

## Library profession and Dr. Ranganathan

R. Satyanarayana

Former Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi  
Current address: 501 - Brent Wood Tower, Charmwood Vllage, Eros Garden, Surajkund, Faridabad – 121009, Haryana  
Email: profrsatyanarayana@gmail.com

The significance of Ranganathan's contribution to library science and service has not yet been assessed in full. He had seminal contributions in almost every aspect of the field. The article discusses in a general way his contribution to dynamic theory of classification, Colon Classification scheme, his demonstration of the symbiotic relationship between classification and subject indexing, formulation of POPSI, etc. Development of PRECIS as also of AACR – 2 was influenced by his work. His association with FID and UNESCO, his role as a teacher and a crusader of library development and library legislation in India has been touched upon.

**Keywords:** S.R Ranganathan, Library Classification, Indexing, Library Cataloguing, LIS Profession

### Introduction

Francis Bacon<sup>1</sup> once commented “I hold everyman a debtor to his *profession* though each one of our debts is different”. Our profession – be it that of doctor, engineer, librarian or an information scientist – has helped to make each of us what we are! Let us now try to understand what constitutes a profession and its essential norms. It may be mentioned here that the range of concerns and plethora of viewpoints render any description of profession incomplete! The Dictionary tells us that “any type of work which needs a separate training or a particular skill, often which involves a higher level of education may be called a profession and cites examples of doctor, lawyer and engineer”. On the other hand, Dale<sup>2</sup> defines a profession “a calling requiring specialised knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation”. It may be stated that to be accorded societal recognition, it would appear that a number of criteria need to be met. Some of the criteria are:

- i. There must an identifiable subject with reasonably clear boundaries, which is not immediately accessible to a lay person;
- ii. There must be a long apprenticeship involving the learning of both theory and practice and application of the latter;
- iii. The application of the subject matter of this apprenticeship must be useful to the society;

- iv. The profession must promulgate standards for the products or services that are produced and delivered to its members; and
- v. Members of the profession are individually responsible for the standard of their work and for the professional conduct but are over seen by a professional body, which has power to ensure compliance.

The application of the above listed criteria to library and information profession has been somewhat problematic because of the divergent attitudes of professional experts relating to its nomenclature and disciplines associated with the profession. It may be mentioned here, that different names have been in practice for the activities concerning the profession. Therefore, under the umbrella term “Information Profession” comes Librarianship, Library Science, Documentation, Library and Information Science with other variant names ending up ultimately with Information Science. Hence, the problem that confronts us is “how to find out ways to define the subject matter and its main focus”?

On each one of the above discussed aspects, Dr. S.R. Ranganathan has done a great deal of study and research and came out with a number of solutions to each of the problems. During his long career which spanned over five decades Dr. Ranganathan has written profusely. It is stated<sup>3</sup> that he wrote sixty (60) books and 2000 technical papers. He also founded and edited research periodicals on library and information

science and filled them with seminal contributions. It may not be an easy task on the part of a single person to understand, much less to gauge the significance of his contributions in their totality. A very humble effort is made through this communication to catch a glimpse of the impact revealed through his writings as also his association with some international organisations.

### **Classification and indexing**

Of the different facets relating to library science, *classification* was nearer to the heart of Ranganathan. It was classification which engaged his mind throughout his life. His enquiring mind made him to delve deeper into the unexplored realms of discipline and his researches ultimately resulted in his dynamic theory of classification. With irresistible logic and reasoning, Ranganathan successfully projected his theory and drew the attention of the intellectuals belonging to the field of library science all over the world. Many got almost converted to his way of thinking. His analytico-synthetic technique in explaining the processes involved in the design of classification schemes has been applauded by everyone belonging to the profession. The postulation of 'Fundamental Categories' PMEST provided the basic frame of reference on which the superstructure of any classification scheme could be built. On colon classification the ALA World Encyclopaedia observes "in spite of its infrequent use, (colon) has had a major impact on library classification affecting all the existing or newly revised schemes"<sup>4</sup>. In other words, the theory behind the formulation of colon classification was constructed on sound principles of logic. The concept of categories, the principles associated with faceted classification have been found to be useful in organising and arranging knowledge relating to any discipline in a helpful manner. This fact has been demonstrated beyond doubt, by the members of Classification Research Group (CRG) London, through their special schemes of classification designed using the basic principles enunciated by Ranganathan.

