

Ranganathan's philosophy in the context of societal development leading to a knowledge society

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National and international organizations are evolving various measures, policies, programmes and so on for societal development that will eventually usher in the knowledge society. The paper looks at some such national and international initiatives with Ranganathan's philosophy in the backdrop.

Keywords: Library development; Knowledge society; Libraries; Societal development; IFLA; NKC

Introduction

The Father of Library Science in India, Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (1892-1972), dedicated his entire life for the development of libraries, for the library profession and above all to establish library science as a distinct subject. His thinking on various areas of library science gave the social foundation that established library science as a distinct social science. Amongst his many contributions, the five laws of library science, concept of fundamental categories, colon classification scheme and depth classification, development of classified catalogue code and chain indexing method are epoch making farsighted contributions which are not only the examples of imagination and thinking that led to the establishment of library science as a social milieu but also established library profession on a sound pedestal and a honourable position.

Since the days of Dr. Ranganathan the concepts and objectives of librarianship have changed. The changes are witnessed even in the nomenclature like information society, moving towards knowledge society. These are the developments basically since 1970s. The nomenclature library science also went on changing from librarianship, library and information science, documentation, information studies etc. Whatever changes we see and nomenclature we give, his thinking pervades to satisfy the requirements of all which he visualized as a most exemplary visionary. Let's look at some of his contributions and thinking in the context of the present scenario of societal transformation.

He recognized that libraries were the backbone for societal development and realized the importance of organization of libraries for which the colon classification scheme, classified catalogue code etc. were developed. Being a student of mathematics, the philosophy of organizing books/documents helped him a lot. He realized the role of libraries in the development of human beings who have to play a significant role in the development of the society that led him to think of the philosophy of librarianship which he did through his Five Laws.

Ranganathan, throughout his life and contributions recognized the role and importance of libraries in the development of the society for which he developed methods and techniques for organization and the access to documents and information and suggesting ways to their availability to all sections of the people in the society. For the later objectives, he realized the need for a well established public library system by suggesting model public libraries act, manpower and other infrastructural requirements.

In the recent decades, information and communication technologies have played a very crucial role in the accessibility, organization and dissemination of information/knowledge which changed the societal structure leading to information and knowledge societies. Knowledge plays a crucial role in the development and transformation of society. A country having knowledgeable people is the most powerful nation. Different nations and international organizations like United Nations, IFLA are taking

positive steps in the transformation process through their various programs and initiatives.

We will discuss such initiatives undertaken at national and international level and try to assess how Ranganathan's idea and philosophy is valid even today.

Recent initiatives to a knowledge society

Societal development pre-supposes upliftment of the people in the society for their well being—food, shelter, clothing etc. through development in various areas such as, education, health care, agriculture, water, energy etc. It is recognized now that knowledge plays an - all pervasive role in every sector of the society. It is said that the 21st century will be a knowledge century where creation, access and utilization of knowledge will be the driving force. The empowerment of people to access and utilize knowledge is crucial which can be achieved by having a robust information infrastructure, efficient research and innovation environment, and qualitative education and lifelong learning systems. Subsequent to World Summit to Information Society (WSIS), the United Nations through rounds of discussions and negotiations amongst the member nations felt that actions should be initiated for societal development, called the Millennium Development Goals if the goal towards knowledge society is to be achieved. Thus, societal development is a pre-requisite for knowledge society. The eight goals set by UN are:

- a) Eradicating hunger and poverty
- b) Achieving universal primary education
- c) Promoting gender equality
- d) Reducing child mortality
- e) Improving maternal health
- f) Combating HIV & AIDS
- g) Ensuring environmental sustainability
- h) Developing a global partnership and development.

The main features of knowledge society are not only access, generation and utilization of knowledge but self-empowerment.

