

# Relevance of Dr. S.R. Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Clear Perspective

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**Abstract** - This study intends to discuss the interrelationships and impacts of Dr. S.R. Ranganathan's five laws with those enhancements and changes in the field and also their research content for further study. Latest developments of information products and services in field of LIS are considered emanated from the ongoing technological innovations and compared effectiveness and efficiency of those innovations with his basic learning of Five Laws. So the study methodology chiefly involves studying his publications and examining the contents in perspective with contemporary changing profile of library and information science.

**Keywords:** Five Laws of Library Science, ICT Impact on Five Laws of Library Science, S.R. Ranganathan, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarianship

## I. INTRODUCTION

The profession of Librarianship, it has been repeatedly stated time and again, would ever remember two legendary and the most distinguished personalities, one from the West and the other from the East. They are consecutively Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey (full name of Melvil Dewey) and Shiyali Ramamrith Ranganathan (for S.R. Ranganathan) and they incidentally belong two hemispheres – north and south. These directional differences have never been the cause for a divide, as the profession has ardently and admirably regarded their contribution as unique and landmarks, and can equate to that of Johannes Guttenberg. For the India's legendary, the simile can be made with few great Indian personalities such as Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Sir C.V. Raman and the great Indian mathematical wizard, Srinivasa Ramanujan. From the west it could be Sir Isaac Newton, Thomas Alva Edison H.G. Wells and Albert Einstein. Very few would still hold over to accept their contribution, to the profession of librarianship, as they have never been accepted by the then community of scholars and they suffered highest course of ridicule, but they sustained all those criticisms for us to enjoy the fruit of their struggle.

For instance Ranganathan (Ranganathan, 1961) has given an account of such happenings at the Dewey's time. Many professionals from India would also endorse the view that Ranganathan has had similar share of struggle to survive in the profession, and he never regretted having changed from the noble mathematics to librarianship, which the later he empowered it with 'Science' suffix and thus elevated it to library science.

## II. FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is a striking similarity between the life and times of Mahatma Gandhiji and Ranganathan. Both were contemporaries. Both of them were primarily modernizing agents employing a traditional idiom. One is regarded as the 'Father of the Nation' and the other is considered as 'Father of Library Science in India'. Mahatma Gandhi believed quotes from the India classic scriptures like the Bhagavadgeeta, Ramayana and Ranganathan's writings are full of quotes from many indological classics. For instance his "five" laws and "five" fundamental categories are equated to reminiscent 'Panch Mahaboot' which are bestowed by mother earth for the habitat of all biological species.

There are noteworthy concepts and ideas designed and developed by Ranganathan. Modes of Formation of Subjects present a complexity of growth of universe of knowledge, which he characterised as 'dynamic continuum' and they present the transformed structure and the typology of interaction among the universe of subjects. Ranganathan's Basic Laws, Cannons, Postulates, Principles of Helpful Sequence all embed into 'Normative Principles' of division of knowledge and that can have application in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century configuration of knowledge and its diverse theories (Parkhi). How of this, can only be a long brainstorming discourse and it is not possible in this short span of pages to discuss about it.

Like Gandhian thought, Ranganathan's philosophy was an open-ended system welcoming new ideas, incorporating those within the system and eventually re-structuring the whole. For instance his Classification system has a unique feature, based on an elaborate and concrete theory, provides full autonomy to classifier without waiting for the Classificationists, the designer of the system, to provide solutions encountered by the classifiers. In the field of librarianship, the contributions of S.R. Ranganathan are noteworthy and remarkable. He had a lot of commitment and devotion to the profession. His ideas were cyclical in the dialectical sense of the term by changing quantity into quality and bringing a lasting transformation to the field of Library Science, especially the five laws and the dynamic theory of library classification.

### **III. DR. S.R. RANGANATHAN: AS A PROLIFIC WRITER**

He was a prolific writer on library science. Most of his works are the output of original research, with keen observation and application on the happenings in the libraries he visited during his life times. Each work is a master piece by itself explaining the theory, postulation, practical demonstration of the activities and services. Most of his books demonstrate a unique presentation of a dialogue between the enquirer and the library professionals, who advocate for the implementation of his ideas. They present a frame of a modern web-blogs and info graphic picturisation. Some of them present the unique methods and procedures of phenomena. There is no branch of library science on which he has not written about in his writings. He has deservedly built up a world-wide reputation on bibliographic representation and description by the major contributions in Library Classification and Library Cataloguing, Reference Service and Documentation, and the latter concept was borrowed from outside library science and made a harmonious blend with the techniques of library science. He was chiefly responsible for patronising library movement in India through the Model Library Bills and library development plans. He wrote 65 books and 2000 research papers on library science and exclusive bibliography of his works was compiled by Das Gupta (1967).

