



AILS Workshop on Digitization and Internet Resources for the Study of Databases for South Asia

Led by Dr. Ellen Ambrosone, South Asian Studies Librarian, Collection Development Scholarly Collections and Research Services Princeton University Library, held at the Post Graduate Institute of English Auditorium, Open University of Sri Lanka, on January 23rd 2020.



Dr. Ellen Ambrosone [Princeton University] at her presentation



Photo: Head of AILS, Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara

Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara described the advances made by the AILS Digitization Project since 2017, focusing on the goals and challenges of locating, preserving, conserving, archiving and digitizing research material. She also explained that AILS is a member of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC), which is an umbrella organization that represents the twenty-five overseas research centers that operate in various parts of the world. She also highlighted the three key areas; Art/ History/ Social Sciences, AILS will be focusing on more intently in the future.

Dr. Ellen Ambrosone, South Asian Studies Librarian, Collection Development Scholarly Collections and Research Services - Princeton University Library, was invited by AILS as a capacity building measure. Dr. Ambrosone's presentation covered *why digitization is important, how one can conceptualize an archive or collection, and how one can begin thinking of putting together a digital archive and placing parameters on it using the South Asian Ephemera collection*. She presented other digital archives as case studies and described that while digitization as preservation is important, it's imperative to consider the critical question of access; who will use the material chosen and how will they be able to access these. She also highlighted some open-access resources for the study of South Asia that may serve as analogues for participants' ongoing projects or for projects that may be proposed, and elaborated that digitization can offer opportunities for inter-institutional collaboration that not only benefit users, but also offer opportunities that raise the profile of the institutions involved using the example of the South Asia Open Archives. The workshop included presentations by all participating organizations and the AILS team.



From left: Dushyanthi Daniels [Library of Congress Representative Sri Lanka], Jeyamla Sivachelvam [WERC], Vishmee Wanchappa [WERC], H.M. Deepanee [Sri Lanka National Archives], Deepthi Guneratne [AILS], Prof. Asoka De Zoysa [Samkathana – University of Kelaniya], Crystal Baines [AILS], Dr. Ellen Ambrosone [Princeton University], Ramla Wahab-Salman [AILS], Malshani Delgahapitiya [Lionel Wendt Foundation], Sharmini Nagendran [AILS], Johann Peiris [GIZ], Rakkitha Samaraweera [Sri Lanka National Archives], Tharanga Samarakoon [Sri Lanka National Archives], Prasanna Perera [Sanjay (Pvt.) Ltd.], Chonila Weerawansa [Samkathana – University of Kelaniya].

AILS Digitization Landmark - Official handing over of the Digitized Archive of late Rev Fr. Tissa Balasuriya's writings at the 6th death anniversary commemoration of Fr. Balasuriya held by the Centre for Society and Religion [CSR] on 17th January 2020.



Above: AILS Associate Director Digitization and Programming Crystal Baines officially hands over the Digitized Archive of late Fr. Tissa Balasuriya to Rev. Fr. Rohan Perera, Director, CSR

In 2017, under the direction of Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara, AILS included under its portfolio a Digitization Initiative to locate, preserve, conserve, digitize and archive endangered material which subsequently became a major part of the AILS program activities. Accordingly, AILS Digitization Initiative in collaboration with the Centre for Society and Religion [CSR], commenced the work to sort, catalogue, conserve and digitize the writings of the late Rev. Fr. Tissa Balasuriya (August 29, 1924 – January 17, 2013) the founder the CSR and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. AILS Associate Director Crystal Baines, officially handed over the completed Digital Archive to the Director of CSR, Rev. Fr. Rohan Silva at the commemorative event for Fr. Tissa Balasuriya held on 17th January 2020. At this event, Crystal spoke on the relevance of Fr. Balasuriya's writings on social and economic justice to the current political context as well as the challenges and importance of digitizing such archives. AILS Associate Director Ramla Wahab-Salman and Project Assistant Shalini Weerasekera represented the AILS digitization team at the event.

Right: Section of the participants with AILS Associate Directors Crystal Baines and Ramla Wahab-Salman & AILS Project Assistant Shalini Weerasekera in the Center row



Above: AILS Associate Director Digitization and Programming Crystal Baines



Right: Images from the Digitized Archive of Fr. Balasuriya

CAORC DEPUTY DIRECTOR HEIDI WIEDERKEHR'S PROJECT REVIEW VISIT TO AILS COLOMBO

Heidi Wiederkehr, the Deputy Director of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) visited AILS Colombo. on 26th February 2019 to meet the AILS staff and hold a Project Status Review Meeting to evaluate both current and planned programs. After general discussion with all staff, AILS Associate Directors Crystal Baines and Ramla Wahab-Salman provided her with the highlights/ key milestones of the AILS Digitization Program leading up to the current successful accomplishments with the South Asia Open Archives and the impending Princeton University Archiving. Ms. Wiederkehr expressed appreciation about the advances made by AILS over the years and imparted valuable advise on project implementation and research development and confirmed AILS of CAORC's continued support in all quarters and discussed project funding and new project avenues. She also shared an overview of CAORC Council Members' projects in general which was a valuable learning comparison to AILS. The Deputy Director praised the Reporting presentations by AILS and encouraged the staff to pursue Capacity Building Training. It was a very positive meetina for AILS.



In Colombo, CAORC Deputy Director Heidi Wiederkehr [center] stands with: [from right] Crystal Baines [AILS], Ramla Salman-Wahab [AILS], Sharmini Nagendran [AILS] & Deepthi Guneratne

Conversations on Gender Equality and Equity: Our own long walk to freedom

Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara took the lead as the moderator at a very successful panel discussion organized by the Centre for Gender Equality and Equity of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) on 30th January 2020. The ultimate purpose of the panel discussion was to mainstream the gender related issues that are prominent, yet seemingly invincible within our own society. It explored a range of initiatives taken to build more inclusive gender culture and the significant challenges that remain to be addressed in Sri Lanka. The panelists and Dr. Vagisha Gunasekara discussed these blatant and subtle forms of gender inequality, gendered expectations or 'gendered annoyances' in their professional/social environments and also the gender related harassments and violence in Sri Lankan society and our own silences about these circumstances. It was a very relatable and illuminating session which highlighted the subtle forms of gender inequality and discrimination we all might experience within our day-to-day lives.



(Panel From left to right) Dr. Vagisha Gunasekera (Moderator), Dr. Kaushalya Perera, Dr. Vivimarie Medawattegedara, Bhoomi Harendran, & Ambika Satkunanathan