Leaders in Librarianship:  
Role of Special Libraries Association in Asia

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Abstract

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) provides library and information science (LIS) professional’s lifelong education and learning opportunities. Its Asian chapter, established in 1999, has organized many international conferences, seminars, events, webinars and continual learning programmes in India, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, etc., with the help of the SLA, USA. These programmes have developed the managerial capacity of librarians in Asia, and they are now well-known library leaders. This paper provides a brief overview of the role of the SLA’s Asian chapter, and of how its continuing professional development (CPD) programmes help its members become leaders of Asian librarianship.

Introduction

Leadership is a behavioral pattern that suggests ‘taking initiative’ and bringing people together to ‘achieve a desired goal’. A leader in the library and information science (LIS) profession can visualize the strength and weaknesses of the profession and try to improve its status in a country or region through various means. In Asian countries, librarians are a loosely assembled group, and the variation in competency, skills, attitude, etc. is wide.

The library literature shows that leadership concepts and theories came into existence in the 1980s. Now, many leadership development programmes are available to enhance leadership skills, which help a professional create a niche. A blend of leadership competencies of LIS professionals in the workplace brings corporate and organizational success.
One can also say that the phenomenon of the knowledge society has led to the cross-fertilization of ideas, which is imperative in the process of knowledge acquisition. It is the surest way of survival in an extremely competitive world. There has been a need for LIS professionals to network within and outside their organization to enhance their skills and knowledge. (Fadehan 2010)

**Development of SLA Competencies for Information Professionals**

At present, libraries and other information agencies face increasing competitiveness, limited resources, accountability for service and a technologically astute and demanding user population. In addition, effective organizational leadership is of growing importance. Leadership is necessary to define more effectively what types of knowledge and skills are needed for leaders to contribute to organizational success. Competency development is a major area. Recent study in the area of leadership competencies has focused on the value of identifying, knowing and understanding users. (Winston and Gretchen 2003)

The concept of learning new techniques, standard practices and managerial skills has traditionally been used in the context of individuals. Now, the focus is on organizational learning (OL), which occurs when an organization’s members become its learning agents; respond to changes in the internal and external organization by detecting and correcting errors in organizations’ theory in use; and embed the results of their inquiry in private images and shared maps of organization. (Argyris and Schon 1978) In fact, OL requires mutual support, mutual respect, and learning from one another, collaborative work and effective teamwork to solve problems. The Asian chapter of the SLA is striving hard to introduce OL modules in special libraries of the region to develop professional and personal competencies.

Professional Competencies: The SLA’s Asian chapter wants its members to provide quality information services, and is working on SLA guidelines to enhance its members’ knowledge of information resources, access, technology and management. The SLA promotes four major competencies in its members: managing information organizations, resources, services and applying information tools and technologies.
Personal Competencies: The SLA’s Asian chapter is working on SLA guidelines to help its members develop the values, attitudes and communications and value-added contributing skills to work effectively and efficiently, and contribute confidently and with a flexible and positive attitude to users and clients in their institutions and organizations. (Special Libraries Association 2014)

**SLA Leadership Programme**

The Asian chapter of the SLA is practicing the SLA leadership programme in Asian countries to

- provide LIS professionals diverse leadership roles at local, regional, state and national levels;
- develop LIS professionals’ leadership skills by reenergizing them;
- develop new leaders to replace outgoing or retiring professionals;
- build collaborative networks between communities; and
- provide mentors to establish professional support systems.

The SLA leadership programme is helping LIS professionals in Asian countries to

- develop leaders with a strong sense of organization;
- shift from the concept of managing people to leading them;
- learn about themselves and others, and improve personal skills and abilities;
- formulate and articulate ideas and communicate with each other;
- reach professionals from diverse geographic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds worldwide;
- create leaders out of individuals with disabilities, and with limited functional literacy or information skills;
- develop leadership skills by identifying individuals’ talents and effectively use them as leaders;
- raise their visibility worldwide;
- help individuals and organizations set goals and plan action; and
- identify unaddressed problems in librarianship and solve them. (Special Libraries Association 2014)
The Support of SLA in Creating Leaders in Asian Countries

The SLA offers unique leadership assessment tools to enhance the power of simulation and to stimulate exploration and personal growth. Utilizing a powerful synthesis of leadership development and leadership profile tools, members will be able to investigate the impact of leadership style, change management and organizational culture on performance objectives. The SLA also provides LIS professionals a leadership summit, and opportunities for professional development and networking. (Discovery Learning Inc. 2014)

1. Leadership Summit

The SLA leadership programme helps today's LIS professionals develop the skill sets employers seek. It enables professional and peer relationships that broaden technical and interpersonal skills and challenge and enrich life. It organizes an annual leadership summit for professionals to develop leadership skills and for SLA leaders. The summit helps professionals learn how the association's initiatives and priorities will affect the chapter or division, and how to develop a strategic plan for it.