### **Indexing**

Ranganathan discerned that classification and subject indexing were the two sides of the same coin. According to him, classifying a document is the translation of its specific subject into an artificial language of ordinal numbers which result in the formation of a class number linking together all the

isolate ideas in the form of a chain. The chain of the class number is retranslated into its verbal equivalents to formulate a subject heading that represents the subject contents of a document. The class number itself is the result of subject analysis of document into its facet ideas and linked together by a set of connecting symbols particularly when a classification system like colon is used for this purpose. As this chain is used for deriving subject entries on the basis of *a set of rules and procedures*, this system was named as 'chain procedure' by Ranganathan. The rules and procedures relating to 'chain procedure' were propounded by him for the first time in his Classified Catalogue Code (CCC). Thus, Ranganathan demonstrated the symbiotic relationship between classification and subject indexing linking these two techniques. This novel approach inspired the designing of other subject indexing models based upon classificatory principles and postulates. Although chain procedure was originally intended to provide class index entries to a classified catalogue, Ranganathan formulated rules and procedures for deriving subject headings to a dictionary catalogue also. This method was utilised to formulate subject index entries in case of BNB, BTI, and INB.

Postulate - based permuted subject index (POPSI) is another system which was developed after a number of years of research conducted at DRTC. In fact, the inspiration to design POPSI was derived from Ranganathan's postulational approach. POPSI is not based upon any particular system of classification but built around a set of fundamental theoretical principles of classification both *in the analysis of subject as well as in the structuring of names of subjects*. In both these aspects Ranganathan's work provided the requisite base. It is an accepted fact that the experience of BNB with chain procedure initiated continuous research by CRG of Great Britain and ultimately led to the development of PRECIS: Preserved Context Indexing System. If anyone carefully examines the theory behind PRECIS, one can perceive Ranganathan's influence in designing its theoretical base.

### **Cataloguing**

Ranganathan's contributions in the field of cataloguing are well known. He was one of the earliest persons to distil out certain basic principles on which a *catalogue code* could be constructed. His 'Theory of Library Catalogue, is a monumental work in which he discussed the normative principles known

as *canons*'. A further interpretation of these normative principles was provided by Ranganathan in 1955 through his book 'Headings and Canons'. J. Mills observed "the influence of Dr. Ranganathan on the study of .... cataloguing is more than the result of tireless investigation of, and prolific invention to, the complex problems associated with the subject. It springs also from his clear cut awareness of its proper relations to the rest of the librarian's studies and to the bold and graphic language which reflects so happily his infectious enthusiasm".<sup>5</sup>

The normative principles, viz. general laws, laws of library science and canons of cataloguing are meant to guide the entire work of cataloguing in general with particular reference to: i) drafting of a catalogue code and formulation of rules, ii) interpretation of rules to meet new problems brought up by certain types of documents or by change in practice of book production and iii) provision of suitable guidance for cataloguing work<sup>6</sup>.

A careful study of AACR – II published in 1978, which is said to be the culmination of three decades of research in author, title and descriptive cataloguing, a definite impact of Ranganathan's theories could be perceived. For example, AACR – II, under its Rule no. 2.0B1 reads that "the chief source of information for a printed monograph is the title page ...." This is what Ranganathan's canon of ascertainability would direct us to do. It may be mentioned here that the normative principles enunciated by Ranganathan are reckoned as one of his outstanding contributions to the field of cataloguing. These principles inspired many professionals to critically examine the catalogue codes. In this context Seymour Lubetzky observes "when I read Ranganathan's criticisms of our rules, I began to realise that, great as their contributions have unquestionably been, the founders and the framers of our cataloguing rules may not have foreseen everything and their being quite infallible, and it seemed increasingly clearer to me that it would sometimes be necessary to stop and reconsider our rules, to discover their underlying principles which have proved sound and valid throughout the years, and to reconstruct our rules on the basis of such principles. And for this guidance, I am indebted to Dr. Ranganathan"<sup>7</sup>. While Ranganathan's views contained in his "Headings and Canons" have had an impact on the construction of cataloguing codes such as AACR – II to some extent, his other canons like canon of prepotency and canon of recall value

remain to be fully exploited for designing a catalogue code at international level.

