



# THE MADRAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

*Founded in 1928*

16, Karpagambal Nagar, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004

## MALA NEWSLETTER

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*Platinum Jubilee Year 2002 - 2003*

### EDITOR'S COLUMN

Public Libraries in the West are eulogised in the best of terms. They are variously called the 'people's libraries' and the 'poorman's universities'. They richly deserve these tributes. The resources they have and the services they offer justify the veneration they are held in. They also change their policies, priorities and strategies as the changing times require. They spearhead the Information Society movement. Realising their importance in social, economic, political and cultural fields, the government helps them in all possible ways. In Britain for example, the People's Library project (a countrywide network of public libraries) has been receiving grants in several millions of pounds periodically, for upgrading the equipment, for resources, and for staff training. At the community level, the libraries are 'owned' by the public. Users support and encourage their libraries in whatever ways they can. In the US, for example, the 'Friends of Libraries' movement is very strong.

In stark contrast, the 3-day national seminar on the Role of Public Libraries in Rural Development that the MALA, the Pennington Public library and the Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation jointly organized in Srivilliputhur recently brought forth a pathetic picture of public libraries in India. Despite invitations having been sent to many State Directorates of Public Libraries, there were hardly any public librarians participating in the seminar. The papers presented for discussion, do not inspire confidence in the future of public libraries in India. What does this mean?

Are the public libraries in India 'owned' by any and if so, who are they owned by? - the local governing bodies, the State Govt., the Central Govt., or the public at large? Going merely by their name, and convention, they belong to the public.

Do the public realize they are the proud owners of this great wealth? In many cases, the local bodies collect library cess which cumulatively comes to a sizable amount of money. As per the Act, they are expected to pass this money to the State Govt. coffers. What happens to this money then? Stories abound. Either the money is diverted to non-library purposes or it just remains idle or even worse, funds are misappropriated. The libraries are put in charge of some bureaucrat whose attitude towards them is, at the best, indifferent. 12 out of 28 States and 7 Union Territories have library legislation on their statute books. Does an

Act really make a difference? As far as the Union Govt. is concerned, it remains a mute spectator and the public libraries remain orphans.

In the present circumstances, it is not realistic to expect the whole landscape of India to be dotted with ideal public libraries. Is it? One can easily detect a long litany of lapses. To recall just a few glaring ones, firstly, as was pointed out earlier either the libraries are starved of funds or where funds are no problem, they are not used properly. Secondly, the great majority of the so called libraries are no different from newspaper reading rooms. Thirdly, they are ill-housed and ill-stocked and lastly, what takes the cake is that the majority of staff are ill-equipped for the intellectual job they are expected to perform. Even in a State like Tamilnadu, with the earliest of the Acts, we hear the most horrendous things like the illiterate or semi-literate security staff running some of the libraries particularly in rural and semi urban areas.

Reading the success stories of the public libraries elsewhere, celebrities, while inaugurating seminars and work shops, talk glibly about the virtues of reading books and using libraries (eg. a room without books is like a body without soul) and they never bother to critically look into the real state of affairs at home. Most of the users of the substandard service are happy with whatever is dished out to them by the ill-motivated staff running the libraries. Is there light at the end of the tunnel?

Some experts believe that like education, libraries should be shifted to the Concurrent List under the Indian Constitution and the Union Govt. should give funds directly to the libraries as the UGC does. Is this feasible and realistic in the present circumstances? Will the IT with the networking capabilities provide the required mantra? Does our professional leadership have the required imagination? Public Libraries do touch every aspect of the individual's life in a democratic society. A vibrant, countrywide public library system is the sine qua non for the development of the society. Who will bell the cat? In the land that produced Ranganathan, we bicker among ourselves on trivialities, showing no sense of commitment to social causes and are obsessed with salaries and service conditions. As a great general was once reported to have quipped, "I saw the enemy; it is us"! So, unless we librarians change, our public libraries will remain as they are.

- K. Sankaraiah

## NEWS DESK

### New Members

#### Life

- Dr. V. Chandrakumar, Lecturer, Dept. of Lib & Inf. Sc., University of Madras
- Mr. Vibha, K, Index Asst. The Hindu
- Ms. Sujatha D, Index Asst. The Hindu
- Mr. Ravikumar S, Index Asst. The Hindu
- Mr. Suresh P, Library Officer, CSIR, Chennai
- Mr. Senthilkumar P, Asst. Librarian, ICRI Spices Board, Myladumpara, Kerala
- Ms. Sujatha, P.L, Asst. Librarian, Bioinformatics Center, Madras Veterinary College, Chennai
- Mr. R. Venkata Kesavan, Manager, Lib. & Info. Services, British Council, Chennai.

