

## Ranganathan's five laws

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Five laws of library science formulated by Ranganathan have with time and environment been changing the form. A number of forms advanced by learned scholars are presented in the article. Considering the fact that the Laws are finding application beyond the confine of library science, a generalized form has been suggested with five examples basing which any other form can be created as per the need.

### Introduction

It can be bibliometrically proved that S R Ranganathan (hereinafter referred to as Ranganathan) is the greatest thinker in the field of library science that the world has ever produced. The number of original contributions he made in this field, fundamental ideas he gave birth to, and the philosophy he advanced are all unmatched in the world. Years ago Chakraborty and Chakraborty showed that Ranganathan was miles ahead of others in his field<sup>1</sup>. It is rather unfortunate that most of his followers chose to parrot him rather than delving deep into his ideas and philosophy and contribute substantially to remove the shortcomings and extend the horizon of Ranganathan school of thought. If a sincere effort is made today to quantify the extent of contributions made by his followers to his school of thought, the sum total may not be very encouraging.

Recently a number of articles have appeared on Five Laws of Library Science as well as its components<sup>2-9</sup> but none has given anything that Ranganathan did not say or imply. Of course, many have tried to put old wine in a new bottle. It may be noticed in these papers that none has quoted any reference that has criticized these Laws. Possibly they are averse to the criticism of Ranganathan.

### Five laws in many forms

Ranganathan presented his Five laws of library science for the first time in 1928 in a conference of teachers held in the Meenakshi College, Annamalaiagar. The

Laws appeared in the book form in 1931<sup>10</sup>. Originally the laws appeared in the following form:

#### Form I

1. Books are for Use
2. Every Reader His Book
3. Every Book Its Reader
4. Save the Time of the Reader
5. A Library is a Growing Organism.

These laws are being quoted from *Five laws of library science*<sup>11</sup>. According to Dasgupta 'Later on Ranganathan himself revised these laws as follows<sup>12</sup>:

#### Form II

1. Documents are for use
2. Every reader his document
3. Every document its reader
4. Save the time of the reader
5. A library is a growing organism'

In some documents the second law appears as 'Every reader his/her document'. Possibly this was done to sink the gender difference.

The changeover from the words 'book/s' to 'document/s' in the laws indicates that Ranganathan realized the mistakes in the original laws and later on tried to correct them. A question may arise in the mind of an inquisitive scholar as to why Ranganathan used the term 'book/s' instead of 'document/s' in 1928 when libraries contained not only books but also other types of documents such as periodicals, patents, standards, and so on.

The aforesaid change made by Ranganathan offered enough freedom to learned scholars to present the laws in any form they liked. They did not bother about the grammar and used capital letters in the statements with absolute abandon. Many forms the laws exist today. Some of them are being presented here verbatim.

Forms III to V are from Parekh's paper<sup>13</sup>; form VI from Thaker and Rawal's paper<sup>14</sup>, form VII from Aghav's paper<sup>15</sup>, and form VIA and VIII from Dasgupta's paper<sup>16</sup>.

#### Form III [by Lenart Bjorneborn]

1. Links are for use – the very essence of hypertext
2. Every surfer his or her link – the rich diversity of links across topics and genes
3. Every link its surfer
4. Save the time of the surfer – visualizing web clusters and small-world shortcuts
5. The Web is a growing organism

#### Form IV [Author not mentioned]

1. Software is for use
2. Every user his or her software (or software is for all)
3. Every software its user
4. Save the time of the user
5. A software Library is a growing organism

#### Form V [Updated form of Five laws by Walt Crawford and Michael Gorman]

1. Libraries serve humanity
2. Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated
3. Use technology intelligently to enhance service
4. Protect free access to knowledge
5. Honor the past and create the future

#### Form VI

1. Information is for use
2. Every user his or her Information
3. Every Byte of Information its user
4. Save the time of the Information users & Staff
5. Universe of Information is growing organism

It may be noted that the author has used capital letter/s for 'byte' (3<sup>rd</sup> law), 'information' in all places and 'staff' in the fourth law disregarding the rules of grammar. The definite article 'The' is missing at the beginning of the fifth law.

#### Form VIA

1. Information is for use
2. Every user his or her information
3. Every piece of information its user
4. Save the time of the information user
5. The universe of information is ever growing

Readers may note that in the fifth law the words 'organism' has been dropped.

#### Form VII

1. Books/Documents/Information/Knowledge are for use
2. Every Reader his Book/ Document/ Information/ Knowledge
3. Ever Book/ Document/ Information/ Knowledge its reader /user
4. Save the time of reader/user
5. Library/ Information/ Knowledge center is a growing organism

Here the author uses book/s and document/s both as if books are not documents. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> laws, reader/user both have been used. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> law 'Every' has been spelt as 'Ever'. It is not known why the author omitted 'staff' in the 4<sup>th</sup> law. The abundant use of capital letters is easily visible. Will it be correct to say Every knowledge its reader/user?

#### Form VIII

In Dasgupta's paper<sup>16</sup> one more form has been noticed which is being reproduced verbatim.

