

Planning a library building

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THE library is a growing organisation providing library services to its users in any society. The quality and efficiency of its services depend largely on a functional library building. A functional library building is one which facilitates in providing efficient and quality library services.

In our country, unfortunately the idea is still current that any building or a collection of rooms can serve the purpose of a library building.

A survey of selected library buildings has shown that excepting a very few, most library buildings were constructed without a well conceived plan and design i.e. without due consideration to the requirements of the functions of a library.

To cite an example, the science section of the Dhaka University Library, the biggest library in the country, is housed in a separate building—a building which was constructed for serving the purpose of an examination hall. Later it was handed over to the DU library authority and converted to a library building. Since the building was not constructed for a library, it is naturally experiencing a lot of problems in management and delivering library services. The old building which houses the other collection and offices of the staff of the library has also many problems which cause impediments in providing efficient library services.

Most of the special libraries of the country do not have separate library buildings of their

own but are housed in one or few rooms mostly in the top floors of the buildings of their respective organisation. The users of these libraries visit them only when forced by requirements and usually hesitate to visit because of the inconvenience in using the libraries located at the top floors usually 3rd or 4th floors. Excepting a very few public library buildings, the others are of the same nature.

One thing is in common that most library buildings of our country were constructed without a well conceived plan and design. Although the situation deserves to be much improved, we have a few examples which can be cited. The Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and the Jahangirnagar University have good library buildings.

To construct a good functional library building, the following factors must be considered:

FUNCTIONS

The first essential factor is to comprehend correctly the functions for which the building is being designed and constructed. The nature and functions of different kinds of libraries differ so the library buildings to be constructed must also differ in design and planning to cater to the needs of the library services. The library being a growing organisation, projections of its future require-

ments of expansion are inevitable.

DECISION MAKING

The second important factor pertains to the participation of the librarians in decision making process enabling them to be involved as a central figure from the early stage of the conception of the building to the designing and furnishing of the interior spaces. The librarians should thus be involved in every step involving the very conception to the completion of the building. There are a number of instances where library buildings have been conceived, designed and constructed without the involvement of the librarians. In such cases, the library buildings tend to be non-functional.

The planning and design of the library buildings should be done by a joint team in which the head of the organisation, the architect and the librarians should be equal partners. If the concerned librarians are not qualified and experienced enough to provide library advice and help in planning and designing the library building, the authorities should employ a suitable librarian or a library consultant from outside the organisation. Unless this is done a functional library building can hardly be designed and con-

structed and ultimately the sufferers will be the users of the library. They will suffer for the faults of others.

The planning team would be responsible for generating the library building programme which generally contains: (1) statement of library history and organisation, (2) outline of library functions, (3) nature of users, (4) indication of amounts of fund available, (5) indication of architectural style required, (6) indication of space requirements for each function and activity.

SITE SELECTION

The third important factor concerns site selection. The library building should preferably be centrally located. This central position should be relative not only to the existing building but also to the anticipated academic and physical development in the years ahead. Easy access to the library from every nook and corner of the campus is the most essential requirement.

The Parry Committee Report of Great Britain recommended that no member of an institution should need to make an excessively long journey from his lecture room or laboratory to consult a book in the library. It was of the opinion that the decision on the library site should be governed

by the space available since the library is a rapidly developing institution and will speedily outgrow its original buildings. There must, therefore, be plenty of rooms for further expansion to accommodate the library in the foreseeable future, perhaps the next 50 years.

ENVIRONMENTS

The next important factor that must be considered is our local environment. The local environment of our country specially the rains and sun rays and other conditions that may cause problems should be considered.

LIGHTING AND AIR FLOW

The other important factors which must be considered are lighting and air flow inside the library buildings. The library illumination should be considered as an integral part of the architectural design. The provision of sufficient lighting and air flow inside the library building should be made at the outset in a building plan because alterations at a later stage will be too much expensive and difficult to make.

The lighting may be of two types, natural and artificial.

Natural Lights: Natural light is a very vital resource as well as an essential amenity specially in our country where electricity failure is frequent. The library building should be constructed in such a way so that maximum day light can be us-

ed. This can be done by long windows, glass walls, and transparent glasses where appropriate.

Artificial lights: The provision of sufficient artificial light and air flow should also be made as an integral part of the architectural design otherwise these cannot be done at a later stage. These facilities are required for convenient use of the library.

SECURITY

An important factor is security. There should be provision for one entrance and exit in the building for providing maximum security to the library materials as well as for saving cost of additional security staff that may be required if more than one entrance and exit are provided in the building.

INTERNAL STAIRCASES

There should be provision of an internal staircases in addition to the external ones and lifts for easy movement of users, books and other library materials within the library buildings.

If the above factors are taken into consideration at the time of planning and designing and if buildings are constructed accordingly it will be a good functional library building suitable for providing efficient and quality library services. The sooner it is done the better for library users.

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