#### Individual (Annual)

- Mr. Migmar Dorjee, (Msc.) Lib. Sc., University of Madras, Chennai

### MALA Celebrates Librarians' Day

The 75 - years old Madras Library Association (MALA), in collaboration with Higginbothams, the well known books – chain shop organized the Librarians' Day, Dr. S.R. Ranganathan's 110<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary on 30 August 2002. (The year 2002-2003 is MALA's Platinum Jubilee year and as part of the celebrations, a series of programmes is being planned and organized). The Chief Guest was Prof. V.K. Natraj, Director, Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS). He spoke on the subject, appropriately entitled for the occasion, "From too little to too much : Information Revolution". He brought in, in the course of an hour's talk, attended by about 70 librarians, in the Orient Longman's large auditorium, many important dimensions to information, starting from the often quoted 'information is power' to information asymmetry. Important points raised and very convincingly answered were (a) is all the information, peddled from a myriad sources useful? (b) although we are constantly exposed to a plethora of information, do we require it all? (c) information acquisition can be intentional or accidental (d) information is the basis of all choice (e) in the case of right to information, is it possible to make the information transparent to the degree where it is meaningful (f) information can be a powerful tool to awaken people to action (g) who conveys the information is as important as the quality of information in that its acquisition is expected to cause some change in the recipient and some readjustment to his thinking, behaviour and attitude. He also said that computer is no substitute for thinking. The function began with K. Sankaraiah, President, MALA welcoming the gathering and ended with Dr. R. Samyuktha, Secretary proposing vote of thanks. Prof. K.S. Raghavan, a personal friend of the Chief Guest introduced Prof. Natraj.

## Executive Committee Meeting

### Platinum Jubilee

At the EC meeting held on 13 Sept. 2002, some important decisions were taken unanimously. One was pertaining to the MALA Platinum Jubilee Celebration.

### Human Resources for the digital era

A major event to mark the climax of the year – round celebrations is a 2-day national seminar, provisionally fixed for 30 - 31 Jan. 2003 in Chennai. The title of the seminar, suggested by Prof. K.S. Raghavan and unanimously agreed by the Committee is "Human Resources for the Digital Era". The plan is to organize it in an appropriate manner, with sponsorship or help by organizations with objectives similar to those of MALA. All members are requested to take active interest in this event.

### Rationalising Membership fee structure

The existing membership fees were fixed many years ago and are considered too low in the light of increasing costs and in relation to fees in similar professional bodies. It was therefore decided that with effect from 1 Jan. 2003, the new fees will be as follows.

	<i>Present</i>	<i>New</i>
Individual annual membership	Rs. 50	Rs. 100
Individual life membership	Rs. 300	Rs. 500
Institutional membership (one time payment)		Rs. 3000

(There will be no annual Institutional membership from 1.1.2003)

### The Role of Public Libraries in Rural Development

A 3-day National Seminar on the Role of Public Libraries in Rural Development was jointly organized by the Madras Library Association (MALA) Chennai and the Pennington Public Library, between 16 and 18 August 2002 at the library premises in Srivilliputhur. The seminar was co-sponsored by the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRFL), Kolkata. The Seminar was formally inaugurated by Honourable Justice S. Mohan, Supreme Court Judge (Retd). Dr. N. Markandan, former Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute (Deemed University) delivered the keynote address. K. Sankaraiah, President, Madras Library Association spoke about the seminar, its background, objectives and how it aimed to achieve them. While Justice Mohan extolled the virtues of libraries especially the Pennington Public Library and emphasized the need for developing the reading habit, the former VC stressed the need for rural development in India. About 50 registered delegates participated in the seminar which was divided into 5 sessions, the last of which was converted into an Open House. Each presentation was followed by discussion and even some non-librarians present in the audience took active part in the proceedings. The Open House witnessed animated discussion on the fact that there are, besides the public libraries, information disseminating agencies at the district level eg. District Industrial Centres, but sadly, there was no co-ordination amongst them. Open House was followed, after a half an hour break, by the

Valedictory Function, chaired by Dr. G. Palanidurai, Head of the Dept. of Rural Sociology, Gandhigram Rural Institute. Valedictory address was delivered by K. Sankaraiah, in which he highlighted the facts that

- 1 as of now, the public libraries are illequipped, in terms of staff, stock and infrastructure, to face the new challenges thrown up by the technology
- 2 most rural people are illiterate, poor and ignorant and so do not know what to expect from public libraries and
- 3 upgrading these two important elements to the international levels is the biggest challenge to the library profession and the Govt. Information and Communication Technologies have the potential to bridge the digital divide as well as the gap between the masses on one side and the libraries on the other. In fact, experiments are going on, mostly by the NGOs or self-motivated individuals, in some pockets in rural India. eg. Pondicherry Information Villages, AP Internet Kiosks project etc. to make the rural people information-conscious as well as effective information users, thus making them self reliant in the use of information. Could these isolated experiments be rapidly extended to the whole country by the Govt. which swears by "IT for all by 2008?"

Dr. R. Samyuktha, Secretary, MALA, who was the Rapporteur-General presented a comprehensive and accurate report on the proceedings of the entire seminar. Mr. M. K. Jagadish, Director, American Information Resources Center, Chennai, read out the recommendations which were adopted unanimously by the delegates. The recommendations, eleven in number, covered action points on issues like strengthening the countrywide public library system, role of NGOs in disseminating developmental information with a special focus on women as target audience, training for library staff, cooperation between the public libraries and the other information-providing agencies at the local level, etc.