IFLA's advocacy for the role of libraries in the developmental process

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the global voice of librarians has taken up the issue of recognition of libraries as a key element in the development goals and advocates recognizing the role of libraries in

societal and sustained development to be included in Millennium Development Goals. This is witnessed by the Lyon declaration (2014) and its advocacy with the UN. The declaration which was adopted states, "In accordance with the findings of the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the post-2015 consultations of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Open Working Group Focus Area Report, all of which identified the crucial role of access to information in supporting development, we, the undersigned, recognize that:

1. Poverty is multidimensional, and progress in eradicating poverty is linked to sustainable development across a variety of areas.
2. Sustainable development must take place in a human-rights based framework, where:
 - a. Inequality is reduced by the empowerment, education and inclusion of marginalized groups, including women, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, and refugees, persons with disabilities, older persons, children and youth.
 - b. Gender equality, along with full social, economic and political engagement, can be significantly enhanced by empowering women and girls through equitable access to education.
 - c. Dignity and autonomy can be strengthened by ensuring access to employment and decent jobs for all.
 - d. Equitable access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and privacy are promoted, protected and respected as being central to an individual's independence.
 - e. Public participation of all is ensured to allow them to take ownership of change needed to improve their lives.
3. Increased access to information and knowledge, underpinned by universal literacy, is an essential pillar of sustainable development. Greater availability of quality information and data and the involvement of communities in its creation will provide a fuller, more transparent allocation of resources.
4. Information intermediaries such as libraries, archives, civil society organizations (CSOs), community leaders and the media have the skills and resources to help governments, institutions

and individuals communicate, organize, structure and understand data that is critical to development. They can do this by:

- a. Providing information on basic rights and entitlements, public services, environment, health, education, work opportunities, and public expenditure that supports local communities and people to guide their own development.
 - b. Identifying and focusing attention on relevant and pressing needs and problems within a population.
 - c. Connecting stakeholders across regional, cultural and other barriers to facilitate communication and the exchange of development solutions that could be scaled for greater impact.
 - d. Preserving and ensuring ongoing access to cultural heritage, government records and information by the public, through the stewardship of national libraries and archives and other public heritage institutions.
 - e. Providing public forums and space for wider civil society participation and engagement in decision-making.
 - f. Offering training and skills to help people access and understand the information and services most helpful to them.
5. Improved ICT infrastructure can be used to expand communications, speed up the delivery of services and provide access to crucial information particularly in remote communities. Libraries and other information intermediaries can use ICTs to bridge the gap between national policy and local implementation to ensure that the benefits of development reach all communities.
6. We, the undersigned, therefore call on Member States of the United Nations to acknowledge that access to information, and the skills to use it effectively, are required for sustainable development, and ensure that this is recognized in the post-2015 development agenda by:
- a. Acknowledging the public's right to access information and data, while respecting the right to individual privacy.
 - b. Recognizing the important role of local authorities, information intermediaries and infrastructure such as ICTs and an open Internet as a means of implementation.

- c. Adopting policy, standards and legislation to ensure the continued funding, integrity, preservation and provision of information by governments, and access by people.
- d. Developing targets and indicators that enable measurement of the impact of access to information and data and reporting on progress during each year of the goals in a Development and Access to Information (DA2I) report".²

The United Nations is now negotiating a new agenda which will succeed Millennium Development Goals that will guide countries on approaches to improve people's lives and outline a new set of goals to be achieved during the period 2016-2030.

In the latest negotiation session on the post-2015 UN development framework, held in the last week of February 2015, IFLA focused on increased access to information in the new framework and highlighted the role that information intermediaries, such as libraries, can play in helping achieve the new set of Sustainable Development Goals that all UN Member States will commit to reaching from September 2015. The argument that IFLA put forward is that access to information is a common principle, as well as a cross-cutting issue across all of the goals and targets.

The issue has been taken by IFLA at the UN and the effort put forth is demonstrated by the following text of the speech delivered there.

"I'm Donna Scheeder, the President-Elect of IFLA, and I'm speaking on behalf of more than 500 organizations and institutions who have signed The Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development. The Lyon Declaration calls upon UN Member States to recognize the importance of increased access to information in supporting the post-2015 development agenda.

I wanted to remind delegates that in moving forward we must pay attention to a different kind of poverty that has not been mentioned much here - information poverty.

Information and knowledge really are the foundation for making progress towards sustainable development. Without access to information, people will lack the means to take the crucial decisions needed to improve their lives.

Increased access to information is a cross-cutting issue that will contribute to the achievement of all goals - whether in health, education, transparency and accountability: all goals will benefit from people being able to know more about how to achieve them.

And we - libraries - can help you get there. There are over 320,000 public libraries worldwide, and hundreds of thousands of school and research libraries - in all of your countries. Librarians are skilled information professionals who can be strong partners in increasing access to information. And we can help people gain the information literacy skills needed to improve their lives.

