

Prof. Bimalendu Guha – the teacher extraordinaire



Writing the obituary of an LIS professional of our country is a difficult task as in most cases the biographical sketch of the person does not appear anywhere before his or her death. Fortunate are those whose festschrift volumes have been brought out. A good biographical sketch in most cases is available there. Attempts were made to bring out a festschrift volume in honour of Prof. Guha which never fructified. As a result, for writing this piece, I had to depend on Babu, his elder son; some documentary sources; and my talk with him on various occasions.

Bimalendu, son of Suresh Chandra and Binapani was born on 1st December 1926 at Bikrampur in Bengal (now Bangladesh). After completing his schooling at Raisina Bengali School, Mandir Marg, New Delhi, he graduated from Hindu College, Delhi, and completed M Lib Sc from the University of Delhi being one of the first batch M Lib Sc students of the University when S R Ranganathan was the Head of the Department. In fact, he was a direct disciple of Ranganathan.

He started his career at Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Calcutta as Senior Technical Assistant in 1950 and continued there till 1956. The story of his appointment at ISI goes like this. In 1950, P C Mahalanobis, FRS, the noted statistician and founder of ISI, called on Pt Jawaharlal Nehru, the then PM of India. During their discussion Mahalanobis told Nehru that he was looking for a good library professional for his library. Thereafter Pt. Nehru contacted S R Ranganathan and told him about Mahalanobis's requirement. Ranganathan promised a brilliant library professional for ISI and asked B Guha to see Mahalanobis. When Guha met him, Mahalanobis was exceedingly pleased talking to Guha and asked him to catch the next available train to Calcutta and join ISI. At ISI, besides library work, he had the opportunity to do jobs related to writing, editing, proof reading, book indexing and publishing.

While at ISI, Guha participated in an essay competition organized by the Indian Science News Association, on the subject 'Calculating Machines', the old name for computers. His essay won the Meghnad Saha Popular Science Prize and the paper was published in Science and Culture. The prize money was not a big amount, but the real benefit was a boost to his confidence in writing. More so, as it attracted the attention of the Founder Director of ISI, Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis, he called Guha to express his appreciation for his effort and was glad to know that he was making good use of the library collection. On his request Guha wrote another article on the same subject for the house organ of ISI.

One regular publication of ISI was the Annual Report with cumulative list of contributions of the ISI staff. This was a regular assignment that was usually done during a single night (composition of the matter, proof reading, printing, etc.) to be made available the next day for presentation at the Governing Body meeting. Guha was a part of the team.

Guha joined the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) in 1956 and served there till 1984 as Documentation Officer and subsequently as Scientist. Here he got the opportunity to compile and edit two regular bibliographical periodicals, i.e. INSDOC List – Current Scientific Literature (1954-1965); and Bibliography of Publications of South and Southeast Asia (1955-1964). Both these publications ceased as Indian Science Abstracts came into being in 1965. He also edited Annals of Library Science (-and Documentation) from 1973 to 1984. In addition, he edited and prepared indexes of a number of books from other institutions which were printed at INSDOC. He was also the editor of ILA Bulletin for two years. ILA Bulletin was a quarterly journal. During his editorship all the eight issues were brought out separately unlike other times when combined issues were the rule rather than the exception.

Ranganathan started an advanced course on documentation and reprography in 1963 at Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore. Several documentalists of INSDOC were sent to this course in its very first year. In 1964, B S Kesavan also started an advanced course on library science and documentation at INSDOC with T N Rajan as the Head. Guha was also drawn into this course. Rajan and Guha were the two pillars of the course. Guha, in his long career of 20 years in the Education and Training Division, never became the Head. He never complained

about it. In 1983 or 1984, the then Vice-Chancellor of Benares Hindu University (BHU), met Guha in a meeting and requested him to take charge of the Department of Library and Information Science, which at that time was not having any Head. Following this, he left INSDOC and joined BHU in 1984 as Professor of Library and Information Science and Head of the Department and remained there till the end of his teaching career in 1986. After his joining BHU, the authorities faced a problem about the payment of his salary. When the salary cheque came at the end of the first month, Guha refused to accept the salary saying that he was a government pensioner and could not draw two salaries from the same Government. Possibly, his salaries during his whole tenure were shown as donation to BHU. He donated not only at BHU but elsewhere also liberally. I have seen many instances of his honesty. In meetings, when we used to go together, he never used to fill in the TA form as I used to fill.

