRM), which emphasizes entity-relationship structures in bibliographic data (IFLA, 2017; IFLA Cataloguing Section, 2003).

## Facilitating Discovery

By applying RDA elements, Human Books can be made discoverable through OPACs or digital catalogues. Users could

search by subject, experience type, or other facets to find Human Books relevant to their interests or educational goals (Zhai, Zhao, and Wang, 2012a; Jana and Rout, 2022a).

## Ethical Metadata Design

RDA’s emphasis on user-centered and context-aware description aligns with the ethical considerations required for Human Books-especially with regard to consent, privacy, and respectful representation of identity (Baca, 2016; Schijf H, Olivar, Bundalian, and Ramos-Eclevia, 2020).

## Challenges and Considerations

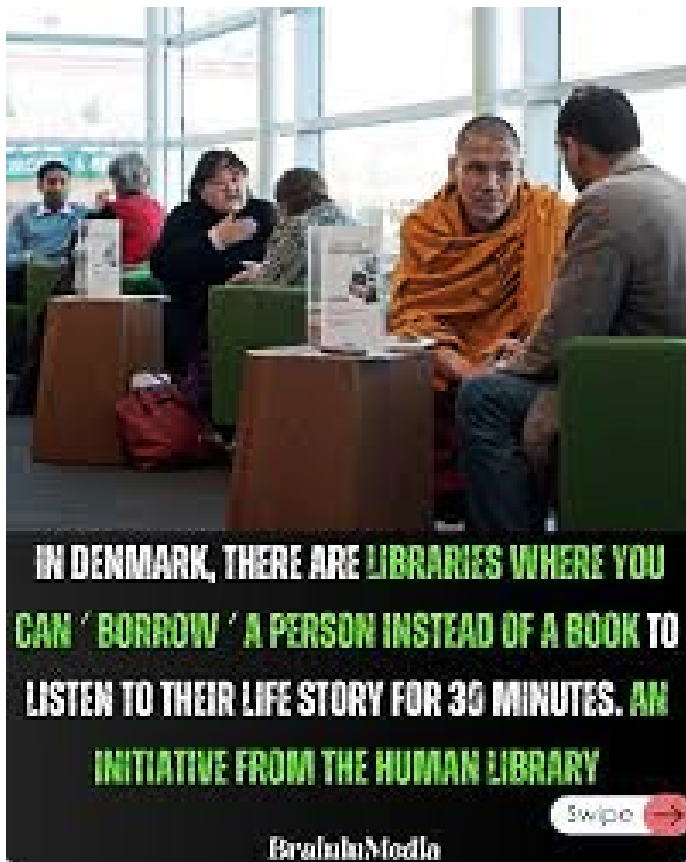
- Non-Traditional Format:** Human Books are not physical or digital objects, but people. RDA would need to be extended or interpreted with flexibility to accommodate human-centric resources (Groyeck *et al.*, 2019a; Oliver, 2010),
- Consent and Sensitivity:** Metadata creation for Human Books must be sensitive to privacy, representation, and language-especially when cataloguing lived experiences involving trauma, identity, or discrimination (Schijf *et al.*, 2020a; Baca, 2016).

RDA, with its flexible and extensible design, has the potential to support the cataloguing and discovery of Human Books in a respectful, inclusive, and standardized way. However, its implementation in this context would require thoughtful

**Table 1: Relevance of Human Library to Five Laws of Library Science.**

Ranganathan's Law	Meaning in Traditional Libraries	Applications to the Human Library (HL)	Five Laws for HL
1. Books are for use	Books should be accessible and available to all.	People (human books) should be easy to talk to and their stories made available through safe, welcoming conversations.	Human books are for open conversations.
2. Every reader his/her book	Every person has the right to find books that match their needs and interests.	Every visitor (reader) should be able to find a human book with an experience or story they want to learn about.	Every visitor/ reader has a story to share.
3. Every book its reader	Every book has value and should find someone who needs it.	Every human book has a meaningful story, and there is always someone who can learn from that experience.	Every human book has his/ her reader/ visitor.
4. Save the time of the reader	Library services should be user-friendly and efficient.	Human Library events are well-organized and human books are ready to share to their stories clearly and openly so that readers can have meaningful conversations easily and without confusion.	Readers can have open conversations without wasting time.
5. The library is a growing organism	Libraries should keep changing and expanding with new knowledge and technology.	The Human Library is constantly evolving, adding new stories and voices to reflect our changing society.	The Human Library is constantly evolving with new stories/ voices.





