

Mumbai-based Nehru Centre Library has recently been revamped to offer better services to the readers. Here, Arati Desai, librarian, shares more about the library in conversation with Varsha Verma.



Libraries in general play an important role as information resource centres. In India, though, libraries are still not fully digitalised and have hybrid collections i.e. both print and digital, are very popular. Libraries today are undergoing a sea-change as far as their services are concerned. With an increased online presence which is an absolute must for them, libraries too are facing the challenge of other faster moving vehicles on the information highway.

To keep up with them, libraries have to innovate and improve their spaces to make them more interactive, livelier and more welcoming. Libraries today are no more about only books. There is much more that they can do and the possibilities are endless.

“Footfalls in libraries increase only with innovation in services. The Nehru Centre Library has striven in this direction with a newly revamped reading room, more digital services in the form of an online catalogue, continuous updation of its collection, e-resources like webliographies and infopacks and an active presence on social media. At the same time, we have a well-selected collection of books, journals, audiovisuals, newspapers and magazines,” shares Arati Desai, librarian, Nehru Centre Library. Nehru Centre is a self-supporting public trust, with no aid or support and the library is a part of it.

Journey so far...



In 1977, the Nehru Centre Library was started as a small in-house library of the Centre for research work. It mainly consisted of a number of donated books. This small library occupied an area of approximately 1500 sq ft, housing about 2500 books and some scientific journals.

Research scholars used the fledging library services for their work. “The collection then mainly comprises of books on Astronomy and Indology as resource material for the two main upcoming units of the Nehru Centre – the Planetarium and the Discovery of India (DOI) exposition. As the space then in the library was inadequate and additional space was unlikely to be available there, it was suggested that part of the unutilised space in the basement of the Nehru Planetarium be utilised for housing the library. In 1991, the services were opened to academicians, scholars and researchers at a nominal membership fee. Gradually, the doors of the library were opened to the general public as a reference library with emphasis only on astronomy. This was also when the books from the Planetarium collection were merged with the Nehru Centre Library. In the 1990s, an increase in readers’ interest was observed and new

subjects like environment, technology, applied sciences etc. were added to the collection. The library also gained immense popularity among students for their school projects. The airconditioned comfort and the quiet environment attracted the members of the academic community. New subjects in books and documentation were added as and when the need arose,” shares Arati Desai.

In 1999, the Cyber Centre

Modern facilities at Nehru Centre Library

- Web-OPAC
- Computer terminals connected through LAN
- Digital resources
- Community participation in the form of constant feedback
- Presence on social media
- Projection facilities
- Comfortable sitting arrangement
- Private research cubicles

was set up with six computer terminals and a network printer and scanner. The audio-visual section was added. “Films on environment and the National Geographic collection proved to be extremely popular. Digitisation of official work began in a big way, the aim of which was to provide a paperless workplace. Internet connectivity was also provided. Each year, some new subjects were introduced in the documentation section. In the year 2000s, the Nehru Centre Library has emerged as a popular multi-resource centre for all subjects,” she adds.

Database...

“Today, we have 30,000 books, about 100 journals, 220 documentation subjects and a well-configured cyber centre with Internet connectivity. The library catalogue is fully automated and all library books are barcoded. We have prepared a common keyword thesaurus of all books and articles in the library to enable fast information retrieval. Besides, outreach activities are regularly organised,” she adds. “We add about 500-600 books to our collection on an average. Apart from that, we also have 12 newspapers in three languages. Our collection also includes audiovisuals like educational DVDs and interactive CD-ROMs.”

Patrons...



Nehru Centre Library is a unique library, in that, it is a public reference library where anyone can come and use the library facilities without paying a fee. One only has to produce a valid ID to enter the library. Since it is a reference library, we do not issue out any material. “Our visitors

include all age groups, social backgrounds, professional backgrounds, etc. In the true tradition of a public library, we cater to all from 8 to 80 years olds,” adds Arati.

Future of libraries...

“Libraries are facing a major challenge everywhere. There is a constant need to innovate, experiment and revamp services to attract readers inside the library. There is no room for stagnation or a laidback attitude. Public librarians in India need to look at the libraries in the west and borrow some ideas. Libraries are no more just reading spaces. They have to evolve into social spaces, maker spaces or meeting spaces and open out for more interactivity,” concludes Arati.