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Referencing a library in digital times

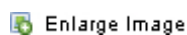
The Nehru Centre Library in Worli stocks over 30,000 books, finds Dhanishta Shah as she visits the library that is not about ‘silence please’

Biblio Zone

Dhanishta Shah



Public libraries are often thought of as old, dingy places with dusty books and a general archaic environment, but the Nehru Centre Library in Worli defies the stereotype. Here is a swanky, state-of-the-art facility that has moved with the times.



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The library has over 30,000 books and enviable data collections, but there are no books in sight as you enter! Books are concealed from public view and accessed by in-house staff, who retrieve the titles

required by readers. What you do see is a vast air-conditioned lounge, which is actually the plush reading room. High bamboos line the stretch and right in the centre are artificial plants and blossoms that add a dash of colour. A massive “google map” of Mumbai stares right back at you.

There are computer terminals; users can access the completely digitalised catalogue through a user-friendly search software (which can be accessed online from any other location as well). They can requisition the books they want from the knowledgeable staff.

Dive into the past

The library started off as a small resource base for the researchers working on the Nehru Planetarium and Discovery of India exhibition in the 1970s, informs Arati Desai, head librarian and documentation officer. “By the 1980s, it was opened to the public. Many students flocked here

for information for the numerous projects that they were doing. Likewise, researchers came here soliciting information,”

she adds.

“At the time, the library was located in the basement of the Nehru Planetarium where access and visibility were issues. The invasion of the internet further reduced footfalls. It was time to update the library,” she explains.

On November 14, 2013, the library shifted to its current location in the Discovery of India building. Eminent architect IM Kadri designed the space that is used by both research students and the general public. “One senior citizen who is a regular here often says she hopes she could live here! One almost feels as if one is reading in a garden,” says Desai.

Collections galore

The library boasts exhaustive documentation of about 2,50,000 newspaper and magazine clippings. These are indexed alphanumerically. Archival sound recordings of several lectures held at the Nehru Centre form another admirable part of the collection as do a veritable selection of coffee table books. They also have every print edition of the National Geographic Magazine since 1947 among several other magazines and journals.

A majority of the collections are in English, but there is an enviable list of titles in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and

Sanskrit. The collections span a diverse mix of subject areas, including classical literature, fiction, art, Chinese painting, science and architecture. There are also special collections on Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The library subscribes to over 80 Indian and foreign journals. The children's collection is also growing and being enriched with newer material.

The spacious reading room accommodates up to 80 readers. There are eight workstations from where readers can access the catalogues. Four research cubicles are allotted to researchers. Readers are free to get their Kindles, iPads, laptops or any other portable reading devices. The catalogue is online, so one can identify the book one wants from the web catalogue and merely request the same at the library!


"Today's libraries are not about 'silence please'. You have to accommodate all kinds of readers and all types of requests," states Desai. The library holds several outreach programmes. There's a monthly informal book club. For children, there are 'Meet the Author' sessions and creative writing workshops.

The ergonomically designed furniture and reader friendly lighting coupled with the contemporary ambience makes this a charming place to be.

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