

Obituary



Inder Vir Malhan (1954-2021): A Gentle Giant

It is to offer my sincere condolence to his family, friends, colleagues and students on the sudden demise of Professor Inder Vir Malhan on 26th of January 2021. Born in Sidhwan-Bet, a village in the Ludhiana District of Punjab, on 31 May 1954, in a Khatri landed family, InderVir had his schooling from the government school in his village. He graduated in Bioscience in the first division and wanted to pursue his career in genetics. On a piece of advice, he entered the library career as in those days jobs were easily available to trained and educated librarians. He completed his M.Lib.Sc. (earning a Gold Medal) from the Panjab University, Chandigarh in 1977 breaking all previous records--his academic credentials have always been more than excellent. But he never left his love for science and did his doctoral research in science communication. In his Ph.D. work (1986) under the guidance of a science librarian from BARC, Mumbai, he studied the resources and services of major science libraries and the information-seeking behaviors of scientists working in CSIR labs. It was a pioneering study, the first of its kind. After doing some odd jobs at Punjab University he entered fully in academic teaching and research at the University of Jammu in 1983. There, later, he headed the Department of Library and Information Science for more than a decade and also headed the University of Jammu Library System for a long time. He donned many a hat at Jammu University of several important positions such as Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Director, Academic Staff College. In 2011 he joined to head the newly founded

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department of library and Information science at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh. There he rose to many eminent positions such as of Dean, Academics and Dean, School of Mathematics, Computers and Information Science, in-charge Librarian of the University Library System of the Central University of Himachal Pradesh and de facto Pro-Vice-Chancellor. He superannuated from there on 31 May 2019 after a notable career of four decades of teaching, research, education administration, and policy formulation.

At the national level, he remained a member of the UGC expert committee set up for coordinating and vetting the development of model curricula for undergraduate studies in library and information science. Membership of the Research Advisory Board, DELNET was another feather in his cap. Being a member of the UGC National Committee on Electronic Theses and Dissertations he was made a member of the National Advisory Committee of eShodh Sindhu constituted by the MHRD, Govt. of India. As a topical coordinator for e-PG-Pathshala project and coordinator for the conversion of e-PG-Pathshala content to MOOCs he was instrumental in creating quality content for students and researchers. He did excellent work as a member of the committee to propose a draft Library Legislation for the then State of J&K. As the culminating glorious achievement he was elected unopposed President of the IATLIS for the term 2018-2020. During his term, with the help of Prof Jagtar Singh, IATLIS developed international ties. On his invitation, Dr. Alton Grizzle, Communication and Information Specialist, Unesco, Paris conducted a media and literacy workshop in India in addition to a few lectures at various online webinars.

From the very beginning, he was bitten by the research bug. His abandoned passion for research was contagious. When he himself was cutting his teeth in research in the early 1980s, he motivated many a library colleague to write and publish. On the formal research front, he had published 110 papers in Indian and foreign journals and conference volumes. He authored and edited 12 books published in India and abroad. He had visited fourteen countries to present papers and chair sessions at conferences. That is in addition to scores of invited lectures delivered in India and abroad as a resource person at refresher courses, workshops including workshops organized abroad by international bodies and professional associations such as UNESCO and IFLA. His works are cited in several Indian and foreign publications. Many bibliometric studies have rated him among the top

prolific LIS author in India. Despite so many administrative and teaching responsibilities he successfully supervised many Ph.D. and M.Phil Scholars to whom he was always available to freely give them his time and expertise without the formality of prior appointment. He was always approachable. He was associated with about a dozen professional journals published from India and abroad. Numerous well deserved awards and recognition came his way. There is no award instituted by any Indian library body which was not offered to him. A tally of his awards and honours is too long to mention here. He quietly loved and valued his awards as recognition of his hard work and professional contribution, but never trumpeted about them. However, a mention may be made of the IASL Leadership Development Grant, USA (1989) and Fulbright Fellowship in Library and Information Science (1996-97), nomination to Fellowship of the Society of Information Science (2006), and Kaula-Ranganathan Gold Medal(2006). Taking note of his vast, dedicated and excellent work as a teacher, researcher, and educational administrator the SRFLIS Council (www.srflisindia.org) conferred on him the Lifetime Achievement award 2018 in April 2019.

Being his proud student you truly can vouch for him that as a teacher he was innovative, informal, and friendly, never didactic or stern. His teaching was learner oriented than ramming down something the throat of students. Then the newly appointed teacher (1980) always came well prepared in the class to answer our queries. He always took a genuine interest in the learning and welfare of his students and helped them to reach their goals. Though the range of his conceptual knowledge and clarity of the subject was wide, but his favourite areas were networks and networking and IT applications with practical hands-on experience that he learned late during his Fulbright fellowship, 1996-1997. This eloquent speaker in his public lectures always spoke with facts and figures but never let his talk get dry. He was a master speaker on the economic and research implications of IT at the macro level. Knowledge Management was another area of his scholarship which he practiced both in practice and theory*. In the true spirit of KM, he believed a teacher has to learn continuously to make a ripple effect. So never hesitated to admit, like S. R. Ranganathan, that he always learned from his students. Age is no bar, he believed, in learning and acquiring new skills. Coincidentally his last lecture, presiding the alumni meet of his alma mater the Punjab University, Chandigarh, delivered virtually on 23rd January, just three days before his untimely death, is the testament of his life philosophy (https://youtu.be/N_W6A70zHuM). To quote partially: "Life is a collection

