RELEVANCE OF RANGANATHAN'S FIVE LAW OF LIBRARY SCIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ERA

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Abstract

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan's[1] Five Laws of Library Science were published in 1931 which is a classic work. This article describes in detail the Five Laws of Library Science and their relevance on library activities in modern ICT Era. These new interpretations of these Laws shows that in today's international world of librarianship, Ranganathan's Five laws are much important and relevant what was before and even it is increasing. These Laws became the cornerstones of the philosophy of the techniques of Western society's library experts. The author concludes that the vision and legacy of Ranganathan will continue to be an inspiration and guiding spirit for the emergence of the new library and information profession. These will serve as source of inspiration and guidance in the years to come. It is not whether Ranganathan is by himself relevant to-day, but it is we who can make him relevant by studying and applying his principles and practices in different areas of library management.

Key Words: Five Law of Library, Basic Law of Library, Library Law in Modern Age.

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1.   Introduction

Dr. Shiyali Ramamritra Ranganathan (1892-1972), who is often regarded as the Father of Library Science in India, was born in Shiyali, a small village in the Tanjavoor district of Tamilnadu state on 9th August (date current in official use is 12th August) 1892. He was an inventor, educator, librarian and a philosopher (Kumar 1992)[2]. He was a library scientist par excellence. He aims to apply scientific method and principles to different areas of library science. In the context of library science, he conceived the Five Laws of Library Science in 1924. The statements embodying these laws were formulated in 1928; i.e. the laws took final form in 1928. His Five Laws of Library Science was published in 1931. This is a classic work, which describes in detail the Five Laws of Library Science and their implications on library activities. These laws have provided a scientific approach to library science. They constitute the philosophical basis for work and services of all types of libraries.

The year 2011 marks the eighty years of the pronunciation of the Five Laws. These laws are still relevant to the international library philosophy. I am happy to contribute this paper on the occasion of eighty years of Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science for which the Korean Library Association and Korean Society of Library and Information Science jointly organising an International Seminar to mark this occasion and pays tribute to the Father of Library Science.

2. Review of Literature

According to Bhattacharya 'these five laws 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 of these disciplines; they are relevant in relation to the present day developments, and they will continue to be so in relation to their future development' (Bhattacharya 1984)[3].

Pauline Atherton would like the Hall of Frame Award to be given to Ranganathan for his Five Laws alone (Atherton 1973)[4]. These Laws represent the best of Indian philosophy and Indian culture. They have been derived from the source of Indian wisdom, namely the Vedas. They are as much applicable to Library and Information Science as to any other branch of human

knowledge or human activity. They cut across all barriers of geography, nationalities, races and cultures. These laws are the "Grammar of the Library Science or Library Profession". They are not just normative principles but the outcome of immense experience, research and talent of the Noble Librarian Dr SR Ranganathan. In the words of Lancaster, "These laws provided fundamental statements of goals that Information services should strive for, and they are as relevant today as they were …. years ago" (Lancaster 1998)[5]. The statement of Lancaster implies that what ever changes that take place in procedures, policies and functions of a library in any society, it would come in the framework and validated by these Five Laws. "One of the astounding things about Dr. Ranganathan's Five Laws is the depth of meaning compressed into so few words. Such concision is characteristic of Western poetry and Eastern teaching (secular and spiritual)" (Gorman 1998)[6-7].

These have made an impact on the growth and development of theory and practice. These will provide source of inspiration and guidance in the years to come. Every student and teacher of library Science and librarian must give a thought to the implications of these laws. 'The laws themselves have as much validity now as they ever did. They have been formulated in fewer than 25 words" (Graves 1958)[8]. Sayers (1957)[9] regards these laws as "a work of great simplicity which conceals depths and yet reveals what may be called the spiritual but intensely practical springs of activity".

Therefore, in the changing environment of libraries in the emerging society has to fall with in the purview of these laws (Parekh 2007)[10]. These brief statements remain as valid (in substance if not in expression) today as when they were promulgated, concisely representing the ideal service and organizational philosophy of most libraries today. These laws are a perennial source of inspiration for services and guidance, for the dynamic development of the subject. They have been widely accepted as the definitive statement of ideal library service.

3. The Five Laws of Library Science

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, considered by librarians all over the world to be the Father of modern Library Science, proposed five laws of library science in the early 1930s. He left a legacy in his concise laws for libraries. Most librarians worldwide accept them as the foundations of the

philosophy of their work and service in the library. These five laws have remained a centrepiece of professional values and as powerful inspirations for social change. These basic theories of Library Science continue to directly impact the development of this discipline and the service of all libraries.

