



THE MADRAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION [MALA]

Founded in 1928

16, Karpagambal Nagar, Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004.

JULY 2005

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 19 No. 3

EDITOR'S COLUMN

I was pleasantly surprised when the head of a leading library school had asked me if I would teach communication (Presentation skills in English) to the students of the PG programme in LIS. After I retired from service, I have started teaching spoken English for young adults. This proactive initiative of the professor triggered a few random thoughts in me, which I have put down below in the hope that these would be of some use to those who are in a position to influence decision-making.

Communication has now come to firmly occupy the centre stage in all fields, enterprises and professions. We wonder if this increased interest in communication has made any difference to our profession! Communication is used here in the restricted sense of articulation and presentation skills in English. The immediate provocation for this anguish was what was seen at a well organised national seminar held recently, on a subject which was of primary interest to the LIS profession. Like many of the seminars organised by and for LIS professionals, a large number (some would even say far too many) of papers were received for presentation. But when the curtain rose and authors' names were called out nearly half of them were conspicuous by their absence. This was the first disappointment. More was to follow. Barring a few exceptions, authors were unable to present their views in a way that would keep the attention of the audience and to keep to the time. Something not to overlook is that many of the authors hold doctoral degrees!

How do we compare with the other and more well established professions like engineering and medicine? Reports suggest that by and large, they fare better. What is the secret of their success? The longer duration of these courses (although at the U.G level) may have something to do with it. They have a much stronger tradition of interaction, through the medium of English, among themselves. It is also a fact that these professional courses attract brighter students. Moreover do the organisers exercise quality control even at the stage of acceptance of papers for presentation? This filter can certainly result in more time being available for the really good papers, which, in turn will lead to better exchange of views. So, what is wrong? Does this far-from-the-satisfactory presentation of many papers at LIS seminars lead us back to the original surmise that librarianship is still the last resort of the mediocre? But the real answer to the basic problem of our inability to communicate well lies elsewhere. Communication being so important,

library schools should include this in the core curriculum which is not the case now. We understand in the tertiary level educational institutions abroad students have to go through a rigorous training in presentation skills. Nearer home, DRTC in its courses makes students go through the grind of presenting papers, something worthwhile for other library schools to emulate.

We are, let us be clear, not talking here about creating orators in the Churchillian mould - only professionals who can present their ideas in a simple and clear cut way. We cannot simply ignore the stage fright factor either. The old adage that action speaks louder than words is passe. Often a right word spoken in the right way at the right time is more effective than a whole lot of action. Librarians are in the business of communication. We cannot therefore afford to lack in these basic skills. If we don't have this vital skill, how do we interact with our customers; how do we present our cases for resources to our bosses and finally how do we project a positive image of our profession to the community at large. Our inability to articulate is perhaps the main reason why society does not take us seriously and why we don't get from the society what we legitimately deserve. In an academic setup, librarians perform roles similar to those of the faculty. But, when it comes to according salary and status, the authorities treat librarians on par, not with academics, but with physical instructors!

How do we change this poor image? Some of our problems stem from the simple fact that we are unable to speak up. This is our problem and only we should try to find a solution ourselves. So, the first and foremost thing for us to do to is to train ourselves in the art and technique of speaking without fear. Only then, others will sit up and take note of us. There is the most archaic and unacceptable case of librarians still being penalised for loss of books in their libraries in spite of the existence of GOs doing away with this out-dated practice. Many of us merely succumb to threats. Should we not stand up and protest that policing does not go well with providing an intellectual service. R.K.Narayan has once argued our case most convincingly. Courage of conviction is the starting point for good communication. Extensive reading, acquisition of general knowledge and taking advantage of every opportunity to talk to people are some of the ways to improve our articulation and assertion skills. Easier said than done! Is there an alternative?

K. Sankaraiah

NEWS DESK

New Life Members

Arun Sowmya Narayn, Archives Officer, HSBC.

Vaishnavi Narayn, Information Officer, TCS.

New Office Bearers

At the AGM held on 24 July 2005, the following members were elected / re-elected for a 2 year term.

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The editors would like to congratulate the newly elected office bearers and wish the comparatively young team a successful tenure of office. We would like to see MALA reaching greater heights of fame under the new dispensation.

About Our Members

R.Rathinasabapati

Congratulations to R.Rathinasabapathi, Librarian of the Tuberculosis Research Centre (TRC) Chennai, on being selected for this year's Fulbright professional fellowship in information science and technology. The award is for a 6-month period of attachment to Rice University, Houston, Texas, beginning 15 September 2005. The subject of his choice at Rice University is "Digital Techniques for Information Science". He will work to gain experience in developing an open access (OA) repository of information on T.B. We wish him all the very best.

L.R. Gowri

MALA's new Secretary LR Gowri, Reference Librarian at

American Information Resources Centre (AIRC), Chennai has just returned to post after being in the US on staff training between 4 and 29 June 2005. A highlight of her visit was her participation in the 129th American Library Association (ALA) annual conference between 23rd and 28th June. She also visited the Library of Congress, National Archives, Arlington Public Library and Richland County Library. The last leg of her tour was a visit to Europe.

IN MEMORIAM

T.B.Rajashekhar 1954-2005

MALA Newsletter records with profound regret the death in a road accident on 3 June 2005 of Dr.T.B.Rajashekar, Associate Chairman, National Centre for Science Information (NCSI) at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. In a little more than 50 years, he contributed enormously to the LIS profession in India, particularly in the post-Ranganathan period. Raja, as he was affectionately called by his close associates, was the first to create a digital library in India. In early 80's he started a current awareness service based on Chemical Abstracts (CA) for scientists and researchers in India and a few neighbouring countries. He also started an 18 month training programme in information and knowledge management at NCSI. He was also the first in India for starting an open access (OA) interoperable institutional repository, which at the time of his death had about 2000 papers. He moderated from 1994 till his death, the LIS-Forum, a news group for LIS professionals. He participated in many events organised by the MALA. He was sincere and dedicated to the cause he took up. He served on several regional and national committees. The untimely death takes away from us a highly promising life. M ALA Newsletter expresses its deeply felt condolences to Raja's family and his innumerable friends and admirers across the country and beyond.

