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, 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.

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.

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 Zoya [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].

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.
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.

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