Books are for use

Every reader his/her Book (Books for all)

Every book its Reader

Save the time of the Reader

Library is a Growing Organism

These are fundamental laws of library science, which provide the rationale for a unifying theory of library science. With the help of these, we can derive postulates, canons and principles applicable in different fields of Library and Information Science (LIS). These also provide guidance in the practice of Library and Information Science. The 24 words of the Laws provided an intellectual framework for understanding all aspects of library work. The laws have been useful in the teaching of different branches of LIS. These are more than mere generalities because they are founded on observation and analysis.

3.1 First Law - "Books are for use"

"Books are for use" is the first, most basic law of Library Science. The first law was the intuitive flash of Prof. Ross, his mathematics teacher and the rest of the laws were propounded by Ranganathan (Ranganathan 1931, p.22). While this seems simple and self-evident, librarians at the time felt very conflicted between the desire to promote reading and the urge to protect and conserve their books. He maintained that books should be used, read and circulated. He observed that books were often chained to prevent their removal and that the emphasis was on storage and preservation rather than use. He did not reject the notion that preservation and storage were important, but he asserted that the purpose of such activities was to promote the use of them. Without the use of materials, there is little use of the item. By emphasizing use, Ranganathan refocused the attention of the field to access-related issues, such as the library's location, loan policies, hours and days of operation, such mundanities as library furniture and the quality of staffing.

This law gives definition both to the concept of an open stack library and to a library that is appointed with tools and furnishings that make the books useful. Books are to be taken from locked back rooms and brought out to welcoming rooms with open shelves. Shelves need to be accessible to more than one user at a time. Libraries are to be located in the midst of their communities. Whatever be the library location, hours of operation, type of furniture and the way in which books are kept, it is the Library Staff that ultimately make or mar a library. A modern librarian who has faith in this law is happy only when the readers make the shelves constantly empty and use the resources comprehensively.

3.2 Second Law - "Every reader his/her book"

An extension of "Books are for use," the second law asserts the right of a library patron to have access to any of the library collection. This law suggests that every member of the community should be able to obtain needed information materials. Ranganathan felt that individuals from all social environments are entitled to library service, and that the basis of library use is education. Librarians should have excellent first hand knowledge of the people to be served, and collections should meet the special interests of the community and libraries should promote and advertise their services extensively to attract a wide range of users. The second law is user oriented law. Every citizen has the right to access the information (Right to Information Act 2004). This law guides the library or information professionals to take care of information users, so that they can access information without any obstacle. Here is the necessity of user survey, user study and user education. User Orientation may help in acquiring the need and satisfying the purpose. Presently many Information Centers or Libraries are is self sufficient to serve all types of information needs of a particular client because of information explosion, budget crunches in the library and raising cost of information sources. But through the networking and the consortium approach of the E-journals and E-books, help to meet the changing needs of users (Satpaty 2007)[11].

While the first law brought about change of fundamental nature in librarianship and put an end to the concept of 'Books are for Preservation' the second law carried this objective further and widened the concept from "Books are for the chosen few to books are for all." The approach of first law is from the side of books, the approach of the Second law. is from the side of users of information sources on the line of democratic principle. The Second law insists some obligatory

functions of government, library authority, library staff and readers in a welfare state. It is ultimate responsibility of the government to give education for all by any means and methods. Books are tools of education. It presupposes the concept of education for all.

3.3 Third Law - "Every books its reader"

The third law asserts that at least one community citizen will have an interest in every book in the library, and that every book should be made available for that person. This principle is closely related to the second law but it focuses on the item itself, suggesting that each item in a library has an individual or individuals who would find that item useful. Ranganathan argued that the library could devise many methods to ensure that each item finds it appropriate reader. One method involved in the basic rules for access to the collection, most notably the need for open shelving. Third Law is information oriented. In modern situation information professionals have to accept the information technology to organize and manage information. Except in rural areas, most of the libraries in India are automated. Few of them have taken initiatives in digitizing the collections. Now e-books and e-journals have taken place into the libraries in addition to the print collections. Every piece of information should be serving to users. Thus information professionals have to organize the information in such a manner that maximum information is used by user correctly and properly. Automated technical process of the library collection such as Cataloguing, Indexing, and Abstracting etc. helps users in the context of the third law of Library Science.

The third law emphasises on the arrangement of the library for maximum use. The following devices are to be used to satisfy the Third law of library science : Book selection (Acquisition on demand); open Access; shelf Arrangement; Cataloguing entries (all approaches); Reference Service; Opening of popular departments (Women/Children); Publicity methods; Extension services; Finance and Staff Selection.

