

**Obituary**  
**Srirangapattanam Parthasarathy**  
**(1917-2021)**  
**A Tribute**

**K.S.RAGHAVAN\***



One of the founding fathers of Indian documentation services, S & T information systems and services, and a highly respected teacher, administrator, founder / mentor of many scientific and educational institutions, Professor S. Parthasarathy, passed away peacefully on 12th April 2021 at Hyderabad where he was living for the last few months with his daughter-in-law. He was a centenarian with an amazing spirit of youth and energy even at age 104! A man full of wisdom and vision, yet of great simplicity and an innate charm, Parthasarathy lived every minute of his long life. I am indeed fortunate to have known him since my student days in Delhi and worked very closely with him since 1977 after I joined the University of Madras and Parthasarathy retired from INSDOC and moved to Chennai (it was Madras, then). A close associate of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, Parthasarathy was a colossus, highly unassuming, full of love and passion for learning, sharp, incisive, articulate and bubbling with energy. He lived in his ancestral house in Chennai, a house that was hallowed by visits of greats like Mahatma Gandhi, C. Subramania Bharathi, Rt. Hon'ble V. Srinivasa Sastri and the like. Even at 100+ he cooked his food, washed his clothes, and politely declined offer of any assistance. At my request, he lectured to Master's students in LIS in Madras University on 'Industrial Information Systems & Services'. Since he was already 80+, the university regulations did not permit me to invite him as a guest faculty and pay an honorarium. After the series of lectures extending over 2 months, I offered to

---

\* Former Professor, DRTC; Former Dean (Academic), University of Madras; Member-Secretary, Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science; Vice-Chairman, Ranganathan Centre for Information Studies, Chennai

pay him a small amount (some of my colleagues in the department and even a few students were willing to contribute) as a token of our gratitude. He politely refused to accept!

Parthasarathy was a voracious reader and regularly visited the British Library, the American Center Library, and the Madras University Library. He kept himself up to date in the areas of IT, school education, and higher education by regularly browsing the Web for new developments and innovative ideas and would even take photocopies of useful and interesting articles for circulating to those who would benefit from them. His passion for Nanotechnology led to him to initiate a programme at the Hindu Educational Organisation (he was a member of the governing board of HEO) for induction of pupils into the area. He was, till the very end, associated with several institutions in Chennai - educational, social, cultural, professional, and religious. During my over four decades of association with Prof. Parthasarathy, I never found him coming late for a meeting or without thoroughly preparing for discussion on the agenda items. He was very articulate and would powerfully and convincingly put forward his own ideas and viewpoints.

With his passing the LIS profession has lost the 'Bheeshma Pitamaha' of the profession. The vacuum left by his passing cannot be easily filled.

**Early Years & Education:** S. Parthasarathy was born in Pondicherry on 23rd August 1917. His forefathers were from Mysore and during the regime of Tipu Sultan the entire community to which Parthasarathy belonged was persecuted and many in the community migrated to Madras (now Chennai) and made it their home. Even today we find many members of this community (known as Mandyam Iyengars) living in the Triplicane area of Chennai. Parthasarathy's father (Srinivasachariyar) was involved in freedom struggle and was a close friend of Sri C. Subramania Bharathi (Bharathiyar as he was fondly referred to), the great Tamil poet and a freedom fighter. Parthasarathy's father was publishing articles in Tamil to promote freedom movement and there was pressure from the British to close these. There was even an arrest warrant against his father by the British and this made them to move to Pondicherry (which was under French rule). In Pondicherry, the family was associated with Sri Aurobindo. Parthasarathy's parents were also deeply religious. Naturally, Parthasarathy was influenced by all these - his parents' involvement in freedom movement, Sri C. Subramania Bharathi's poetry and the religious atmosphere at home. Only after the First World War the family was given amnesty and they moved back to Madras. As a boy he was a lover of outdoor games and played cricket and hockey. In the 1930s his father joined Andhra University (Visakhapatnam) as a professor of French and Parthasarathy studied in the AVN College there. He was captain of the college

*Vol 59 No 2 June 2021*

cricket and hockey teams. Parthasarathy admits that he was not serious about studies until he joined the Presidency College, Madras. Parthasarathy majored in Economics with French as one of the languages. He says that an advertisement by the Indian Institute of Science for the position of a librarian (with an attractive salary of Rs.250/- per month) that he saw in the 'The Hindu' made him join the Library Science programme in Madras University after graduation where Dr. Ranganathan was a teacher.

**Professional Career:** On completing Library Science programme, Parthasarathy worked with Dr. Ranganathan in the University Library. His first official posting was as School Librarian at the Hindu Highschool in Madras. At that time Parthasarathy was closely working with Dr. Ranganathan in writing papers. Parthasarathy's next major professional assignment was in the Inspectorate of Military Explosives in Kirkee near Pune, where he worked as a supervisor in the information unit between 1944 and 1946. In 1946 he had an offer from the University of Delhi and moved to Delhi. Parthasarathy joined INSDOC in 1952 when it was started. He was one of the principal architects of INSDOC and was there from day one of the institution. He was there till he retired. Except for the five years during which Mr. B.S. Kesavan was the director of INSDOC, Parthasarathy was head of INSDOC for almost 25 years. His contributions as head of INSDOC stand out and vouch for his vision and clear understanding of the information needs of the Indian scientific community. The INSDOC List (which, unfortunately, was discontinued later and replaced by Indian Science Abstracts) was an outstanding example of this.

