THE RELEVANCE OF Dr. RANGANATHAN’S IDEAS IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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Briefly examines the relevance of Dr. Ranganathan’s ideas and contributions in the present context of information age. Citing the implications of his five laws of library & information science interprets their value in the present day information handling problems. Lists a few areas for the application of his methodology of subject structuring. Mentions the groundwork for library routines as analogous to algorithms for computer programming and analysis for PERT/CPM. Suggests that his ideas are valid even today for serious study.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ranganathan’s contributions to the library and information field are sagacious and profound, considering their relevance even in this age of information. More particularly, his endeavors to put India on the world map of library and information science have been unique, immense and unmatched.

In this brief, rather cursory account, an attempt is made to focus attention on a few of his ideas to perceive their import in the changing context of information. These ideas relate to

- Five laws of library and information science;
- Methodology for the design and development of the intellectual organisation of knowledge; and
- Job, work and load Analysis of library operations.

FIVE LAWS

The five laws of library science considered in the present emphasis on information, can be restated to accentuate on information. The earlier reference to ‘books’ and ‘libraries’ are replaced by ‘information’ and ‘information systems’ as the former were valuable only because books carried information and knowledge and were stocked in libraries. Restated five laws read as follows:

- Information is for use;
- Every user his/her information;
- Every information its user;
- Save the time of the user; and its corollary save the time of the library and information staff; and
- Information system is a growing organism

The First Law:

It stresses the value of information as a vital component in every human activity. In the information society, as conceived today, information is viewed as a resource, a commodity and a basic input to all growth and developmental activities, quite in conformity with the way Ranganathan propounded it. In fact, the old adage ‘Knowledge is Wealth’, ‘Knowledge is Power’, is being captured in these ideas to reinforce the power of knowledge that transforms a non-resource into a resource.

In essence the first law comprehends a whole range of aspects of information handling which includes

- Physical layout and facilities;
- Document resource, collection, location, access, availability, etc.;
- Organisation and management;
- Techniques and methods;
- Use of different kinds of literature;
- Bibliometric studies on the core, peripheral and marginal literature of subjects;
- National and international policies and perspectives;
- and similar others

The Second Law:

It suggests that information services should be oriented towards user needs. User studies, therefore, are essential comprising the following:
First Law comprehends a whole range of aspects of information handling that includes:
- Physical layout and facilities
- Document resource, collection, location, access, availability, etc.
- Organisation and management
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Second Law suggests that information services should be oriented towards users needs. User studies, therefore, are essential that include, among others:
- Behavior patterns of different categories of users in different contexts
- Use and users of literature
- Interest profiles of users, institutions, programmes, projects, etc.

The Fifth Law refers to the:
- Dynamics of change impacting user needs, professional challenges, responsive & anticipatory products and services
- Institutional mechanisms with a self adapting capacity

The Fourth Law emphasises:
- Timeliness and speed
- Use of information technology
- Education and training for Information professionals
- Use promotion, user education
- Research & Development on all aspects of information handling

Third Law conveys that:
- The entire information transfer process should be in consonance with the ultimate use.
- Primary, secondary and tertiary communication channels should be focussed on use.
- Marketing of information keeping the customers in view and
- Providing scope for innovative products and services.

Schematic representation of the Five Laws
DR RANGANATHAN'S IDEAS IN INFORMATION AGE

- Behavior patterns of different categories of users in different contexts,
- Use and users of literature,
- Interest profiles of users, institutions, programmes, projects, etc.

The Third Law:

It conveys that the entire information transfer process should be in consonance with its ultimate use. The familiar principle 'Right information to the right user at the right time' is communicated here. Primary, secondary and tertiary communication channels should be focussed on use. In other words marketing of information keeping the customers in view is stressed, providing scope for innovative products and services.

The Fourth Law:

It emphasises the value of 'Time'. Timeliness and speed are the very essence of service. Use of information technology enables a total metamorphosis in improving means and mechanisms to provide high quality service. Information professionals should be geared to this transformation process that hinges on education and training. Use promotion, education for use skills and user friendliness makes the use of a system not only simple but saves a great amount of time. Continuous research on all aspects of information handling is an absolute necessity keeping all these factors in mind.

The Fifth Law:

It refers to the dynamics of change which is seen in the evergrowing, sometimes turbulent advancement of knowledge, which is never ending. The institutional mechanisms with a self adapting capacity to changing environments are to be constantly evolved; the need for it is to be appreciated and understood as a necessity. All these have implications on the formulation of national and international information policies and perspectives.

In substance, it can be safely inferred from these laws that Dr. Ranganathan wished that libraries and information institutions should function as partners with specialists in all intellectual pursuits, economic and social development activities, all round higher productivity, in short in every activity that raises the quality of life.

The five laws have been represented in a schematic diagram given in Fig. 1.

INTELLECTUAL ORGANISATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The methodology propounded by Dr. Ranganathan for structuring a subject, primarily for the design and development of depth classification schedules, provides a useful framework for a number of similar types of concept organisation and retrieval. The postulates and principles enunciated in this methodology can be profitably applied to studies such as:

- Creation of Expert Systems for knowledge organisation,
- Setting weighted Boolean for computerised information storage and retrieval,
- Design of Information Retrieval Thesaurus,
- Presentation of ideas in technical writing and
- Organising thoughts in any specific area for oral presentation

JOB AND WORK ANALYSIS

The operation of functions in a library or for that matter in any information institution require a thorough and complete analysis of every minute job and operational routine needed to be set up to carry them out in a systematic way. Dr. Ranganathan gave a basic groundwork for setting routines in libraries and information centres which may be deemed analogous to setting algorithms for computer programming or analysis needed in network analysis.

SOME OBSERVATIONS

Although the above cursory listing of some of the areas wherein Dr. Ranganathan’s thinking can be useful, may appear to be a little over reading into his ideas, the fact remains that his contributions give scope for deeper studies and analysis in the present context of design and development of computerised information systems. It may not, therefore, be imprudent here to suggest that Dr. Ranganathan’s ideas deserve careful study by those who are lured to the application of modern information technology to information handling.