Editorial

Indian LIS periodicals

Library Miscellany was the first LIS periodical from India. It started in 1912 and continued till 1920. From 1912 to 2014 nearly 200 periodicals appeared in India and about half of them have already perished. *Granthalaya Sarvaswamu*, a bilingual periodical (English and Telugu) of Andhra Pradesh Library Association is the oldest surviving LIS periodical from India. It started in 1915 and continues till date. The growth in the number of periodicals picked up after independence and continued more or less steadily. The 21st century witnessed a spurt in the growth inasmuch as 21 periodicals started during the first decade of the century and 60 periodicals during 2011-2014! However bright these figures may be, it has the dark side as well. Despite so many journals, none has become worthy of coverage by *Web of Science*. Only two journals are covered by *Scopus* and four by *LISA*. The numbers are undeniably shameful. Let us try to dig deeper to unearth the maladies afflicting our LIS periodicals.

What is the total number of *active* LIS periodicals being produced from India now might be a common question among the LIS professionals. However, the answer is elusive. Within the compass of this editorial, an *active* periodical may be defined as the periodical which has brought out at least one issue in the year 2013. For example, *Advances in Library and Information Science* brought out by North Bengal University is not an active periodical as it did not publish any issue after 2011. Similar is the case with *Journal of the Indian Library Association* (formerly *ILA Bulletin*). The article by Dutta and Sen[1] portrays the total scenario of Indian LIS periodicals living and dead. As 83 periodicals were started during 2001 – 2014, it is believed that most of them are alive till date. Of the remaining 100-odd periodicals definitely more than 20 are alive. Hence the total number of live Indian LIS journals may be assumed as more than 100.

There is a problem in accessibility of the Indian LIS journals. No single library in the country acquires all these. The acquisition of all the Delhi libraries taken together does not solve the problem either. Hence, it is not possible to pass any remark on the quality of the new crop. If National Library or the National Science Library can procure all the journals, only then it will be possible to access and use the journals, and pass judgment about their quality.

Studies by Garg and Bebi[2], Patra[3], and Sen[4] indicate that *Annals of Library and Information Studies, COLLNET Journal of Scientometrics and Information Management, DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology, IASLIC Bulletin, Information Studies, Library Herald, SRELS Journal of Information Management* are our top journals. Of these journals *Annals of Library and Information Studies* and *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology* are being covered by Scopus database. I feel days are not too far when one or more of these journals will be covered by *Web of Science* as well. Some other journals are also showing promise to occupy the top positions. They are: *International Journal of Library and Information Science, Pearl*, and others.

The *Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science* started publication only in 1996 is being covered by *Web of Science* and many other databases for a decade or so. Considering this, our failures look awful. Let us enumerate the causes one by one.

Lack of research papers: Several hundred students are conducting research in LIS for their PhD all over the country, still the number of research papers emanating from them are not very many. Stereotype bibliometric studies form a large chunk of our research papers which are published not only from academic bodies but also from other institutions. To maintain the international standard of around 10 LIS journals of the country we need at least 300 research articles. Apart from research articles, short communications based on research and review articles will also help the journals to maintain their high standard. Our LIS researchers, I do not know why, are not interested in publishing short communications and review articles. They need to change their attitude.

Timeliness: Most of our journals lag behind time. *Web of Science* will not cover a journal that cannot maintain a strict time schedule of publication. If a journal does not maintain that, immediacy index and impact factor cannot be calculated and included in the *Journal Citation Reports*.

Peer review: Our LIS journals in most cases are not peer reviewed. Some journals may claim to be peer-reviewed. Peer reviewing is a difficult task for India. Dedicated peer reviewers well-versed in the subject, aware of art of peer reviewing and command of the English language are yet to appear in the country. Some peer reviewers do not send

their comments about the article even after six months. In some cases their comments betray their lack of knowledge on the subject. We have not yet set up a standard for peer reviewing, hence everyone reviews in his/her own way. Delhi Library Association has devised a format for reviewing for *Library Herald*. Other journals may follow it maybe with a bit of modification. Some journals like *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology* and *World Digital Libraries* have started paying the reviewers some fees. This may improve the situation a bit. However, it will be difficult for most journals to do this because of their financial hardship.

Language and style: Once an article is selected for publication, the editor has to spend a great deal of time to edit the article and give it the final shape. Invariably it adds to the delay in preparing the manuscript for the full issue. The language and style of about 90 percent articles is below the mark. The title may be improper; the article may be without author/authors name/s; the abstract is either absent or incomplete or flawed, and in some cases horrible; literature review by and large are incomplete, and in some cases absent; the overall structure, paraphrasing, sectional and sub-sectional headings are not generally up to the mark; the figures in the tables in certain cases are found to be wrong; many graphics are uncalled for; the references given in many cases are outdated, incomplete or missed. Indians have got a peculiar tendency of using capital letters unnecessarily. It is not uncommon to find a page with 10 or more capital letters used unnecessarily. They are also highly prone towards redundancy. These are some major factors contributing to the poor quality of our journals.

Editorial board: Every journal is ornamented with an editorial board. These boards by and large are not international. Even editorial board members from the country hardly do anything for the journal, neither they are asked to do. The involvement of the editorial members with the periodical can definitely improve its quality.

Editor: The editors in general are not formally trained for the job. As such they do not know the basics of running a journal. Ideally, they should have knowledge about the potential authors, reviewers, editors, etc who can help in running the journal with desirable quality. Their knowledge about the subject, art of editing, the English language, printing and publishing should be above par. They should also have idea about the citation generation potential of an article. In reality most of them do not have even proper education in technical writing.

Generally editors of Indian LIS journals are not appointed as full time editors. They do the job on a part time basis without any remuneration, and learns his job bit by bit by day-to-day experience. This practice does not help much in maintaining the quality of a journal. In certain cases the editor of the journal brought out by a society is changed as the new executive committee takes office. This practice also more often than not affects the quality of the journal badly.

Pay and publish syndrome: Many predatory open access journals have come into being in LIS as well. In these journals, authors can get articles published on payment basis. The recent mushrooming of this breed of open access journals has little consideration on the quality of articles published.

In this editorial I have tried to paint the LIS journals scenario of the country with broad strokes of brush. The quality of certain journals can be improved with proper editing and peer reviewing. In our LIS courses students who are our future authors can be thoroughly trained in technical writing, peer reviewing, journal editing, and so on. This will create a generation of good authors, editors, and reviewers. Journals in our field may mushroom. Keeping aside that, if the editors of a few top ranking journals sincerely try, then they can get at least ten of our LIS journals covered by *Web of Science, Scopus*, and other relevant databases. If that can be done, it will be a big achievement.

References

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