

Influence of Manu on Ranganathan's philosophy of library science: An overview

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Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan introduced a number of classical theories and their practical applications with rules, regulations, laws, canons etc. The article traces the influencing philosophical factor which laid the philosophical foundation in his mind for lifelong academic and professional efforts. It is observed that Indian classical epic literature in general and Laws of *Manu* known as *Manu Samhita* or *Manu-smriti* in particular had a great impact on his thoughts.

Keywords: *Manu Samhita*; philosophy; education; library; Five Laws of Library Science

Introduction

Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan (1892-1972) is known to the world for his contributions for the advancement of the discipline of library science and librarianship as a profession. Ranganathan laid the foundation library science as a discipline and profession in India through his library science laws, theories, principles and canons. What could have been the influencing factors behind the philosophy of Ranganathan? Ranganathan had great interest in Sanskrit literature from an early age. A number references to Sanskrit literature can be seen in this writings.

Manu has narrated Hindu code of conduct and ways of obeying the code of law known as *Manu Samhita* or *Manusmrti* ("Laws of Manu"). This Manava-Dharmasastra consists of two thousand six hundred ninety four *Sutras* in twelve chapters. It proclaims duties of people at various stages of life, dietary regulation, rights and duties of rulers etc. Thus, *Manu Samhita* has tremendous impact on society as 'the law of all the social classes' as even recognized by the Vedas. "Manu became the law giver per excellence, and his name, a byword for what was righteous proper. The Vedas say whatever Manu said is wholesome like medicine, *Yadvaikinchana Manuravadad tad bhesajam*". "In usages it covers a wide range of meaning from the qualities and characteristics of the things to the highest virtue and spiritual efforts; natural characteristics and tendencies, as also what men should do or ought to do."¹

Manu's influence on Ranganathan

Manu Samhita covers all aspects of four stages (*Ashrama*) of life –*Brahmacharya* (the student age),

Grihastha (the householder age), *Vanaprastha* (the hermit stage) and *Sanyasa* (the wandering ascetic stage). Second and third chapter of *Manu Samhita* narrated *Brahmacharya*- which deals with students' duty during learning process and also teacher's (Acharaya) role in the teaching-learning process. Library as knowledge hub tries to fulfill the objectives as well as spread of education. Library as knowledge centre collects, store, organize and disseminate knowledge to the meet individual as well as social thrust of knowledge. In dealing with the users, the librarian follows some professional ethics or code of conduct. A librarian's behavior is same like a teacher to his new student. He has to be hospitable just like a host. According to Manu, "Grass, room (for resting), water, and a kind word; these (things) never fail in the houses of a good man"². In the same tone Ranganathan opinioned "...a library, keen about its books being fully used, will plant itself in the midst of its clientele"³. "Library alone can be called hospitable, which shows an eagerness to invite readers to the feast at its disposal, it is such hospitability that makes a library big not in size"⁴.

Ranganathan read *Manu Samhita* and was influenced by its code relating to conduct of student-teacher. As he correctly mentioned librarian have to attempt all efforts to satisfy its users like teachers to his student. "Sometimes, all conscious attempts fail. Hence, we have to act on the principle of "the more, the merrier. By contacting the student intimately in varied situation, we may increase the chance to hit their nuclear element. So, little is ever achieved by verbal transmission. A true teacher fulfils himself more effectively through that intangible influence

emanating from his personality and transforms the students and throws them into the most favourable mood for the creative enfoldment of their own personality"⁵. One may think that Ranganathan's opinion originates from Manu's narration, "The good should be taught to people without hurting them; one who desires merit should use his words sweetly and delicately"⁶.

In ancient education system a student has to pass through the code of ordinances of studentship which includes subduing the senses, rules of study, respectful social dealing with fellow citizen, stages of rituals as well as behavioral pattern so that they might become good citizens. It was expected that later on the student will become teacher and follow the same tradition to teach his pupils. According to Manu among four stages of life, *Brahmacharya* be considered as best as it forms the foundation of other stages of life. This stage helps to develop knowledge base of individual as well as of the society. Prof. Raghavan has rightly mentioned "...the term *Brahmacharya* means also celibacy and continence"⁷. According to Manu "...the knowledge of the soul is state to be the most excellent among all of them; for that is the first of all sciences, because immortality is gained through that"⁸. One can notice same kind of observation from Ranganathan's classic work "School library: the training ground for responsible citizenship". It highlights as training ground "it (library) promotes 1. Public mindedness 2. Consideration for others; 2.1 Right attitude towards obligation of public life; 2.2 Avoidance of difficulties to the other members of the community; 3. Respect for the rule of the queue; 4. Formation of correct habits of public and private hygiene; 5. Fire Prevention; 6. Personal manners"⁹. To comply these right attitudes is essential. Now the question may rise what attitude ought to be considered as right? For answer one have to turn to Manu "Learn that sacred law which is followed by men learned (in the Veda) and assented to in their hearts by the virtuous, who are ever exempt from hatred and inordinate affection"¹⁰. Again as a genesis of Ranganathan's concept of 'Avoidance of difficulties...' one may consider *Manu Samhita* as source, "Let him not, even though in pain, (speak words) cutting (others) to the quick, let him not injure others in thought or deed; let him not utter speeches which make (others) afraid of him, since that will prevent him from gaining heaven"¹¹. Respect for the rule of the law in "Personal manners" may find its

genesis from Manu, "The rule of conduct is transcendent law, whether it be taught in the revealed texts or in the sacred tradition; hence a twice born man who possesses regard for himself, should be always careful to (follow) it"¹².