So when considering how we do this, let's make sure we use the institutions who can help open up the datasets, knowledge resources and provide access to the ICTs people need to achieve sustainable development.

*We look forward to being partners in the data revolution and helping us get to 2030 in great shape."*²

Efforts towards knowledge society at national level National Knowledge Commission

The constitution of the National Knowledge Commission in India (NKC) in 2005 by the Prime Minister of India is a great step initiated by the Government of India "with the focus on five key-areas of knowledge paradigm – access to knowledge, knowledge concepts, knowledge creation, knowledge application and development of better knowledge services"³. The overall task before the National Knowledge Commission was to recommend steps that would give India the 'knowledge edge' in the coming decades, i.e. to ensure that the country becomes a leader in the creation, application and dissemination of knowledge. The aim of the commission "is to transform India into a vibrant knowledge-based society. For this the Commission seeks to develop appropriate institutional framework to strengthen the education system, promote domestic research and innovation and facilitate knowledge application in sectors like health, education, agriculture, water, energy and industry. Increased participation and a more equitable access to knowledge across all sections of society are of vital importance in achieving the goals".³

National Mission on Libraries

The goal for moving towards knowledge society requires creation and access to knowledge by the citizens of the countries. It is imperative to provide access to relevant and timely information to address the role, the people should play in the developmental process and disseminating knowledge is pre-requisite to ensure that people from all walks of life have easy

access to knowledge relevant to their needs and aspirations. In this process libraries play a significant role in not only collecting information and knowledge but also developing a strategy of knowledge access and dissemination.

The NKC from the very beginning appreciated the role of libraries as a rich repository of resources and realized its importance in the knowledge paradigm. Thus, the Commission constituted a Working Group for Libraries in April 2006 with nine terms of reference with a broad objective to examine the present standards and services of different types of libraries and information centers and resources and to create mechanisms that will serve the people, the goal being to transform libraries from guarded storehouses of publications into open stock-piles of knowledge. The Prime Minister at the inception of Commission's work pointed out the key role public libraries could play as an extremely important element of the foundation of a knowledge economy.

The Working group recognized that all the stakeholders of the all the focus areas of NKC mandate will require well-organized library and information support. The Group submitted ten recommendations as follows;

- 1) Set up national commission on libraries
- 2) Prepare a national census of all libraries
- 3) Revamp library and information science education, training and research facilities
- 4) Re-assess staffing of libraries
- 5) Set up a central library fund
- 6) Modernize library management
- 7) Encourage greater community participation in library management
- 8) Promote ICT application to libraries
- 9) Facilitate donation and maintenance of private collections
- 10) Encourage public-private partnership in development of library and information services.

The responsibility of libraries in the knowledge society requires provision of equitable, high quality, cost-effective access to information and knowledge resources and services to meet the informational, educational, recreational and cultural needs of the community.

Conclusion

The features of the knowledge society encompass the creation, access, and utilization of knowledge for societal development for betterment of life of the

people. The societal development needs to be undertaken in all directions so that its benefit can be utilized by all. Both the efforts being put forward at international and national level recognize the role of libraries in the knowledge society.

Ranganathan realized the importance of libraries in societal development and worked on the different facets of libraries starting from organization to development of libraries. Efforts at national and international level are being made to develop different strategies, plans and programs for societal development to facilitate transition towards knowledge society. Actions identified whether at national and international level for societal development include healthcare, poverty eradication, food & shelter, education for all, infrastructure, agriculture, water, etc.,. The features of knowledge society being envisaged are access to knowledge, utilization of knowledge and above all empowerment of citizens in all these activities.

All the agencies, concerned with transformational process have realized and recognized the role of libraries in the developmental activities and utilization of knowledge by citizens for their survival. The National Knowledge Commission in India gave importance on libraries and had set up Working Group on Libraries to suggest ways and means to support the developmental activities. On the basis of recommendations of NKC the Government of India has established

National Mission on libraries (NML) The other recommendations include census of public libraries as a preliminary step to establish a well knit public library system in the country, and establishment of national virtual libraries. Ranganathan's contribution on librarianship encompasses a broad areas starting from organization of libraries through development of various methods and techniques to access to information knowledge, which he realized to be possible with an well organized library system in the country for which he developed model public libraries act. The need of the hour is to look at Ranganathan's philosophy in the newer perspective of societal transition and development.

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