Nehru Centre Library: Infrastructure of the Future

Arati Desai *

* Librarian and Documentation Officer
Nehru Centre, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

QR Code

Abstract: - *Libraries and librarians are today faced with the challenge of technological change, rapidly increasing electronic resources and fast reducing footfalls. Libraries in India specially have fallen back in comparison to their counterparts in other countries. With fast developing digital technologies, it has become imperative for library and information centres to revamp their spaces into social and maker spaces, upgrade their services from print to digital and open their reference services not just for a few but for a larger readership.*

The Nehru Centre Library too had an uphill task in getting acknowledged as an important resource centre in the city of Mumbai. This paper talks about the transformation of the Nehru Centre Library from an inactive repository space to a hub of activity. With some imaginative thinking and complete involvement and commitment of the librarian, it has evolved from a small, nondescript place with no natural light, no visibility, an oddly designed space housed in the basement of the Nehru Planetarium into a state-of-the-art unit of the Nehru Centre. The library has recognized the need to modernize and has introduced brand new innovative services for the public. On the technology side, we have an online catalogue including information about books, journal articles, newspaper clippings, maps, encyclopedias, audio and visual resources.

We also have a visible presence on social media with plans for more visibility. We propose to digitalize the section of 2,00,000+ newspaper clippings wherein the reader can locate any article of current importance on any subject from a searchable list of 200+ subjects. A 5000+ word keyword thesaurus will be compiled which will incorporate all resources in all forms. We prepare electronic info-packs every month which include interesting information on books, journals, web directories, web-links, and quotations on a relevant topic. This decision has definitely paid dividends and gained the Nehru Centre Library recognition in the country and abroad.

Keywords: C Social Media, Libraries, Skills, Services

About Nehru Centre:

The idea of Nehru Centre was conceived in 1972, not as a mute memorial, but as a living testament and monument of faith in the vision of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. The Nehru Centre comprises of the following:

(a) *Nehru Planetarium*: It seats 500 persons. It conducts shows on astronomy in three languages for the public and has emerged as a popular destination for astronomy lovers.

(b) *Discovery of India*: This is a permanent unique exposition, covering every aspect of artistic, intellectual and philosophical attainment of India through the ages, depicted in 14 galleries beginning from the Harappan age and ending with the independence of India.

(c) *Art Galleries*: Two art galleries promoting young artists provide a platform for them to exhibit with eminent artists.

(d) *Culture Wing*: This department encourages young performing artists in the fields of dance, drama, vocal and instrumental music.

(e) *Library*: A public reference library offering free information services to the community.

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 small number of donated books. Cataloguing of books was began manually and cards were filled in wooden card catalogues and they are almost extinct now. The entry of journals was maintained in the manual cardex system, another outdated method of keeping a record of journal procurement. Some of those who donated books to the library were the families of Shri Shantilal Gujar (2000 books), Shri Dhiren Bhagat and Shri Amalendu Ghosh. The book racks were wooden makeshift once which were used to store both magazines and books. The shelfs were fixed and could not be adjusted according to height of the books. This small library was housed in the 7th floor of the Sterling Centre, adjacent to the present Nehru Centre building and occupied an area of approximately 1500 sq. feet. This housed about 2500 books and some scientific journals. Research scholars used the fledging library services for their work.

In 1980, it was decided to set up a Library Committee which would meet once a month. In 1981 the first Library Committee was formed. In the early Library Committee meetings, the procurement of primary source materials on Indian science and technology for the coming up Discovery of India (DOI) project was assessed. As the space in the adjacent building of the Sterling Centre was inadequate and additional space was unlikely to be available there, it was suggested that part of the unutilized space in the

Nehru Planetarium be utilized for housing the library. The collection then mainly comprised of books on astronomy and Indology which were used as resource material for the two main upcoming sections of the Nehru Centre – the Planetarium and the DOI exposition. All these materials were only used by the officers and the research staff of the Centre. Material on and by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was also collected to help the founding of the DOI Exposition. Book Selection was also done during the Committee Meeting, i.e. once a month.