Many times while providing services to the users in library it may not be possible to satisfy them to utmost level. As an ongoing process, library has to take feedback from user to develop or modify search strategy. Ranganathan in *Prolegomena to Library Classification* mentioned, "When one is engaged on a problem, the most useful ideas occur suddenly. They seem at once to cast a flood of light over murky tracts of half-formed thought and promise reward for further exploration..."¹³. For philosophical foundation of this statement one can look upon Manu, "Let him not despise himself on account of former failure; until death let him seek fortune, not despair of gaining it"¹⁴.

Five Laws of library science

Ranganathan has used twice (once after the contents and again in description of Second Law under "MANU'S MAXIM") the following quotations of *Manu Samhita* in his classic work "The Five Laws of Library Science".

यो दद्याज्ज्ञानमज्ञानानां कुर्याद्वा धर्मदर्शनम् ।

स कृत्स्नां पृथिवीं दद्यात् तेन तुल्यं न तद्भवेत् ॥

मनुः ।

It means

"To carry knowledge to the door of those that lack it and to educate all to perceive the right!

Even to give away the whole earth cannot equal that form of service"¹⁵.

Influence of Manu can easily be understood when Ranganathan devoted a paragraph on "MANU'S MAXIM" in 'second law and its digvijaya' for the sake of spread of education. He mentioned "We cannot end this rapid sketch of the World Conquering Expedition of the Second Law of Library Science more appropriately than by praying, in all sincerity, for the speedy success of the Second Law in India as well and by reminding our Ministers of Education that the example of their brethren in the progressive nations is but in close consonance with the precept of our ancient law-giver"¹⁶.

Ranganathan in his Five Laws gave special emphasis on the word 'every' that is the right to

knowledge by every citizen. As "... in libraries books are collected for USE, prepared for USE, kept for USE and served for USE"¹⁷. It may again be derived from the Manu's narration of man without book, with book, knowledgeable man after study and chance of his behavior thereafter. To quote Manu, "(Even forgetful) student of the (sacred) books are more distinguished than the ignorant, those who remember them surpass the (forgetful) students, those who possess a knowledge (of the meaning) are more distinguished than those who (only) remember (the words), men who follow (the teaching of the texts), surpass those who (merely) know (their meaning)"¹⁸. The same concept has been reflected in Ranganathan's Five Laws "When knower and knowee are brought into relation, the knower knows the knowee; and knowledge emerges"¹⁹.

For maximum use of library service the role, relationship, behavior, attitude of librarian is most important. Ranganathan in First Law under the heading 'What makes a Library Big' mentioned, "In fact, the relationship between the librarian and the reader should be easiest and the most agreeable..."²⁰. "... it is the library staff that ultimately make or mar a library"²¹. The same kind of ambiance one can notice in family life "...where the husband is pleased with the wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will assuredly last"²².

Discussion

Ranganathan was greatly influenced by other Indian epics, examples of which can be seen in his writings. Such as in narration of First law he mentioned Lord Krishna words of *Karmayoga* to the librarians:

"Thy right is to action alone and never to fruits.
Let not the fruit of action be the motive.
Nor let thyself be attached to inaction."²³

Again in Vital Principle to make it understand 'the spirit of the library' as knowledge centre he took help from Gita:

"As a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out forms and enter into others that are new.

Weapons do not cleave him; fire does not burn him; water does not make him wet; nor does the wind make him dry.

He cannot be cloven; he cannot be burnt; he cannot be wetted; he cannot be dried; he is eternal, all-

pervading, steadfast and immovable; he is the same forever."²⁴.

Thus in many occasion to narrate, collaborate or substantiate, Ranganathan used Indian Mythology and *Manu Samhita* is of no exception. "If *Manusmirti* is not a mere code of ordinate duties, and if it raises in its philosophical parts to grave dignity, it ranks high also as a masterpiece of ancient literature which is pithy and effective couplets gives expression to some of the most precious ideas and noblest virtues and ideals"²⁵. More over *Manu Samhita* also known as *Manava-Dharmasastra* has a great impact on society. Likewise 'Library is a social and functional organization'. So, Manu's impact in respect of philosophical aspects on library is obvious. Particularly when it describes Brahmacharya- the main focus is on creating knowledge society in a disciplined way. To strive for knowledge is to struggle for freedom as ignorance is the worst slavery. "As an elephant made of wood, as an antelope made of leather, such is an unlearned Brahmana; those there have nothing but the names (of their kind)"²⁶.

Conclusion

Concept of knowledge based society can be traced from ancient Indian education system through oral tradition of disseminating knowledge called *Sruti*. *Manu Samhita* by providing guiding principle had laid the foundation of knowledge based society. Ranganathan being influenced by Indian mythology in general and *Manu Samhita* in particular, fostered the way by providing all kinds of philosophical as well as functional aspects of library as storehouse and disseminator of recorded knowledge. Only through equal access to education, information, knowledge to every citizen knowledge society can be established where freedom of expression will persist. Then only freedom of mind, freedom of heart and freedom of will be established.

"Ranganathan's 'Five Laws of Library Science', propounded succinctly each in four to six words only, is the epitome of the operational philosophy of librarianship"²⁷. This is because Five Laws are based on solid philosophical foundation based on Indian *Dharmasastra* can be extended to any limit and contemporary. Laws may be interpreted in different ways but the spirit remains the same. Gorman interpreted Ranganathan's Laws in the context of today's libraries and its possible futures known as Gorman's Five New Laws of Librarianship²⁸. Again it

is possible to replace books by links, software, information, knowledge, tapes, files, records etc. Further it may even be extended to different organizations like museums, class rooms, groceries, patients, temple considering these laws as common laws as proposed by Sen²⁹.

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