

T. B. Rajashekar

Tarikere Basappa Rajashekar, who was the Associate Chairman of the National Centre for Science Information (NCSI), Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore was killed in a road accident near Bangalore on 3 June 2005.

Raja, as he was known to his close friends, was an achiever. When many others were talking about digital libraries, he started working on building one. He was clear in what he wanted to do and went about it with dedication and commitment. What is more, he knew his limitations and never attempted to do anything in which he did not have the required expertise. He was serious about his work and would never waste time or energy in fruitless pursuits.

When new technologies came in quick succession and transformed the way we handle information, Raja was quick to learn those technologies and apply them intelligently in the areas of database management and information dissemination.

Raja's role in the creation of the nation's first computerized current awareness service in the early 1980s at NCSI is commendable. He was one of the earliest in India to use COBOL and database, in both of which he had a rich experience and knowledge, in library applications. He had an exemplary skill in programming and an innate ability to understand, apply and disseminate newer programming paradigms all the time.

Right from the early days of NCSI, Raja not only led the young team from the front with his insistence on discipline and timely delivery of quality services, but also played a key role in capacity-building. He was largely responsible for the content and curriculum of the 18-month training programme on information and knowledge management at NCSI, which is unlike any other programme taught anywhere else in India. The curriculum always reflected the most recent developments. Not only did he teach the key courses (information and knowledge organization, digital library and information services in enterprises, internet information resources and services), but also helped his younger colleagues acquire the skills to teach state-of-the-art courses. Many of the professionals trained by him occupy

important positions across the country and elsewhere, and have been contributing immensely to the growth of information science. The fact that they stayed in touch with him and continued to hold him in reverence, vindicates the fact that Raja was not only a great and inspiring guru, but also a fine gentleman. Raja had become synonymous with NCSI.



Raja set up India's first interoperable institutional open access archive, but was dismayed at the rather slow pace at which it was filling. When it was pointed out that he should be more proactive and meet with faculty and talk to them about the archive, he took the suggestion in the right spirit and at the time of his tragic death there were more than 2000 papers in the archive. He had conducted many training programmes on setting up open access archives. Raja was also largely responsible for marrying the Greenstone digital library software with an earlier version of the Eprints software (when the latter did not support full-text searching). A few months before his death he and his colleague Francis Jayakanth, in collaboration with researchers at the Old Dominion University, developed two approaches to make CDS-ISIS databases OAI compliant. Raja was also the first in India to set up an e-mail-based electronic discussion forum for the library and information science (LIS) professionals. Since its inception in 1994, he moderated the LIS-Forum democratically.

Born on 2 November 1954, Raja took his Bachelor's degree in library science from the Mysore University and the post-graduate associateship in documentation

and information science from the Documentation Research and Training Centre, Bangalore. After a few years at the National Informatics Centre, New Delhi, he had a brief stint at the British Council Library in New Delhi, where he impressed everyone with his technical savvy. Later he moved to the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, where he worked quietly and earned a reputation as a performer. Along the way he also took a doctoral degree from the Poona University.

A shy person, Raja would keep himself away from the limelight. Deeply committed to his family, when he took a sabbatical in 2000, he did not move out of Bangalore. He worked for Informatics (India) Ltd, a Bangalore-based company, and developed an excellent multidisciplinary current awareness tool, an e-journal portal and gateway called J-Gate, to aggregate thousands of journals. He also wrote a series of essays on digital libraries.

Raja was on many committees, including the CODATA, and had contributed to the development of INFLIBNET and INDEST. He was also elected Fellow of the Society of Information Science (India).

When he was on course to achieve much more, fate has snatched him away from us. The large number of condolence messages received from within the country and elsewhere is an indication of the respect he had earned. Once he remarked to his students, what mattered in life was that what one left behind for others to remember and continue. By that yardstick, he has done extremely well. The best tribute that the LIS professionals in this country could pay Raja is to set up institutional open access archives as soon as possible and fill them with papers, modernize their curricula and teach their students the values practised by him.

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