Guha contributed around 70 learned publications on LIS. His magnum opus Documentation and Information Service – Techniques and Systems drew the attention of all LIS professionals in the country and became very popular. Till this day this book on documentation is unsurpassed in the world in terms of content, coverage and quality. There is hardly any graduate or Master's degree holder in LIS in the country who has not read this book. He edited quiet a number of publications. Some of them are:

The festschrift volume brought out in honour of Dr. V. A. Kamath of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay, published by Allied Publishers, Delhi.

A report entitled A study on the language barrier in the production, dissemination and use of scientific and technical information with special reference to the problems of developing countries prepared in response to a request from UNESCO in 1985.

The voluminous Report of the National Forest Commission edited along with B. K. Sen.

Another great piece of work he did after his retirement is Indian Library Science Abstracts 1992-2010 (a IASLIC publication in three volumes). Of about 9000 abstracts contained in these volumes, Guha prepared around 7000 abstracts, classified all the 9000 abstracts according to Colon Classification (7th ed.), and assigned subject headings to all of them.

Apart from attending many conferences and seminars within the country, he attended the following outside the country: Training Course in Documentation Technique, (Tokyo 1970); 1st Symposium of Editors of Library Science, Documentation, and Archives Journals (Paris 1972); 2nd Symposium of Editors of Library Science, Documentation, and Archives Journals (Berlin 1978).

His writings betray his organized mind and utmost sincerity. He has written thousands of abstracts for Indian Library Science Abstracts. All these abstracts bears testimony to his beautiful handwriting which ranks among the best. Every letter in the writing is distinct and easily readable. Every line is straight even on plain paper. Even after scanning page after page one fails to find a word that has been struck through or rewritten. He used to say my first draft is my last draft.

According to his students, as a teacher he ranks amongst the best in the country. He was sincere, honest, soft-spoken, and his method of teaching extraordinary. Every lecture used to be well-structured and every concept crystal clear.

In his speaking, he was more than frugal. He never used to speak any word which was unnecessary. In meetings and get-togethers, he used to listen to heated discussions without opening his mouth. Only when he was asked, he spoke.

He was an active member of IASLIC, Bengal Library Association, Delhi Library Association, and Indian Association of Academic libraries.

Among the LIS teachers and LIS journal editors he ranked among the toppers in the country. It is difficult to estimate how many PhD theses he has evaluated. Whenever I visited his house I found a huge pile. More than often, he was invited to deliver lectures in various universities of the country. His presence was practically there in all departments of the profession. It is rather unfortunate that despite his being a very well-known figure in the profession, he died practically unsung without being honored by any national association or academic body in the country.

The greatest tragedy of his life struck him in 1977 when his wife Abha met with a fatal accident. He was left with only two of his young sons. Thereafter, it was practically a painful long-lingering lone journey. Despite the tragedy he performed his worldly duties with utmost sincerity. He married his both sons and saw that they are well-settled.

It is not at all surprising that in one of the saddest moments of his life he penned the following Obituary.

My Obituary!

**Oh Death! Where is thy sting,
Where is thy stern face?
I can dare ask you now.**

**Like all mortals with belief fix
Your name spelt fright,
Away from you was life.**

**Your inevitable silent tread
Did remove my dear one
Leaving me in tears.**

**I dared not look at your face
Accepted your wish as fate
Failed to see your grace.**

**Now age has brought me close
I can feel your grace
And glow in your face.**

**As my old belief changeth
I long to be closer to you,
For your warm embrace.**

10.5.1990.

His demise was but a silent one. He turned 92 on 1st December 2018 as a healthy individual. He could do all his household chores without anybody's help. In the afternoon of 21st January 2018 sitting at his residence at I-1609, C R Park, he first saw on TV, a football match between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, then the Bengali movie called Kuheli and thereafter he started seeing another football match. Sometime between 7 and 8 PM while seeing the match he left this world for good absolutely silently without giving anyone the slightest hint! Possibly death cannot be any better. Let the Great Soul rest in Peace in his heavenly abode forever.

B K Sen

Chairman, Bibliometric Expert Group, DST, Govt. of India.

Address for correspondence

80 Shivalik Apartments, Alaknanda, New Delhi – 110019