### **Impact on international organisations**

Ranganathan was propelled into international arena in 1948 when Donker Duyvis, Secretary General of FID invited him to FID headquarters in the Hague and got his memorandum entitled "Classification and International Documentation" published as a fascicule of '*Revue de la Documentation*'. Subsequently, Ranganathan was made Rapporteur General of FID/CA. During the period (1951-61) Ranganathan submitted as many as 10 reports as Rapporteur General of FID/CA and brought into international field his concepts of Fundamental Categories, Facet Analysis, Sector Analysis, Zone Analysis. . . etc. For his lasting contributions, Ranganathan was honoured by FID making him as 'Honorary Member' of FID in 1957. Ranganathan's impact could be perceived in the formulation of UDC schedules in their revised form.

Ranganathan was closely associated with the activities of UNESCO. For example, he was a faculty member of International Library School held in Manchester in 1948. He was associated with the first UNESCO conference on Public Librarianship. He was one of the members of the International Advisory Committee of Library Experts of United Nations which laid down the policy for the establishment of the United Nations Library. Ranganathan also served on UNESCO's International Bibliographical Committee during the period 1950-1953.

### **Contribution to Library Profession in India**

Ranganathan has been called the father of Library Science in India. The late Sir Maurice Gwyer paid tributes to Ranganathan in the following words "he is the father of the library science in India .... His reputation as a librarian extends far beyond the borders of his own country and his opinion and advice are valued in all lands where libraries are held in honour".<sup>8</sup>

Ranganathan's contribution to library profession may be grouped into the following categories.

- i. As a theoretician who has contributed to the growth of the discipline by propounding new theories, concepts and ideas:
- ii. As a teacher of library science who inspired many a student and built up a first rate cadre of Manpower for the country:
- iii. As a promoter of library legislation in the country.

Let me briefly discuss these aspects one by one and try to focus Ranganathan's contribution to the library profession in India.

### **Ranganathan as theoretician**

As a theoretician with original ideas, Ranganathan has written profusely on every aspect of library science. Many of his works such as *Prolegomena to Library Classification*, *Colon Classification*, *Five Laws of Library Science*, *Headings and Canons*, *Classified Catalogue Code* and *Reference Service* have attained the status of classics. Whether his colon scheme of classification will be frequently revised and practised in libraries is a different matter, but his theory of classification, especially his postulational approach, will continue to inspire many a classificationist of the future.

### **Ranganathan as a teacher**

Dr. Ranganathan exhibited signs of a great teacher even at the very start of his career. In the year 1924, he started library science classes on behalf of Madras Library Association for certificate course. He used to teach colon classification along with DC and a comparative treatment used to be given to schemes of classification as well as to catalogue codes. At a time, when no library school was firmly established, his courage and innovative techniques based on consistent research gave life to the subject and inspired students. Research and teaching formed a holistic part of Ranganathan's personality. Question – answer method, assignments, colloquia, morning walks, impromptu classes formed the special features of Ranganathan's teaching system. As a teacher, he became a legendary figure during his life time. Wherever Ranganathan went, he created an atmosphere of academic excellence. The DRTC, Bangalore became a *Gurukula* for library science education during the years 1962-1972, when he directed its activities as the Honorary Professor. Young students, eager to learn flocked around him. Ranganathan was a merciless and a very hard task master. His disciples narrate many anecdotes regarding his uncompromising strictness. He demanded 100% commitment on the part of his students and inspired them to imbibe the qualities of sincerity, hard work and devotion.

In recognition of his great qualities as a teacher and researcher par excellence, the Government of India made Ranganathan a National Research Professor in 1965, a rare honour held at that time by very few

great Indians like C.V. Raman, Satyen Bose- the physicists. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee- the linguist and R.C. Majumdar- the historian. True to the spirit, Ranganathan worked relentlessly for the upliftment of the profession till he breathed his last.

