



The Nehru Centre Library relocated to the Discovery Of India building last month. The 36-year-old library, today, boasts of a collection of 25,000 books, documents, journals and papers. PHORUM DALAL spends an afternoon sifting through the shelves while quizzing the librarian, ARATI DESAI

THE BEST bus number 84 stops outside the Nehru Centre on a hot, windless afternoon. The driver hits the brakes nonchalantly as the conductor announces the stop in much boredom. But, there's a flutter in my heart as I walk up to the Discovery of India building. Wide marbled stairs lead me to the first-floor landing and the smell of fresh paint further intoxicates my excitement.

An assignment to 'check out' a new reading space is any bookworm's dream job. I push the glass door and a smiling clerk ushers me into librarian Arati Desai's new cabin. The Nehru Centre Library, founded in 1977, was crammed in the basement of Nehru Planetarium in a mere 5,000 square feet area since 1991, has moved in to an area of 10,000 square feet last month.

For a moment, my mind races back to my school library, which we frequented minutes before the first bell rang for the morning prayers, all of the 15 minutes of the short break and most of the lunch break and after the last bell rang to mark the end of day. Enid Blyton's characters — Georgina from *Mallory Towers*, Fatty from *Five Findouters* and Moonface and Saucepan Man from *The Faraway Tree* — resur-

rect in my mind space.

The articulate and sprightly voice of Desai brings me back to reality and we delve deep into a conversation about the library's origin and the role of a librarian in the tech-savvy world. "It's true people don't frequent libraries, but does that mean that a librarian should stop working?" questions Desai. She quotes SR Ranganathan, who is considered the father of library science in India. "He described the library as a growing organism. It must continue to grow," he said."

Desai wants to reach out to the reader in the right way, and has plans to come out with a newsletter that highlights rare books in the collection, new collections and interesting books to draw more readers into the new

space. "The entire catalogue is available online to the reader but to read, he must walk in," assures Desai.

Technology has, in fact, stretched the role of a librarian. "There is so much to do," says Desai "I am an information freak. Every morning I go through all the newspapers and magazines for interesting articles that can be documented." The library uses the 'alpha numeric' system of cataloguing. In addition to the books and journal articles which are already on the catalogue, the library has a huge collection of about 1,50,000 newspaper clippings which are organised by using an alpha numeric system. Desai hands me a file, which contains a list of subjects that are used to classify and categorise the newspaper clippings.



Librarian Arati Desai has been working at the Nehru Centre Library since 2000. The seating area at the new location is stylish and well-lit with luxurious seating. In short, a reader's paradise. PICS/BIPIN KOKATE

### Reading time

Interestingly, the total length of the book shelves is 6115 feet that is around two kilometres in length!

A guided tour with Desai hints the mammoth task she undertakes along with her staff of five. The library has a vast Indian and world history section, philosophy, psychology and literature section and an extensive Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi collection. But the largest attraction is the astronomy and science section. The library contains rare books in every section. "You just have to spot the publishing date to recognise one," she says.

At the end of the tour, she wishes me 'happy reading' and leaves me on the mezzanine floor with endless racks filled with books. "Does this section have CCTV cameras?" I blurt out. "No, but hand me your bag. I will deposit it at the exit," she grins.

I start with the arts rack and pick *The Post-impressionist* by Belinda Thomson. The first chapter discusses the term post-impressionists. It was Roger Fry, an English artist, who, faced with the difficulty of presenting a haphazard exhibition of continental arts to an inexperienced English art clients titled the exhibition *Manet and the Post-impressionists*. Strangely, George Seurat, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Paul Cezanne were dead when the word was coined in 1910. I move on to Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, where he writes about the non-existence of adventure: "Adventures are stories and one does not live a story. One can tell it later, one can only see it from the outside." I know I must come back for more of his philosophy.

I end my tour with the opening paragraph of Roald Dahl's *Going Solo*: "A life is made up of a great number of small incidents and a small number of great ones." To add to that, spending time in a library surely makes it to the latter. phorum.dalal@mid-day.com