2. Professional Development Opportunities

Participating in SLA webinars held year-round improves an LIS professional’s knowledge and credentials. The webinars are available on Click University (Continuous Learning to Improve Career Knowledge), which provides a world of learning opportunities for SLA members online. It also has an Innovation Lab, which is a place to experiment with new technologies. Click University offers a range of programmes like Click U Certificate Programmes, Webinars, Webinar Replays, Click U Courses at Conference, Innovation Lab and Career Programmes.
3. Networking and Information Exchange

The SLA’s annual conferences and INFO-EXPOs help LIS professionals network, communicate, learn and explore other developmental opportunities.

The SLA has chapters that organize events in the members area and continue building relationships online and physically. Similarly, a division membership links LIS professionals in a topical area, and enhances expertise and learning. The SLA’s discussion lists increase opportunities and forge new alliances between members as their interests shift towards new areas. The SLA also provides LIS students learning opportunities through student groups.

Historical Background of Asian Chapter, SLA

The Asian chapter of the SLA was established in 1999 with a few members. The chapter started with lack of leaders in librarianship in Asia but gradually, the chapter flourished and now has many leaders. It is now one of the biggest chapters, covering large geographical area consisting of over 20 countries. It was recognized as the fastest growing chapter in 2009 by SLA. Many top leaders from Special Libraries Association have visited Asia during 2007 to 2013 to improve leadership qualities in Asian Librarians.

Presidents from Asia

Given a vast geographical area, the library leaders with diversity from following countries have contributed as President of Asian Chapter. Figure -1 show in tabular format and Figure 2 shows it graphically:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Presidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure: 1
SLA has developed leadership ability in many countries in Asia.

Country-wise members in Asian Chapter

Presently there are 113 members of Asian Chapter from 13 countries who have taken membership of Asian Chapter. The details are given below in figure -3 and graphically shown in Figure -4:
Country-wise members in Asian Chapter

Figure-4

The highest membership in Asian Chapter is from India. The professionals from India are active members of SLA and are participating with the full enthusiasm in the activities of SLA.
Awards & Recognition

Special Libraries Association offers Awards and Recognition to honor exceptional individuals, achievements and contributions to the Association and the information profession as a whole. It offers awards for excellence in work and profession to those who stand as leaders in special librarianship. SLA has offered prestigious awards like Diversity Leadership Development Programme Award to many library leaders in Asia. Library leaders in Asia have received awards and recognitions from many other divisions also like Science and Technology Division and Business and Finance Division. These awards have not only given recognition to the professionals in Asia but also the opportunity to attend the Annual Conference at USA and meet professionals from around the world.

SLA Awards to Information Professionals in Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>SLA/Division Awards</th>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SLA Awards</td>
<td>Diversity Leadership Development Programme (DDLP)</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SLA Awards</td>
<td>Professional Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SLA Awards</td>
<td>Presidential Citation</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SLA Awards</td>
<td>Member Achievement Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Science and Technology Division, SLA</td>
<td>Bonnie Hidlitch International Librarian Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Science and Technology Division, SLA</td>
<td>Achievement Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>Award for Outstanding Achievement in Business Librarianship</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>Distinguished Member Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>Distinguished Leadership &amp; Service Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>International Travel Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>Professional Grants</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>Impact Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Business and Finance Division, SLA</td>
<td>Centers of Excellence</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>PAM Division, SLA</td>
<td>PAM International Membership Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Asian Chapter has also started its awards to recognize and honor library leaders in Asia since 2009. Following awards have been offered to information professionals in Asia and this has also helped them in attending SLA Annual Conference in USA. The awards have been won from countries like China, Philippines and India is shown above in Figure 5 and 6.