LOCAL

Roja Muthiah Research Library in new home

G.Sundar, Director, Roja Muthiah Research Library (RMRL) writes :The RMRL, a project of Roja Muthiah Research Library Trust and University of Chicago has moved to a more central location for easier access

to scholars. Its landlord is the Local Library Authority. The shifting operation took place in April 2005 and the library has started functioning in the new premises from May 2005. The new address is 3rd cross road, CPT Campus, Taramani, Chennai - 600 113. Phone : (044) 2254 2552, email : rmrl@dataone.in RMRL holds nearly 150000 imprints and rare audio material related to South Indian studies. The collection consists of works of indigenous medicine, classical and medieval literature, folklore and popular arts such as cinema, drama and ballads. In addition, there are rich holdings of oleolithographs from Ravi Varma's works, collection of clippings, drama notices, wedding invitations, business and family correspondence. The collection spans over 200 years, the earliest being a Tamil work titled Kantar Antati, published in 1804. This collection contains price-less source material for scholars studying people and society. For more information about RMRL visit :

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/southasia/about-rmrl.html>

Madras University e-network

According to newspaper reports a 7-year old project was all set to become operational, at the beginning of Aug 2005. After years of planning, the four campuses of the Madras University, Marina, Chepauk, Guindy, Taramani are ready to be networked by optic fibre cable. It is a boon to the staff and the students. It also forms the intranet backbone to improve the University's academic research and administrative capability. Each campus would have dedicated Internet kiosks, University authorities claim. Some basic regulation processes are being presently worked out.

NATIONAL

People's PC

Attempts have been on for sometime now to produce a home PC which common people can afford. Anand Parthasarathy, a well known columnist, in his report in the Hindu of 24 April 2005, draws attention to a PC priced at less than Rs.10,000. A Kolkata-based company by name Zenitis, has produced it in collaboration with a Chinese firm producing peripherals. The company is involved in aggressive marketing under different local brand names like Amar PC (Bengali) Apna PC (Hindi), Amchi PC (Marathi) Namma PC (Tamil). Zenitis is settingup manufacturing units in different regions, It is hoped that a workable PC will soon be within the reach of the aam admi in the market and that similar attempts by other firms will follow soon.

IASLIC CONFERENCE 2005

Dr. Harish Chandra, Librarian, IITM, Chennai deserves to be congratulated for achieving a coup of sorts in successfully persuading the Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC) to hold the 25th All India Conference of the IASLIC on his turf. The Conference dates are 26-29 Dec 2005. The main theme is LIS profession in India: Vision for 2010. Among the subthemes are i. Strategic Planning and implementation ii. Universal availability of publications iii. Internet and its future iv. Digital Library Resources Management v. Knowledge Management in digital environment vi. National LIS Policy vii. LIS Education and Research viii. Professional Associations and Professional Ethics. As usual, special interest group meetings will be held along with the conference. Full papers with abstracts on diskettes in MS word should be submitted by 16 Aug 2005. Further correspondence regarding papers may be addressed to the :

Hon. General Secretary
IASLIC
P-291, Scheme No. 6M
Kankurgachi
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INTERNATIONAL

US Public Libraries protest FBI surveillance

According to Guardian Newspapers Ltd. 2005, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is trying to zero in on library users who borrow books or seek information on Osama Bin Laden. More than 2000 requests are reported to have been made from public and academic libraries since the introduction of the Patriot Act, the legislation that has enhanced the government powers to investigate alleged terrorist activity after the attacks on 9/11 on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The power to subpoena library records is being fiercely resisted by the American Library Association (ALA) which rightly believes such enquiries could put people off reading certain books or subjects. Besides, this undue inquisitiveness is being perceived as infringement of civil liberties and has been the subject of debate in the Congress.

AACR3

Joint Steering Committee (JSC) has decided on a new working title, Resource Description and Access (RDA) rather than a new edition of AACR, with a different approach to accommodate rules for mixed and multimedia materials. For more details visit ;

<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/ysc/current.html>

ISBN Changes

The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is set to change from 10 to 13 digits from 1 January 2007. This is being done to increase the numbering capacity of ISBN system, owing to the increase in electronic publications and the resulting proliferation of editions and formats. This is to make ISBN totally compatible with EAN-13 used for other products and supply chains, to decide what and how ISBN is assigned to certain types of monographic publications eg. digital files, print-on-demand materials, discrete parts of monographic publications and to specify the authority to assign ISBN and the administration of ISBN system.

Information Society Index 2005

IDC, the US-based premier global provider of market intelligence advisory services and events for information technology telecommunications industry has been compiling since 1995, an Information Society Index (ISI) by analysing and forecasting the state of IT usage and adoption across 53 countries around the globe. It combines 15 variables in 4 infrastructure "Pillars" such as number of Pc households, internet use, social factors which support IT use etc., to calculate and rank each nation's ability to access and utilise information and IT. For the year 2005 Denmark had displaced Sweden in number 1 position and Sweden, US, Switzerland and Canada have taken the next 4 slots. Britain is among the first ten. India is among the lowest scoring developing countries, but is included in the 53.

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APPEAL

Of about 300 members of Mala, only about 100 are on the e-mala yahoo group. Among the remaining 200, there may be many having email ids. To facilitate easier communication, we appeal to all email id holders to join the e-mala group as soon as possible.

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