1. Tapes, files, records, relics and books are for use in the information delivery system.
2. To every media – ite, his/her medium
3. To every tape, record etc its utiliser
4. Save the downtown of the patron
5. a learning resource centre is a growing organism

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> law, possibly 'ite' will be 'its'. In the fifth law, 'a' figuring at the beginning of the sentence will be in capital.

Different forms of the Laws given above reveal several characteristics of the Laws. They are as follows:

1. The wording of the Laws is not constant. Words are changing with the passage of time and environment.
2. The Laws are finding applications in different environment, especially in different organizations.
3. The Laws are not having any mathematical representation.
4. The Laws are not discipline specific.
5. The Laws can take many more forms depending on the organizations to which they are applied.

The characteristics show that the Laws are not like the laws of science whose wording remains unaltered for centuries and millennia, which in many cases are discipline-specific, and quite often can be represented mathematically. The laws of bibliometrics and many other disciplines are also of that type. Take for example, Zipf's laws—they are basically linguistic laws and till date they did not warrant even the change of a single word and can be represented mathematically<sup>17-18</sup>. It has been shown in a paper that Ranganathan's Five laws can also be condensed into a single scientific law<sup>19</sup>.

Judging from a neutral point of view, these Laws may be viewed as basics, fundamentals or broad principles having the potential of application in diverse environment with changed forms. They are basically organizational laws. For example, Forms I and II are laws for the library, Form III for the Web, Form IV for the software library, Form VI and VIA for the information centre, and form VIII is for a learning resource centre. Form V is a set of five statements that goes much beyond the confine of library science. Form VII is a *khichri*.

An analysis of the Five laws reveals that

- i) the 1<sup>st</sup> law focuses on the usable item,
- ii) the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> laws focus on the user and the usable item,

- iii) the 4<sup>th</sup> law is a general appeal,
- iv) the 5<sup>th</sup> law focuses on the organization, and
- v) the object appearing in the 1<sup>st</sup> law is a component of the organization figuring in the 5<sup>th</sup> law.

Keeping consistency with the Five laws, the 5<sup>th</sup> law of forms VI and VIA should be - An information centre is a growing organism.

It is likely that these laws will find application in many areas. Hence a generalized form is needed that can act as a base for deriving other forms depending on the situation and need. An attempt is made here to provide the generalized form.

### Generalised form of the five laws

#### 1. Objects are amenable for some action

Here an 'object' means anything that is considered as a noun and 'action', any verbal noun. The term 'action' is being chosen here instead of 'use' appearing in Ranganathan's 1<sup>st</sup> law to ensure universal application of the law. For example, in a museum an object is for viewing, in a shop an object is for selling, in a hospital a patient is for treatment, in a religious environment, a temple is for praying, and so on.

#### 2. Every consumer his or her object [*Sentence form: Every consumer should get his or her object*]

If in any environment this statement is likely to create ambiguity, the sentence form is to be preferred. A 'consumer' appearing in the statement means a person such as a reader, customer, patient, devotee, and so on who uses an object or avails a service

#### 3. Every object its consumer [*Sentence form: Every object should get its consumer*]

The condition given in 2, is applicable here also.

#### 4. Save the time of the concerned persons

In the Five laws, the 4<sup>th</sup> Law reads as - Save the time of the reader. Then 'Save the time of the staff' was added not as a separate law, possibly as a corollary. Instead of two sentences, only one sentence has been preferred which takes care of both.

### 5. An organization is a growing organism

The term 'organization' embraces all organizations such as a library, an information centre, a business organization, a hospital, a temple, and so on.

#### Specific forms

Five specific forms applicable to different areas are being given here. Depending on the need any number of area-specific forms can be created.

#### Form I

Five laws for museums

1. Museum objects are for viewing
2. Every viewer his/her object
3. Every object its viewer
4. Save the time of the concerned persons
5. A museum is a growing organism

The Laws can be applied to zoos, exhibitions, botanical gardens, etc by changing the term 'museum' with 'zoo', 'exhibition', etc.

#### Form II

Five laws for educational institutions

1. Class rooms are for learning
2. Every student his/her teacher
3. Every teacher his/her student
4. Save the time of the concerned persons
5. An educational institution is a growing organism

#### Form III

Five laws for grocer's shops

1. Groceries are for buying
2. Every customer his/her grocery item
3. Every grocery item its buyer
4. Save the time of the concerned persons
5. A grocer's shop is a growing organism

#### Form IV

Five laws for hospitals

1. Patients are for treatment
2. Every patient his/her doctor
3. Every doctor his/her patient
4. Save the life of the patient
5. A hospital is a growing organism

The 4<sup>th</sup> Law has been changed here a little since the life of a patient is more important than the time. If a surgeon takes more time to save the life of a patient, it is welcome.

#### Form V

Five laws for religious organizations

1. Temples are for use
2. Every devotee his/her temple
3. Every temple its devotee
4. Save the time of the concerned persons
5. A temple is a growing organism

Depending on the need church/es, mosque/s, pagoda/s, etc can be written in place of temple/s.

#### Conclusion

It is to be accepted that Ranganathan's Five laws do not have the sophistication of scientific laws<sup>20</sup>. They basically represent fundamental principles applicable to varied institutions with suitable changes in the wording. With the passage of time they are definitely proving so.

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