**Asian Chapter Awards to Library Leaders in Asia**

The awards given to by the Asian Chapter to Library Leaders in Asia are given below in Figure 7 and shown graphically in Figure-8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Name of Award</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Awardees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Travel Stipend with Science and Technology Division</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Diane K. Foster International Student Travel Award with Science and Technology Division</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Early Career Award with Business and Finance Division</td>
<td>India, China, Philippines</td>
<td>02, 01, 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SLA Asian Librarian Award</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SLA Young Professional Award</td>
<td>India, Philippines</td>
<td>02, 01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure-8**

![Asian Chapter Awards to Library Leaders in Asia](image)

- **Student Travel Stipend with Science and Technology Division**: 1
- **Diane K. Foster International Student Travel Award with Science and Technology Division**: 1
- **Early Career Award with Business and Finance Division**: 4
- **SLA Asian Librarian Award**: 3
- **SLA Young Professional Award**: 3
Professional Activities to enhance Leadership in Asian Countries

Many international conferences were organized in Asia to develop networking and leadership among Asian Librarians. Asian Chapter began its task with organizing its first seminar in 2005 on IT Application in Special Libraries in New Delhi. In the year 2007, it organized a seminar on “Benchmarking and Best Practices in Special Libraries” in New Delhi, India. SLA Asian Chapter started a series of international conferences in the year 2008 which is now popularly known as ICoASL in LIS profession in Asia. The first ICoASL - International Conference of Asian Special Libraries was on 'Shaping the future of special libraries: Beyond boundaries' held during 26-28 November 2008 at India Islamic Cultural Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi, India. The conference was attended by professionals from around the world. The second conference (ICoASL 2011) by Asian Chapter, Special Libraries Association was held during 10-12 February 2011 at United Nation University, Tokyo, Japan and the third one (ICoASL 2013) was held during 10-12 April 2013 in Pasay City, Philippines. The fourth conference (ICoASL 2015) is scheduled during April 2015 in Seoul, South Korea.

Asian Chapter has also organized various training workshops including "Basics of Preservation, Conservation, Restoration & Data Curation" recently held from 24-25 March, 27-28 March and 10-12 April 2014 in Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines respectively.

“Library and Information Professionals Summits” (LIPS) on Leadership, Ethics, Accountability and Professionalism in Library Services” is another series of programme held by Asian Chapter. The first LIPS summit was organized by SLA Asian Chapter during 16-17 March 2012 in Delhi, India. The second in series was recently organized in 2014 on “Brick to Click: Transforming Libraries into Social Spaces” during 7-8 February 2014, New Delhi, India. SLA Asian Chapter also organized “National Conference on Human Resource Development in Library Services in India” on 9 March 2013 in Delhi, India. The chapter is regularly organizing many conferences, summits, workshops and development programmes in various states of India like Mumbai, Bangalore, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, India and other Asian countries like Philippines, Japan, Korea, etc.
Leadership Initiatives

Exchange Programmes – Asian Chapter is also having exchange programmes to develop leaders. Presently, two Asian students have been trained in India under the exchange programme.

Lectures/Presentation in SLA – To showcase the vision and leadership capabilities, the leaders of Asian Chapter are moving around the world to demonstrate their skills. Many Asian leaders have given presentation at SLA Annual Conference and are regularly participating in the leadership programmes.

Newsletters/Publications: The Asian Chapter is regularly raising its voice through its newsletters which is published online since 2008. The Newsletter provides information of Asian Chapter activities and upcoming programmes to be held to keep its members abreast with the activities of the Chapter.

Future Initiatives

The SLA Asian Chapter has future vision on the same guidelines of SLA to promote and strengthen its members’ skills through learning, advocacy and networking initiatives.

Resource Development: The Chapter visions to create more resources to assist and promote library professionals in Special Libraries in Asia with engaging, developing and retaining diverse and highly qualified individuals.

Training Programmes: The Chapter aims to provide more educational and training opportunities to reflect and reach increasing special libraries with diversity.

Student Support Programmes: Provide increased leadership and career development opportunities for Library and Information Science students in Asia.
**Associates:** To strengthen, support and collaborate with other chapters and division of SLA and the headquarters.

**Leadership:** Strengthening more information leaders in the profession and in Asia.

**Collaboration and Partnering:** Organizing more events, conferences and programmes and providing opportunities to meet, communicate, collaborate and partner with the information industry and the business community in Asia.

**Conclusion**

Due to significant changes in Library Science profession and the recognized need for leaders at all levels of libraries, leadership training modules have been developed and offered by libraries, professional organizations and professional associations, as well as academic and non-profit foundations. (Mason, Wetherbee and Louella 2004)

The Asian Chapter of SLA is helping its members in inculcating and developing leadership capacity and bringing about change and enabling the progress of the members. The chapter on the guidelines of SLA is dedicated to develop effective leaders in Asia, helping them in their development and education which is needed to contribute to organizational success. SLA is a place where its members increase their skills as information professional’s career. It is correctly said that SLA membership is a passport to a learning community that is unparalleled for ease of access, educational excellence and professional value. (Lowery, 2004).

**References**