It was repeatedly expressed in the Library Committee Meetings that there was inadequate space for the library. Following the concept that a library is a growing organization, soon the space in the Sterling Centre appeared to be inadequate. In a note dated Nov. 30, 1983, Dr. V.A. Kamath, the then Chairman of the Library Committee regarding the allotment of space for the Library and Information Services wrote,

"On the basis of the generally accepted standards, the library expert members of the Committee indicated that Reading and Stacking Sections should each have at least 5000 sq. ft. area. Another 5000 sq. ft. area will be required for the various facilities normally needed in a library and information centre and also for the staff which will increase substantially during the period of a decade. It may be noted in this connection that it is universally acknowledged that in the planning of any library, adequate provision should be made for space for its expansion as library is a growing organization. Taking all the above mentioned factors into consideration, the Committee came to the conclusion that a minimum of 15,000 sq. ft. area should be provided in the Tower Portion of the DOI building for the Library and Information Services. (DOI pic)

I am rather surprised that the Building-cum-Tender Committee of Nehru Centre at its meeting held on Nov. 21, 1983 thought that the space requirement indicated for the Library & Information Services to be rather excessive. If for any reason it is not possible to allot 15,000 sq. ft. area for the Library & Information Services, the Library Committee at its meeting to be held on Jan. 9, 1984 will have to consider the following: (1) cutting down the proposed acquisition of 5000 books per year to, say, 3000. (2) To provide reading facilities for a maximum of, say, 30 persons only. (3) To reduce the size of the various facilities envisaged i.e. micrographic, reprographic, photographic, micro-reading, offset-printing, duplicating etc. Even if we go through this exercise, in my considered opinion, we will require a minimum of 11,000 sq. ft. area to have a Library & Information Services within a decade of which Nehru Centre could be proud of."

In 1984, it was again decided to shift the library to the 10th floor of the DOI Building. In view of further expansions envisaged in the Nehru Centre,

it was felt that suitable staff also be appointed in the library. A study was made in which it was mentioned that a minimum area of 7000 sq. ft. was required to house the library with the collection of books at that time. This would also accommodate the planned area of the library for the next 10-15 years.

In 1985, the library was proposed to be shifted to the tower section of the DOI Building and was to occupy three floors there. But the members of the Library Committee strongly felt that the physical structure of the DOI Building was not a functional location for a library. Standard library furniture would be out of place in the circular area and it would require specially designed furniture. The library was, however, shifted to the 10th floor of the DOI Building. Even here, the collection of the books was restricted to Indology. Later, the number of disciplines was increased to include a wider variety of subjects.

In 1990, it was recommended that a documentation service be started in the library. This service would be on the lines of the Centre for Education and Documentation (CED) which has done pioneering work in the field of documentation in Mumbai. Documentation services in the Nehru Centre Library were initially a fledgling service with limited subjects consisting of astronomy, history, geography, sciences, art, culture and futurology, primarily for in-house research.

In 1991, the library was again shifted to the Planetarium Basement and the services were opened to academicians, scholars and researchers at a nominal membership fee. Gradually, it was also introduced to the general public as a reference library with emphasis only on astronomy. Thus, it was known as a resource centre for information on astronomy related subjects. 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 air-conditioned comfort and the quiet environment attracted members of the community. New subjects in books and documentation were added as and when the need arose. Suggestions of readers were also accepted.

In 1999, the Cyber Centre was set up with six computer terminals and a network printer + scanner. The audio-visual section was added and the National Geographic collection proved to be extremely popular. Digitization of official work was begun 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.

Plans for the future

Space and infrastructure were always a problem for the Nehru Centre Library. The need to provide proper facilities for all members of the society was extremely important as there was a constant demand from students, adults, senior citizens and the corporate world. If the Nehru Centre Library was to prove to be the ideal public library for the community, it was necessary that some changes be made to the existing set-up. A study needed to be made of public libraries in other cities and abroad. A detailed study of the space available within the Nehru Centre premises and a floor plan with precise specifications of the use of that space was submitted to the Executive Committee of the Centre.

The new library was inaugurated on November 14, 2013 as the Centre's tribute to the first Prime Minister of the country. It is a 10,000 sq. ft. area with a beautifully landscaped reading room, comfortable ergonomically designed furniture, ramps for wheelchairs, lights which are easy to the eye and natural light seeping in from glass walls. There are cubicles for researchers, scholars or writers where they can store their personal material and work at peace. Multipurpose computer workstations double up as the OPAC and can also be used to surf the Internet or watch multimedia.