### **Ranganathan as a promoter of library legislation.**

The concept of library legislation is not a novel one. It was very much prevalent in U.K. Library legislation gave rise to the phenomenal growth of public library system in U.K. In fact, by the end of forties the United Kingdom could claim an effective public library service covering all the sections of its population. Ever since, Dr. Ranganathan visited England and had an intimate knowledge regarding the functioning of public libraries in the country, he was very much influenced by the British pattern and wanted that such a system should be developed in India. He began to work ceaselessly for organising a movement for library legislation. As early as 1930, Ranganathan presented a draft of Model Public Library Act for India in Library services section of the First All Asia Educational conference held at Banaras<sup>9</sup>. Since then, his untiring efforts resulted in the enactment of library legislation by five states. Though Ranganathan was the prime mover of these acts, it is only in the case of Karnataka Library Act that his ideas found their full manifestation. Credit should also be given to the initiative taken by the Karnataka Government, which set up a committee under the chairmanship of Ranganathan for this purpose. It is stated that the Karnataka state has a better system of public libraries compared to other states which have enacted library legislation. It is stated that Ranganathan also prepared draft library bills for other states such as U.P., Gujarat, Kerala and Assam. But these were not taken up by the respective governments then.

In addition to his efforts relating to library legislation at state level, Dr. Ranganathan also wanted library legislation at all-India level and strove for it<sup>10</sup>. He observed that "a Union Library system is absolutely necessary as something which binds together and supplements the resources of the library Systems of each one of the constituent states. It has also some specific functions ... A Union Library Act is necessary to make the Union Government discharge these functions efficiently". Ranganathan prepared a 'Model Public Libraries Act' and published it as part of the book entitled 'Public Library System', in 1972.<sup>11</sup> In this Model Act, Ranganathan has recommended a system of National Libraries,

National Department of Libraries, a National Committee of Librarians and a National Library Fund. The Government of India has not yet enacted any such act. It will be a fitting tribute to his memory if the profession could persuade the Government of India to pass such an act.

### Conclusion

In the foregoing a brief account of the impact of Dr. Ranganathan on library profession has been attempted. Volumes could be written in a critical and objective manner, interpreting his theories and identifying appropriate areas of relevance to the solution of current problems faced by the library profession. It is hoped that the profession will be inspired to publish such works.

### References

- 1 Bacon F, *The elements of the common Laws of England*, (Assigns of I, More, Esq.; London), 1613.
- 2 Dale A, Despatches: Letters from the Corporanian War Zone. Letter 7 – meeting the demands of chartered status, *Journal of Information Science*, 27 (6) (2001) 4341.
- 3 Rajagopalan T S, *Ranganathan's Philosophy: Assessment, impact and relevance*, (Vikas Publishing House; New Delhi), 1986.
- 4 Wedgeworth R, *ALA World Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Services*, 1980, p. 146-150.
- 5 Kaula P N, Contribution of Ranganathan and world librarianship, In Rajagopalan T S, ed. *Ranganathan's Philosophy: Assessment, Impact and Relevance* (Vikas Publishing House; New Delhi), 1986, p. 28-40).
- 6 Guha B and Prasad H N, Ranganathan's normative principles and AACR – II. In Rajagopalan T S, ed. *Ranganathan's Philosophy: Assessment, Impact and Relevance* (Vikas Publishing House; New Delhi), 1986, p.353)
- 7 Lubetzky S, *Cataloguing rules and principles: a critique of the ALA rules*, (Library of Congress; Washington), 1954.
- 8 Kaula P N, Felicitation to Dr. S R Ranganathan on his 71<sup>st</sup> birthday, In What they say, (Ranganathan Commemoration Volume Committee; Benares), 1965, p. 71.
- 9 Gopinath M A, History of library legislation in India, In Ranganathan S R and Neelameghan A, Eds., *Public Library System*, (Sarada Ranganathan Endowment; Bangalore), 1972.
- 10 Ranganathan S R, Library development plan: thirty year programme for India, (Delhi University; Delhi), 1950.
- 11 Ranganathan S R and Neelameghan A, *Public Library System*, (Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science, Bangalore) 1972.