### **IV. LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION & CATALOGUING AND S.R. RANGANATHAN**

The Colon Classification (CC) and Classified Catalogue Code (CCC) have revolutionized thinking in bibliographic description of the contents of documents. According to Eric De Grolier "one must grant to its author certain exceptional merits the CC is the first basically 'multidimensional' bibliographical classification which has ever been conceived. Apart from the creation of a dynamic theory to library classification, he advocated and created a unique terminology to library classification, which hitherto before has never been attempted by any one so comprehensively and elaborately. His argument was, when other subjects of universe of subjects have their own specialised terminology why not the library classification should have its own terminology.

A research was also made on his contribution to terminology to library classification, by Prasad (1982). Ranganathan has played a pioneering role; without his works a great part of the movement of ideas which has manifested itself in recent year in the field of the bibliographic classification would probably not have taken place. The CC seems, in fact, to have been the last general classification system to a series of attempts made to design library classification systems and is one of most international significance to have seen the light of the day. First published in 1933 went on to add six more editions till 1987.

He entered the profession without any pre-thought, background or inspiration, like most of us have entered the profession of librarianship not by choice but by chance. He kept on working on Colon Classification and proved that the design and development of a Scheme for Classification is a life time activity so he continued to contribute to it until the end of his life and kept on working. The account of his contribution to the field of library science, to the country which was attaining just its independence, after a long span of colonial rule, cannot be measured in this short treatise on him. His thinking and urge for library movement for India was expressed in his two papers (Ranganathan, 1941, 1948)

The CCC has brought new features in Cataloguing as it is the first cataloguing systems to suffix the years of authors. The Chain Procedure, an act of symbiosis as a method to allow the processes of Classification and Cataloguing to work together and in supplementing each other. The Chain Indexing, the only indexing system that was based on the Library Classification and its model is equated to the "Yahoo" Search Engine (Glassel, 1998).

### **V. NEED AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The need and purpose of the study is to discuss the importance of Ranganathan's contributions to the philosophy; theory and practice, education for library science and initiating and nurturing the public library movement in India. It would also in perspective examine the values of his contributions and their relevance in the 21st century library profession which has been transforming in diverse directions. In fact the writings of Ranganathan have beforehand had predicted these turning points in the profession and has spelt them implicitly. It is a reflective piece of deliberation of examining the content and implications of Ranganathan's unparalleled contribution the "Five Laws of Library Science" in the present context to the library and information science which has been on perpetual transition since its infant ages. The study contends on revisiting the work and contributions of Ranganathan which have continued championing of them in the professional development of librarianship. The value of the study is in examining traditional library values in the era of virtual or digital librarianship and its successive changes from one form to another. The study would touch upon all his contributions in general, but the Five Laws of Library Science, in particular, which have been regarded as 'unique' and are the philosophical basis covering all facets of librarianship.

### **VI. RELEVANCE OF DR. S.R. RANGANATHAN'S FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

The Five Laws of Library Science were enunciated in 1928 by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the Librarian of the University of Madras. Their first formal exposition occurred at the Provincial Educational Conference; held at Chidambaram in December that year. Dr. Ranganathan, after, his education

in librarianship in the University of London, School of Librarianship in 1924 and his observation after working in several libraries in England, had been struggling to discover whether the principles and practices that he observed could be generalised and reduced to certain cardinal principles. In other words, he was in search of some principles which could tell us what should be done in the library field to make library organisation; management and operation efficient and universalise its services. He first contemplated and began to articulate the ideas that soon would be enunciated in The Five Laws of Library Science. This was a period in library history when the world was grappling with fundamental questions. What is a library? What is library service? Libraries were just developing systems of classification and organization, and no one had yet dealt with a unified philosophy that attempted to define the purposes and functions of a library. The principles enunciated in Ranganathan's Five Laws were the first and, to date, the only clear definition of a library's functions and responsibilities.