of your minutes. Make productive use of your time. Waiting for the good time, you will keep waiting. The right time is right now. Time management is life management. Experience and knowledge are more valuable than academic degrees. Failure is not the antonym of success, but its part. Never be bogged down by it. There is no substitute for hard work, nor any shortcut route to success. Nothing is small in life. We can achieve big by doing small things. ... Be human, be kind to all. Make a difference in somebody's life. Provide emotional first aid to the distressed. Honesty, empathy, and kindness pay in the long run. Enrich your life with good readings including spiritual literature... Above all, have confidence in yourself and follow your heart..." All this is exemplified by his life and living. Well, with all these he could have been a full-time professional motivational speaker.

As a person, he had an unswerving faith in God and his earthly gurus. His dietary choices were strictly vegetarian and never savored any intoxicant- he vehemently abhorred such things. In a wet company we used to tease him to taste a drop of somras which his revered gods also took in ancient times- lightly laughing it off, he never took it any offense. Always cool in temperament, no provocation will throw the always cool and soft-spoken professor in rage. But he was fond of good food-- a foodie, to reveal his secret. He would specially visit Amritsar and ask me to take him for lunch to a hundred-year-old ethnic Dhaba in the thick of the old city reachable only on foot where only traditional Amritsari cuisines are prepared in shudh desi ghee and equally traditional dessert is served to sweeten the mouth. His wish to visit me again for this very purpose will eternally remain a wish. Though he had the misplaced courtesy of not saying no to anyone yet could convey his message very subtly with whom he did not agree. Smiling face was always a wise counsel for his friends and family. The par excellent narrator of jokes and anecdotes had a gift of gab. The engaging table talker seemed to have inside knowledge of politics and national events. His middle-class upbringing in a simple rural environment ingrained in him down to earth life attitude. He was never pretentious and could be seen enjoying rustic fun in an informal and intimate company. His company was enjoyable where he regaled us with jokes and anecdotes imbued with rustic Punjabi fun. His declared and cherished values were "Honesty and integrity, politeness and respect for best viewpoint/practices, teamwork, compassion and humanism, hard work for excellence, continuous learning, and doing best possible in every situation"

He had completed most of his professional work, yet more was expected, and indeed coming from him in his retirement before the sudden death snatched a gem of a person from his family and profession. Indian library profession will have no other like him-knowledgeable, IT savvy, a facilitating and motivating teacher, accomplished speaker, having a remarkable capacity to take pains, willing to hold many high responsibilities at a time, unpretentious, pacifist, kind, and a thorough gentleman, above all.

*Perspectives on Knowledge Management by I V Malhan and K. Shivarama Rao (Editors). London ; Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008.

M P Satija, Honorary Professor
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Obituary



Dr Ashok Kumar Sharma

M.Sc. M L I Sc, PhD

Born: 09.08.1954

Died: 16.03.2021 in Meerut

Dr Ashok Kumar was educated in Ch. Charan Singh University, Meerut with a MSc degree in 1974 and University of Delhi with a MLISc in 1978. He subsequently gained PhD in 1986 from Meerut.

After a brilliant academic career, he entered the library profession as Librarian. From 1978-1990, he worked in the library at CSIR-National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi. Later in Feb 1990, he moved to CSIR-Structural Engineering Research Centre, Ghaziabad and served there as Head, Library till Dec 2002. From Jan 2003, he was in CSIR-Central Road Research Institute, New Delhi as Head, Library and retired in Aug 2014.

Dr Ashok Kumar was a very dedicated and true professional in the field of Library and Information Science. He always believed in team work and supporting his juniors and colleagues. He was closely associated with the activities of National Knowledge Resource Consortium of CSIR and member of various Negotiation Committees of the consortium.

We pay our homage to a creative mind and multi faceted personality.

Dr. Neera Aggarwal

HoD, Principal Technical Officer

Documentation & Library Service, CRRI, New Delhi

Dr Ashok Kumar was a hardworking and dedicated library professional who served NPL, SERC and CRRI and set an example of a best Librarian with human values and inspiration for others. I worked with him when he was Head of Library at SERC, Ghaziabad during 1990s. He was later transferred to CRRI.

He was a dedicated library professional, and always a source of inspiration. He has left behind a rich harvest of memories to cherish, honour and emulate. We offer condolences with heartfelt sympathies to the deceased family.

May the soul of the dearly departed rest in peace.

In reverence & remembrance

We - The Library Professionals, Friends and Colleagues

Mr. Ram Kumar
Senior Technical Director
Scientist F, NIC, New Delhi