**Figure 3:** Readers reading Human Books sitting in different location in a Human library (Source from British Media: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DFsT-KSyc9a/>).

adaptation, with a strong emphasis on ethical description and user-centered practices.

## CONCLUSION

As the world grapples with rising social divides and the need for deeper understanding, the Human Library emerges as a powerful tool for change. Its growth from a local initiative in Denmark to a global platform—now quietly taking root in India—reflects a universal desire to connect beyond stereotypes. By offering real people as “books” and encouraging honest, respectful dialogue, the Human Library creates a unique space where empathy can flourish. It is even called “Living Library” (Maisal, 2018; Parmar, 2024) designed for a global movement aimed at promoting social change through dialogue and understanding. In India, where social identities are complex and often contentious, this initiative holds great promise. By reaching into rural areas and underserved communities, and by embracing digital innovations such as virtual storytelling, the Human Library can broaden its impact and ensure that more voices are heard—especially those that have long been silenced.

As interest in mental health, inclusivity, and diversity continues to grow, the Human Library is well-positioned to become a key part of educational and community engagement. Its ability to

spark conversation, challenge bias, and build human connections makes it not only relevant but essential for our times. With continued support from educators, community leaders, and changemakers, the Human Library has the potential to reshape how societies listen, learn, and relate to one another—one story at a time.

In the near future, data elements related to human resource discovery will need to be revised and expanded for effective cataloguing and classification. Therefore, frameworks like *RDA* (Resource Description and Access) and *DDC* (Dewey Decimal Classification) should take the initiative to adapt and evolve in order to reflect the changing role of libraries in a knowledge-sharing society. Finally, some Analytical Remarks can be highlighted in this regard:

## Evolving Role of Libraries

Traditional libraries are transitioning from being solely repositories of books to becoming dynamic spaces for knowledge exchange, community engagement, and social innovation—exemplified by concepts like the Human Library. Classification systems need to reflect this expanded role.

## Limitations of Current Standards

Current cataloguing standards (like *RDA*) and classification systems (like *DDC*) are largely designed for physical and digital media—not for interactive, human-based resources like “living books.” Without revision, these systems may fail to accurately represent such resources in library records.

## Need for Inclusive Metadata

Human-based knowledge resources require new metadata elements—such as lived experience, identity, and thematic concerns (e.g., prejudice, inclusion)—which are currently underrepresented or absent in traditional cataloguing standards.

## Call to Action

The suggestion that *RDA* and *DDC* take the lead highlights the need for authoritative bodies in library science to recognize this paradigm shift and initiate necessary changes to ensure libraries remain relevant and inclusive in the digital and human-centric knowledge age.

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commitment to breaking down stereotypes and building more inclusive communities.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of Interest.

## SUMMARY

The Human Library is a transformative concept that redefines the traditional role of libraries by enabling people-called "human books"-to share personal stories through one-on-one or small group conversations. This initiative promotes empathy, challenges stereotypes, and fosters social inclusion by turning dialogue into a powerful tool for learning. The concept, including its definition, types, historical background, components, and implementation, aligns with the evolving nature of libraries and their role in society. The work also highlights the need for modern bibliographic standards like DDC, RDA, FRBR, and IFLA LRM to evolve in order to accommodate new, human-centered formats of knowledge sharing, bridging the gap between printed books, digital resources, and experiential human narratives.

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