Ranganathan's Five Laws essentially constitute a fundamental contribution to the development of Library Science, Documentation and Information Science. They are fundamental because they are relevant in relation to the past, present-day developments, as well as future developments. Although the Five Laws of Library Science consist of five short statements, the boldness and clarity of thought behind these is remarkable. These statements appear to be too simple but in reality these laws are quite complicated. These provide guidance and rationale for practice and teaching of Library and Information Science. The laws have been useful in teaching of different branches of Library Science. These have made an impact on the growth and development of theory and practice. These will serve as source of inspiration and guidance in the years to come.

Today's Internet search engines are reminiscent of that famous story from Ramayana. When Lakshmana lay dying in the battle field, the physician told Rama that a Sanjeevini herb could save the life of his brother. Ever faithful Hanuman, leaped across valleys, rivers and mountains and could finally find the mountain on which the Sanjeevini herb grew. But there was dense vegetation all around and Hanuman was not able to recognise the herb. So he grabbed the mountain and brought it to Rama and hence Lakshmana survived. Here the browser represents Hanuman in search mode, then the database is the mountain; How to find the Information which is hidden somewhere? Ranganathan created a revolutionary system in 1933 and published his findings in a book called Colon Classification. The facet analysis which he formulated 80 years ago is being used by the famous Yahoo Search Engine.

The fourth law is "Save the time of the reader". Saving the time of the user becomes navigating with them through the Web and creating high-quality and accurate guides to information in this challenging domain. The Five Laws as a

set of Normative Principles continue to be very relevant to the management of information resources irrespective of the form and format in which they are embodied from ancient clay tablet, palm leaf mss, to conventional printed documents, computer databases, web pages, hand-held tablets, etc.

## VII. THE FIVE LAWS OF THE WEB

The Five laws of the web are inspired by the "Five Laws of Library Science" which were the seed of all of Ranganathan's practice. These laws form the foundation for the Web by defining its minimum requirements. These were given by Aliroza Noruzi, Iranian Librarian. These laws are:

1. Web resources are for use
2. Every user his or her resource
3. Every web resource its user
4. Save the time the user
5. The Web is a growing Organism

The Web consists of contributions from anyone who wishes to contribute, and the quality of information or the value of knowledge is opaque, due to the lack of any kind of peer reviewing. Moreover, the Web is an unstructured and highly complex conglomerate of all types of information carriers produced by all kinds of people and searched by all kinds of users (Bjorneborn & Ingwersen, 2001).

This new revised version of Ranganathan's laws gives us the grounding for librarians' profession just as the 1931 original did. The Web exists to help users achieve success through serving user information needs in support of the world community. Information needs are met through web pages and documents appropriate to web users. In fact, the Five laws of the Web are really the foundations for any web user-friendly information system. What they require is universal access as a right of cyber citizenship in the information age.

## VIII. CONCLUSION AND OBSERVATIONS

Ranganathan's Five Laws essentially constitute a fundamental contribution to the development of Library Science, Documentation and Information Science. They are fundamental because they are relevant in relation to the past, present-day developments, as well as future developments. Although the Five Laws of Library Science consist of five short statements, the boldness and clarity of thought behind these is remarkable. These statements appear to be too simple but in reality these laws are quite complicated. These provide guidance and rationale for practice and teaching of Library and Information Science. Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science are applicable to all fields of library activities. Now we have entered into digital era. In spite of multidimensional development in different areas of library work and service and their enrichment with the application of modern technology Five Laws of Library Science are equally applicable till date,

since their inception. Today ICT application has permeated in all human activities. The five laws are equally valid in the present digital / information age as they have been in the conventional library environment. The five laws are the source and sum of all the Library practices of times, yesterday, today and tomorrow. The American Library Association paid tribute to Ranganathan as, "S.R.Ranganathan, Librarian to the world on behalf of the Cataloguers and Classifiers of America we greet you. Your words are the words of the Anglo-America but your language is the language of the East and your ideas are universal. You answer the challenge of the future with a challenge. Most of us are not your disciples; all of us are your students. For a generation you have forced librarians to think we are proud to be in your debt" (Kaula, 1986).

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