This law addresses the fundamental issue of open access. In addition, when a library user comes to the library, or gains access to the library resources, there are certain materials that will meet his or her needs. It is the library's job to ensure that the connection between the user and the materials are made, and that the connection is as speedy and practical as possible. There are

many ways in which a library can connect its users to its resources such as: Distribution of acquisition lists; New Book displays; Providing Research Guides; Newsletters; and Book Lists.

3.4 Fourth Law - "Save the time of the Reader"

This law is recognition that part of the excellence of library service is its ability to meet the needs of the library user efficiently. The fourth law emphasizes on saving the time of the readers by adopting suitable methods. At present time is precious to not only to the reader but also to the library staff. While rendering library service there is time lag or delay in providing materials due to non-availability of materials, language barrier etc. To this end, Ranganathan recommended the use of appropriate business methods to improve library management. He observed that centralizing the library collection in one location provided distinct advantages. The skillful and qualified staff would not only include those who possess strong reference skills, but also strong technical skills in cataloging, cross-referencing, ordering, accessioning, and the circulation of materials (Ramesh Babu 1996a)[12].

This guideline is meant to improve the efficiency of the library. Readers who can quickly locate the book they want will be more satisfied customers. This law highlighted on, how fast information can be delivered to its end users. ICT has helped users in getting their required information into their laptop, palmtop, and desktops. Today's concept of "library without walls" has come into the picture. Through broadband connection information professionals provide in-formation to its clients with in a fraction of second. Day by day Internet is speedy and reaching every user irrespective of the place and time. Perhaps this law is not as self-evident as the others. Nevertheless, it has been responsible for many reforms in library administration. A Library must examine every aspect of its policies, rules, procedures, and systems with one simple criterion that saving the time of the reader is vital to the library's mission. Policies must formulate with the needs of the library users in mind. For example, hours of operation must be set in order to ensure appropriate and convenient access, and the collection must be arranged in an inviting, clear, and obvious way so as not to waste the time of the users.

3.5 Fifth Law - "Library is a Growing Organism"

Ranganathan realised that libraries need to continually grow in order to survive. They should be constantly accumulating more information sources in their collection, and they should continually adapt to changes in culture, interest and technology. This law focused more on the need for internal change than on changes in the environment itself. He argued that library organizations must accom-modate growth in staff, the physical collection, and patron use. This involved growth in the physical building, reading areas, shelving, and space for the catalogue. The 5th law tells us about the vital and lasting characteristics of the library as an institution and enjoins the need for a constant adjustment of our outlook in dealing with it. Libraries grow and change, and will always do so. Collections increase and change, technology changes and budgets change. Change comes along with growth, and in order to be healthy, that change and growth requires flexibility in the management of the collections, in the use of space, in the recruitment, retention and deployment of staff. In the Fifth Law, the word 'organism' implies a 'system' concept; 'growing' connotes a 'living system'.

The fifth law enunciates a basic principle that should govern the planning and organization of libraries. When a library grows, its entire constituents such as books, readers an staff will grow. Every year books are added to the library collection, due to knowledge explosion and the increasing rate of book production. The increase in the book stack affects the shelving accommodation and stack room area. Thus planning library building, furniture and. fittings should have the character of elasticity. There should be provision for future expansion.

4. New Interpretations of Five Laws

The Five Laws were interpreted and reworded from time to time. The following are some of such interpretations:

Replacing Books with Documents (Ranganathan 1963)[13]

Documents are for use

Every reader his/her document

Every document its reader

Save the time of the reader

A library is a growing organism

Replacing Books with Information (Bhattacharyya 1983, p.231)

Information is for use

Every Information user his/her information

Every piece of information its user

Save the time of the information user

The universe of information is ever growing

Replacing Books with E-Resources

E- Resources are for use

Every E- Resource its user

Every user his/her E- Resource

Save the time of the user

E-resource is a growing organism

Visualizing the Web through Five Laws (Noruzi 2004)[14]

Web resources are for use

Every user his or her web resource

Every web resource its user

Save the time of the user

The Web is a growing organism

5. Conclusion

Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science are applicable to all fields of library activities. Now we have entered into digital era. Inspite-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 its inception. Today ICT application permits all human activities. Five Laws of Library Science was written eighty years back and inspite-of having so many changes in Library world, these Five Laws still relevant in today's context. 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 practices of times, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Even eighty years of its origin Ranganathan's Five Laws are very much popular and applicable in this present electronic and

digital era. These Laws can never be obsolete as long as human civilization and culture exist and consigned to oblivion in spite of the digital divide and information literacy barrier.

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