In the 21st century, the Nehru Centre Library has emerged as a popular multi-resource centre for all subjects. Today, we have 30,000 books and a constantly growing collection, we subscribe to 75 journals, we have about 220 documentation subjects with new subjects added almost every day and a well-configured cyber-centre with Internet connectivity. We have a fully online library catalogue and we have bar-coded all library books. We have prepared a common keyword thesaurus of about 5000+ words of all books and articles in the library to enable fast information retrieval.

Nehru Centre Library: Futuristic Infrastructure

A public reference library has to function as an efficient resource centre for all members of the public. It has to be located in a prominently visible area of the organization, it has to be well-lit and ventilated and it has to provide ample comfort to the reader. The relocation of the library to the first floor of the DOI Building has greatly enhanced its profile as the physical layout of the area also suits a library's requirements. It has provided increased visibility to all those who enter the precincts of the Discovery of India building. Its proximity to the DOI Exposition has added to the value of the Exposition as the library now plays the role of a resource centre. The rich collection of books, encyclopedias, journals, documentation and online resources are now

utilized to the fullest not only by visitors to the DOI but also by interested readers.

Services that the library has provided now are greatly automated. An Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has replaced the current manual catalogue. All computers in the library are networked, have the OPAC, Internet and digital resources. The library has a visible presence on social media with Facebook page www.facebook.com/NehruCentreLibrary and regularly updated blog http://nehrucentrelibrary.blogspot.in/. Thus, the Nehru Centre Library has now emerged as a hybrid library with both print and digital information resources.

We organize book discussions, workshops and meet-the-author sessions. It is very important that literary events should be organized near the library so that those attending can also browse the material that they are interested in.

There is a dearth of good libraries in the vicinity of the Nehru Centre. Members of the reading public are always in search of a place to read their favourite author, to browse through the daily newspaper, to look up articles on a subject of their interest or to surf the Internet for information. The library acts as a 'one-stop-resource-centre' where all these are available in the comfortable ambience of the new location.

In the last three years, the Nehru Centre Library

has emerged as a premier library not only of the neighborhood but of the entire city of Mumbai.

From July 2016 onwards, the library selects a 'Reader of the Month' and 'Book of the Month'. A reader who has visited the library for the most number of days in the month is selected 'Reader of the Month'

More Plans for the Future

- Active Social Space:

  Library will provide a social space to its users. Social space may include a platform shared for dance, drama and other performing arts. Web chat services will be added to the services of the library. Quality service and user satisfaction will be our primary goals.

- Group book reading session:

  Group reading session for kids have been planned for the summer vacations on special request from parents and we look forward to it.

- RFID:

  Since the library has only one entry/exit point, the installation of RFID System will

help in securing the collection. A set of two library security gates with two theft detection pedestals, and 2 antennas for large detection field with a range of 1 meter between the two pedestals will be required.

- DSpace:
  We are in a process to install DSpace which will contain newspaper and journal articles. A user will be able to search for these archived documents online.
  We have 2,50,000 + newspaper clippings arranged under 200+ subjects in box files. We plan to make metadata and search online facility available to our readers. Work is on at full speed for this project.

- E-books:

  In the last decade, Nehru Centre has published books which are compilations of lectures, seminars and conferences held at the Centre. All will be available in e-book form.

- Kindle stations:
  For this a WIFI zone has to be created and individual reading stations have to be provided in the reading room. This service will be the first of its kind in any library in Mumbai and will surely add to the library's popularity among youth.

- RFID:
  Radio-frequency identification (RFID) uses electromagnetic fields to automatically identify and track tags attached to objects. The tags contain electronically stored information.

- Kindle stations:
  The Kindle is a series of e-readers designed. Kindle devices enable users to browse, buy, download and read e-books, newspapers, magazines and other digital media via wireless networking to the Kindle Store.

- QR codes:
  QR code is a machine-readable code consisting of an array of black and white squares, typically used for storing URLs or other information for reading by the camera on a smartphone.

- Catch Them Young: An early love for books in an individual is a lifelong love. So we plan to have many more literature –related activities for children.