**Chronology of Professional Positions held:**

- Librarian, Hindu High School, Madras 1941-44
- Senior Technical Assistant, Inspectorate Military Explosives, Kirkee, Pune, 1944-46
- Senior Technical Assistant, Delhi University Library, 1946-52
- Lecturer in Library Science, University of Delhi, 1951-53
- Junior Documentation Officer, INSDOC, 1952-56
- Senior Documentation Officer, INSDOC, 1956-61
- Head, INSDOC, 1961-63
- Assistant Director, INSDOC, 1963-69
- Scientist-in-Charge, INSDOC, 1969-1977

**Work on Standards:** Dr. Ranganathan was associated with the Indian Standards Institution (Now, Bureau of Indian Standards) almost from the beginning and one of the earliest subcommittees constituted by ISI was the one on Documentation of which Dr. Ranganathan was chairman and

Parthasarathy was a member (even when he was still in the University of Delhi). The standards that were brought out by this subcommittee covered Indian Standards for Bibliographical References, Library Furniture and Buildings, Glossaries, Layout of Periodicals, etc. (Later, Parthasarathy even served as Chairman of the Documentation Subcommittee of ISI).

Work as a Member of UGC Committee: Parthasarathy was a member of the UGC Committee on University Libraries that was charged with the responsibility of preparing a detailed report and an action plan for the development of university libraries in the country. As a member of this committee, he visited several universities.

Contributions to Building Information Systems and Services in India: Parthasarathy can certainly be called as one of the founding fathers of Indian documentation services. In 1961 he organized the UNESCO Seminar on Scientific Documentation for Asia at INSDOC. He prepared the Five-Year plans for development of INSDOC and was largely responsible for:

- Setting up an INSDOC Regional Centre at Bangalore;
- Instituting a Training programme in Documentation & Reprography;
- Developing a plan for Translation Programme in collaboration with US National Science Foundation;
- Member of the Working Group to plan the setting up of Data library and documentation centre for ICSSR;
- Member of a various working groups for development of Information Systems in different domains (E.g., Marine Data; Civil Engineering; Steel Industry, etc);
- Member of the Advisory Committee for NISSAT set up by DST, Government of India; he was one of the principal architects of the National Information System for Science & Technology; Also on various advisory committees for sectoral centres set up under NISSAT

Parthasarathy was involved in many projects sponsored by both national and international organizations: The Directory of Scientific Institutions in India (UNESCO Project), Information facilities relating to new renewable energy resources (UNESCO Project), MEDLARS programme of National Informatics Centre, SDI Services based on Chemical Abstracts (using CAN-SDI software on the IBM 370 machine at IIT Madras), the DST demonstration programme of online access to databases at TIFR, Mumbai (with support from the European Space Agency), to mention a few.

Work for International Organizations: Parthasarathy represented INSDOC on the FID Council and was also a member of the FID Commission for Asia and Oceania. He served as an expert for international organizations including UNESCO and UNIDO.

- Expert Member in Documentation at the Industrial Development Centre for Arab States, Cairo;
- UNESCO Expert in scientific information in Ethiopia to formulate a national science policy;
- UNIDO Senior Expert in industrial information at the Federal Industrial Research Institute, Lagos, Nigeria.

Parthasarathy visited many countries on mission / invitation and to participate in international conferences and meetings and has left his footprints in practically every meeting that he attended. He has published many papers - journal articles, conference papers, book chapters. His papers, 'A Grammar of Depth Classification' (Annals, 1958), 'Faceted Classification as an Approach to Machine Coding' presented at the Western Reserve University Conference organized by Jesse Shera (1960), his review of the Elsinore Conference on Classification Research (Annals, 1965) are testimonies to his scholarship and depth of understanding.

Support to Cultural, Social and Religious Organizations: Parthasarathy was actively involved in and supported several cultural, social and religious institutions. To mention a few:

- Hindu Educational Organization (that manages a 150-year-old school and 2 other schools affiliated to CBSE);
- Sri SaraswathiBhandaram Committee (for propagating Sri Vaishnava philosophy and managing a temple (AmmajiMandir) at Ayodhya;
- BharatiPasarai (for popularising the thoughts of Bharatiyar); Also served as its president from 1985 to 1995;
- Pradhan Tirumala Rao Trust (for providing assistance to temples);
- Veda Vedanta Vardini (for promotion of Vedas and Upanishads);
- YadugiriAmmal Trust (for assisting the needy);
- Madras Book Club;
- Parthasarathy Swami Sabha for promoting classical music, dance and drama;
- MOP Charities and member of Governing Council, MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai.

