

Now, borrow an entire library shelf

Desaposhini Library in Kozhikode blazes a trail by introducing e-readers.

S.R. Praveen

KOZHIKODE: If tech-savvy book-lovers flip the page over to the e-reader, can libraries fall behind? Whether books die or not, the romance of reading will remain, a promise these handy electronic readers, each able to pack a thousand or more of e-books, make.

Desaposhini Library, a cultural nerve centre of Kozhikode city and trailblazer in many respects, which is celebrating its diamond jubilee, has become an early adopter of e-readers. Never one to turn back on technology, the library took its first steps towards introducing digital reading to its flock of 8,000 members on Sunday.

M.K. Raghavan, MP, inaugurated the issue of e-readers on the library premises at Kuthiravattam.

The library is using the Kindle e-reader of Amazon, a U.S.-based e-commerce site. In the initial stage, five Kindle readers will be made available to the members. More numbers will be added on gauging the response.

Each Kindle can hold 1,500 to 2,500 e-books at a time, depending on the size of the content and the presence of audio and video. The screen employs E Ink technology, which promises no glare, allowing reading even in bright sunlight. (Cellphones and handheld devices with low screen resolutions do not allow easy reading in similar conditions).

The Kindle screen supports 16 grey shades, making the pages appear almost print-like. By zooming in, those with weak eyesight, especially



BYTE-SIZED BOOKS: e-readers are cornering shelf-space in libraries too, with Desaposhini Library in Kozhikode lending them to readers.

— PHOTO: S. RAMESH KURUP

senior citizens, can read small text.

A.P. Karthik, son of A.P. Krishnakumar, president of the library, donated the e-readers. "The library, as part of its modernisation plans, decided to issue the e-readers on an experimental basis. Later, we plan to digitise the entire collection and add it to the e-readers," he said.

The library plans to lend the e-readers to its members for two weeks each on payment of a security deposit. Lifetime members can borrow them free.

"Children these days depend on the

library only for academic purposes. Most of their time is taken up by television and the Internet. This is a way to 'kindle' their reading habits and bring them back to the libraries," Mr. Krishnakumar said.

The library can download titles to the Kindle and add to the collection. Copyright-free titles are free to download, whereas others are sold at prices much less than those for the print versions.

Kindle, the first version of which was released in 2007, ran into controversies two years later when Amazon remotely deleted George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and 1984 over some copyright issues from all Kindles without the users' permission. A huge uproar ensued, users and tech experts calling it Orwellian, an enactment of what 1984 visualised. Later, Amazon apologised for the deletion and promised to restore the deleted books.

Nevertheless, the popularity of Kindle has been on the rise, and more and more e-readers and tablets promising a similar or even better experience offer a choice to the reader. With libraries adopting them, at least some reading habits are bound to change.

"I used to be a voracious reader and have read innumerable books. But with the advent of digital reading devices, I have not been able to complete any book. Still I think Kindle is closer to a book than any other device," Zainul Abidin, secretary, Calicut Forum for IT, said.

Desaposhini Library has a collection of more than 45,000 books and subscriptions to a variety of newspapers and magazines. Even in the cusp of such big changes, it retains an old-world charm, remaining a favourite haunt of many literary stalwarts.