## LOCAL

### Emerging Technologies for Effective Management of Library Services

Central Library, IIT Madras organized, in collaboration with the DELNET, New Delhi, a training programme entitled "Emerging Technologies for Effective Management of Library Services" for LIS Professionals, during 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> September 2002. Prof. M.S. Ananth, Director, IIT Madras inaugurated the Programme. Prof. S.Narayanan, Dean, Academic Research addressed the valedictory function and distributed certificates to the participants.

## NATIONAL

### Bridging the Digital Divide

Developing Library Network (New Delhi) DELNET and Cochin University of Science & Technology (Kochi) CUSAT organized the 5<sup>th</sup> National Convention on Library

and Information Networking, NACLIN 2002 between 21 and 24 of October this year at CUSAT. This convention's theme was Bridging the Digital Divide.

The objective of NACLIN 2002 was to focus attention on the problem of Digital Divide. Participants had an opportunity to exchange their experiences and share their ideas by interacting with peers. The first two days were exclusively designed for conducting tutorials by experts on various topics on digital library and the Internet. The next two days were devoted to the theme of the National Convention : "Bridging the Digital Divide".

### Prof. Kaula Gold Medal 2001 to Alan Gilchrist

Prof. Kaula Endowment for Library and Information Science was formed on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1975, the birthday of Prof. P N Kaula. A gold medal named after him is being given to a distinguished Librarian annually. Alan Gilchrist UK has been selected for Prof. Kaula Gold Medal and Citation for the year 2001, in recognition of his outstanding services for the cause of Library and Information Science. Gilchrist is a leading Management Consultant and Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Information Scientists, editor of the Journal of Information Science, and an External Examiner to the M.A. in Information Management course at the University of Brighton. Considering his services in the LIS field, the Committee selected Alan Gilchrist for the honour. Arrangements are being made to present the award shortly.

### IASLIC National Seminar

Further to information, given under the same heading in our Newsletter dated (wrongly) Aug. 2002, more information is now available about the 20<sup>th</sup> IASLIC National Seminar.

Confirmed dates for the seminar are 27 – 30 Dec. 2002. The venue is Arts Auditorium. Punjabi University, Patiala,

*For more details, please contact*

#### Dr. Jagtar Singh

Organising Secretary

20, IASLIC National Seminar

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#### IASLIC Translation Service

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## INTERNATIONAL

### Child abuse through the Net

According to a news item in The Hindu of 11 Aug. 2002, the world's most friendly technology, the Internet, is turning out to be a parents' nightmare with paedophiles increasingly using it to seduce children by taking advantage of the hundreds of "chat rooms" available on the Web. Parents are advised not to leave the child alone with the computer as they are putting their kid to potential risk. It has been established that every one in five children who have unfettered access to the Internet visits a chat room and, one in 10 goes on to have a 'real' meeting with someone they have 'met' on the Net – often with disastrous consequences. A new term, "online grooming", has been coined by experts to define the phenomenon of Net child abuse. It starts with a paedophile going into a children's chat room, claiming to be a child himself and pretending to share their interests. Gradually, he gains their confidence and then 'lures' them to a meeting as seems to have happened with the two missing girls. So beware!

### Gender inequality removed

New South Wales (Australia) Industrial Relations Commissions (IRC) pronounced a ruling that from now on, librarians of all grades, irrespective of their sex, would be paid on par with other govt. employees. According to the landmark decision recently handed down, library workers have been under paid because their profession was dominated by women. According to the ruling by the full bench of the NSW IRC, hailed as one of the most significant pay equity decisions in the past 30 years, librarians would receive pay increases of upto 25% and the ruling may act as a benchmark for other departments. The IRC found the work of librarians, library technicians and activists as

historically under-valued because of their gender. It further said that "There has been significant increase in the last decade or so in the work, skills and responsibilities of such employees, that has not been properly taken into account in fixing their rates of pay. A case was launched to prove that a female worker was of the same worth as her male counterpart in a similar career. Although we in India have many inequities and inequalities, gender inequity is not, thankfully, one of them.

### e-books not well-received

As reported in the Times of India of 11 Aug. 2001 and quoted in Information Today and Tomorrow (ITT) a couple of years ago, a big hype was mounted by sections of IT professionals of e-books finally arriving and even replacing the traditional printed books. It was even predicted by an American Consultancy firm that by 2005, 10% of the book sales world be electronic. Publishers were worried about the easier violation of the copyright in the case of e-books and so enveloped their e-publications with encryptions to prevent transferring copying and printing. But the high expectations about the commercial success of e-books did not materialise. Apart from poor sales, there was keen competition for digitizing books, unleashing heated arguments among writers, readers, librarians and technologists over who should control electronic books. Publishers like Random House, Time Warner, Simon & Schuster and others who began to publish e-books are less enthusiastic now about the prospects of their products. Digitopia, a book first published in print form and later in electronic form warns the world about the false promises of the wired world. The electronic version of the book, according to its author, was never reviewed or promoted or not even downloaded. "My book is just dead," bemoans the author.



Courtesy : American Libraries, Oct. 2001

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