Awards and Membership of Professional Bodies: Parthasarathy was a recipient of Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in 1950-51 for advanced studies in librarianship and for observing scientific and industrial libraries in

the USA. In 1974 he was elected a Fellow of the Indian Standards Institution for services rendered to the field of documentation standards. Recognising his long and distinguished service to the field of Library & Information Science, ILA made him an honorary Fellow of the Indian Library Association. He was also elected as a Fellow of the Society for Information Science. During its Golden Jubilee year (2005-2006) IASLIC honoured him with a citation. He was a life member of ILA, IASLIC, SIS, MALA and, until a couple of years back, attended without fail, the annual conferences of these bodies. In 1991-92, the LIS community in India (and around the world) celebrated the birth centenary of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan. The ILA naturally wanted to have its Annual Conference in Chennai. Prof. Parthasarathy asked me to take up the responsibility (even though I was very reluctant knowing the limited resources I had in Madras University). Parthasarathy presided over the conference and under his guidance and direction we planned the conference volume and the programme. Even today, if the ILA Madras conference (1991) stands apart in terms of quality of the papers and deliberations, it is largely due to the guidance of Parthasarathy. In 2017 SRELS and RCIS in association with IIT Madras and Informatics (India) organized an international conference, "Revisiting Ranganathan" as part of the 125th birth anniversary of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan. Parthasarathy (who was already 100+) attended every session, lecture, workshop, and cultural programme and was an active participant in the discussions and deliberations in every session. Parthasarathy was a trustee of the Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science (SRELS) and a founder-trustee of the Ranganathan Centre for Information Studies, Chennai (RCIS). I have been Secretary of MALA, Member-Secretary of SRELS and Secretary (and, more recently, Vice-Chairman) of RCIS. In all these bodies I had the opportunity to closely work with, observe and learn from Professor Parthasarathy. That he was dedicated to the cause of library science could be judged from the observation made by Sri R. Yogeshwar, Ranganathan's son: "He (Parthasarathy) used to be at our home in Sami Pillai Street (Madras) almost every morning, working in the office room upstairs, while I was just waking up in the hall adjacent."

Verse 391 of the great Tamil classic, Thirukkural says:

*'Lore worth learning learn flawlessly [and]  
Live by that learning thoroughly'.*

Prof. Parthasarathy lived by this throughout his long life. As one of his close friends, Sri B. S. Raghavan, I.A.S. (Former Secretary, Government of India) put it:

*"We will not see another like him in the foreseeable future. His life is to be celebrated as that of a renaissance person who lived life to the full in a spirit of NEVER SAY DIE".*

**Professor (K. S. Raghavan)**

Dean (Academic) (Retd.) University of Madras  
Professor (Retd.) DRTC, Indian Statistical Institute

The following professionals passed away due to Covid- 19. May their soul rest in peace. We pray God to give strength to their families to bear the irreparable loss.

1. Shri Lakhan Singh (born in 1935) batch 1958-59). He retired as Librarian and Scientist 'F' from DRDO-Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Service, New Delhi. Late Shri Lakhan Singh was the father of Shri Ashok Kumar, who also retired as Scientist 'G' from DRDO.
2. Dr. S Majumdar (born in 1948, batch 1979-80), was a rank holder alumnus of the department who received a gold medal for securing the highest marks at MLISc. After serving as Deputy Librarian at Indian Institute of Public Administration, Director of Central Secretariat Library and JNU. He retired in 2011 as Librarian from Delhi University Library System. After superannuation, he also served as Librarian at India International Centre (IIC).
3. Dr. Om Prakash Hooda (born in 1949, batch 1988-89). He retired as Librarian from Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi.
4. Dr. KK Taneja (born in 1950, batch 1975-76). He retired from Delhi University Library System
5. Dr. Ashok Kumar Sharma (born in 1954, batch 1977-78). He retired as Head Library & Scientist 'F' from CSIR-Central Road Research Institute.
6. Mr. Puneet Kumar Chhabra. Technical Officer 'A', DESIDOC, DRDO.
7. Shri. Virender Kumar Jain (born in 1955, batch 1986-87). He retired from Delhi University Library System.
8. Mr. Zarafat Khan (born in 1970, batch 1994-1996). He was working at the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi.
9. Ms. Priya Singh (born in 1981, batch 2004-2006). She was working in the Media House at NOIDA Centre.
10. Prof. A. Amudhavalli, Former Head, DLIS, University of Madras (some sources claimed due to heart attack also)
11. Prof. Y. P. Dubey, DLIS, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.
12. Dr. Surya Nath Singh, Librarian, IIVR Pune.
13. Dr. B. Ravi, Librarian, University of Hyderabad.
14. Dr. H. Anil Kumar, Librarian, IIM Ahmedabad.
15. Prof. I. V. Malhan, Former Head, DLIS, CUHP.
16. Dr. Bhooshan Lal, Former Librarian, IIT Kanpur.

*LIBRARY HERALD*