

Prof. S. Parthasarathy (1917–2021): Bhishma pitamah of LIS profession

Many enlightened personalities have opined – “Celebrate life in all its glory”.

Professor S. Parthasarathy (1917–2021) was one of the living legends in the library and information science (LIS) profession who celebrated his life with such completeness that he could observe his centenary celebration – a rare feat, especially at a time when the world is faced with overwhelming situations. Even as a centenarian, he participated in many scholarly and professional events, particularly those that related to his teacher and mentor, Dr. S. R. Ranganathan. Prof. Parthasarathy loved interacting with budding LIS students and young professionals and motivated them by sharing his rich experiences and knowledge.

Prof. Parthasarathy was born in Pondicherry (now Puducherry) on 23rd August 1917 to an educated Tamil family. His parents were involved in India’s freedom movement, and they took refuge in the then French colony, Pondicherry. His family was very close to the famous Tamil poet Subramania Bharati. His family was also associated with Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual journey in Pondicherry. So, during his younger days, he had an atmosphere of literature, culture, religion, and philosophy around him

Prof. Parthasarathy completed a B.A. degree in Economics from Presidency College in Madras. He also took the French language in his B.A. course. After completing his B.A., he joined Diploma in Library Science at the University of Madras, where Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (SRR) was the teacher. That Diploma course was designed by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan based upon his book, “The Five Laws of Library Science”. The course did not follow a frozen syllabus; everything would be the latest. This course taught Parthasarathy that tools are not important, but services are. After completing the Diploma course in 1941, he did three months apprenticeship under Dr. S.R. Ranganathan.

Prof. S. Parthasarathy began his career as a school librarian in Hindu High School in Madras and worked there during 1941-44. He then joined the Inspectorate of Military Explosives in Poona as a senior technical assistant and worked there till 1946. This was a research laboratory for all kinds of explosives, and he acquired expertise in scientific documentation, which vastly helped shape his future professional career.

He joined the University of Delhi Library as a senior technical assistant. He also got involved as a Lecturer in library science at the same University. As a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, he participated in research courses at the Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, in the United States during 1950-51. He also had extended visits to various technical libraries in the USA and the United Kingdom during the said period.

When Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) was set up in 1952, Parthasarathy joined INSDOC as Junior Documentation Officer in the same year. Eventually, he became the Head of INSDOC during 1961-63, and Scientist-in-Charge of INSDOC during 1969-77. He was one of the founder teachers of the Associateship in Documentation and Reprography course offered in INSDOC, later renamed as Associateship in Information Science. He was also instrumental in developing various popular scientific documentation services of INSDOC, subscribed by many academic and research institutions across India and abroad.

At INSDOC, Prof. Pathasarathy was associated with the development of S&T information infrastructure in the country. He was a member of several high-level committees of the Government of India, including the University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Standards Institution (ISI), National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT), National Committee on Science and Technology (NCST), besides many others. As a contributory member of different advisory committees, he recommended many changes in academic and research libraries and their manpower planning that would bring advancement and modernization of LIS services across the country.

Prof. Parthasarathy was also associated with several international and intergovernmental organizations, representing the country as a domain expert. His association with the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID), United Nations International Scientific Information System (UNISIST), and UNESCO’s General Information Programme (PGI) was well recorded. He was a council member of FID during

1970-75, and a member of different committees of FID during 1970-77. After superannuation from INSDOC, he undertook some missions with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and UNESCO to develop an Industrial Information Centre in Nigeria and establish a National Scientific and Technological Information Centre in Ethiopia. He also got himself associated with the Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore as a visiting professor. He helped them synchronize the curriculum of DRTC's Associateship in Documentation and Information Science (ADIS) with INSDOC's Associateship in Information Science (AIS). Both offered practice-oriented postgraduate training programmes in documentation and information science. The graduates of these courses became sought after in the industrial and research information sectors.

Prof. Parthasarathy was the Joint Editor of *Annals of Library Science and Documentation* (1955-64). He was also associated with *Library Science with a Slant to Documentation* (presently, *SRELS Journal of Information Management*), and *Information Studies* as an editorial adviser. He was also a regular contributor in these journals.

He passed away peacefully on 12th April 2021 in Hyderabad at the age of 104. Fondly called Bishma pitamah of the LIS profession, his acquaintances attributed his good health to a disciplined life, including a simple lifestyle, good food habits and active professional activities.

His contributions have been reminisced in a festschrift volume titled "Library and Information System: From Alexandrian Heritage to Social Networking (Essays in Honour of Prof. S. Parthasarathy)", edited by K.S. Raghavan and K.N. Prasad, published in 2009. He will be remembered not only by his students and colleagues but also by all LIS professionals working in the country.

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