PHILOSOPHY OF REFERENCE SERVICE


1 EMERGENCE OF THE PHILOSOPHY

Reference service is still the young and new entrant into the field of library service. It is the latest to come into vogue. It has been due to the pressure of the Five laws of library science. Hence naturally a reference librarian is set to wonder: What is the principle guiding me in my work? What is the theory behind my doings? Is there a salvation for me in this field of work? Above all, what is the Philosophy of Reference Service?

The answer is furnished by Reference service (1961).* This philosophy was first propounded in 1940 in edition one of the book. The present edition has worked out the philosophy in a fuller measure. Perhaps this is the first book to present reference service in the fulness of its elevating quality. The philosophy is so invigorating that the book will turn every sincere reference librarian into a missionary dedicated to document-pilgrimage with the readers in searching, discovering and bringing to light the hidden knowledge and information.

2 SAGA OF SUBLIME DELIGHT

The author and his colleagues had intense and varied experiences of the pioneering work...
of reference service in Madras University Library. The experiences got irradiated by the five laws of library science. The radiant thoughts crystallised out of this unique experience are recorded in the book. Hence it is original and stimulating. The method of exposition is also as interesting as it is new. All the subtleties and ramifications of reference service—in action, are explained in pristine clarity with the help of 167 case studies interspersed throughout the book. The case studies, drawn from actual experience, read like short stories and parables. The wide knowledge of the author is brought to bear on the subject. There is a scientific attitude to the whole subject. For, it emerges as the deductions of the Five laws in the descendent region of the Spiral of Scientific Method. The pages are replenished with the beauty, music and rhythm of poetry and imagery drawn from English literature and Indian classics. There is an analysis of the psychological aberrations of the readers and the reference staff owing to their own intrinsic behavioural imbalance and also owing to the abnormalities of the content, structure and form of books. There is also a study of the social benefits of reference service. An attempt is made to derive light from mystic experience. On the whole the subject shines with a cosmic beauty. There is a divine lustre around it. An aroma and exhilaration fill us as we read through the book. In effect the study of reference service is made a saga of sublime delight.

3 EVOLUTION

Reference service had to follow the evolution pattern of a tree. Only after root, trunk and branches were fully grown could the flower of reference service blossom out. Dr Ranganathan sensed the importance of reference service even when he was a teacher of mathematics prior to becoming librarian. He was practising it almost unconsciously. The future "World Librarian" did not then have a full grasp of its implications. At that time though unconsciously he was working "in the area of overlap between the regions of a teacher and a reference librarian". After his entrance into the profession, his first book the Five Laws of Library Science (1931) highlighted all the aspects of library science. Then reference service emerged as an implication of the fourth, first, second and third laws in order. The author's mind had to push this aspect to the sub-conscious level. For, he had to design the techniques for the more pressing and primary parts of library science. So his books on classification, cataloguing and administration came out first. Once library science was equipped with good classification and cataloguing techniques and was provided an apparatus for efficient management, the time was ripe for the emergence of reference service into the conscious level. The tree was fully grown; now it had to blossom. Reference service surged up in the mental aperture of the author. The result was the book reference service in its edition 1 in 1940.

4 BREAK UP OF EDITION 1

The first edition of the book was brought out in two volumes. The first volume was on reference service and bibliography; volume two was a bibliography of reference books and bibliographies. This arrangement was all right in 1940, despite the discordancy in clubbing all the three of them in one book. During the last decade the growth of literature on the subject of library science and the rapid evolution in library practices in the field of reference service and documentation made the anomaly of edition 1 more conspicuous. Hence, the necessity for their break up and reorganisation was felt. Volume 1 of edition one has been broken into 3 distinct, yet inter-related books:

1 Reference service (edition under review);

2 Documentation and its facets (under print); and

3 Enumerative bibliography (in preparation).

Reference service (1961) is completely re-arranged, re-organised and re-written with many new chapters. These add new dimensions to the subject. They forge into it new ideas new techniques and new experiences in the light of latest developments in the field.
5 PURPOSE-COMPLEX OF A LIBRARY

Here is a new, practical, comprehensive, up-to-date enunciation of the purpose-complex of a library as a social institution. The purposes are:-

1 To serve as social memory; and for this purpose,

2 To assemble, organise, preserve, socialise, and serve all expressed thought embodied as manuscripts, books, periodicals, their constituent documents, however minute, and every other similar document produced as a means for communication; and by this means,

3 To help in the transmission of the knowledge of the earlier generations to the later ones; and by this means,

4 To help in the cumulation and the further building up of knowledge from generation to generation; and in a similar way,

5 To help in the contemporary development of knowledge without any wastage in the building of knowledge, by the unintended and purposeless repetition of effort and the consequent wastage in the research-potential of humanity; and also

6 To conserve the research time of humanity by the separation of literature-search from positive research; and also

7 To help in the perpetual self-education of one and all; and further,

8 To collect together all available recorded information — particularly in the form of reference books, and to socialise and serve freely all such information to each according to his needs at the moment; and by all such means,

9 To increase the economic resources of humanity to the extent necessary to maintain the ever-increasing population, in comfort and free from want of any kind; and also

10 To help in the mutually understanding, mutually co-operating, and mutually tolerant peaceful co-existence of individuals, communities, and nations; and further

11 To help in the elevating, self-dependent use of leisure with the aid of freely served books, pictures, sound records, and other similar materials; and also

12 To help in increasing the opportunity for the spiritual awakening of one and all of the members of humanity.

This is the profoundest revelation of the purpose of a library. A full realisation of this purpose makes it inevitable for every library to have an efficient, unbiased and yet aggressive reference service to fulfill the demands of all the laws of library science.

6 DEFINITION

The above purpose-complex leads us on to an exact and comprehensive definition of reference service.

61 Reference Service

Reference service is personal service to each reader in helping him to find the documents answering his interests at the moment, pin-pointedly exhaustively and expeditiously both on request and in anticipation for the growth of knowledge and collation of useful information.

62 Reference Librarian

A reference librarian is a librarian of higher order. He shall have a full view of the universe of knowledge in general and a closer view of the sector he serves. He will be well-versed in the techniques of literature search as well as research. He will be a document specialist knowing well the structure, scope and the abnormalities of the world of documents. He shall be capable of treading his high way through their criss-cross and labyrinth. Above all this he shall have immense patience, good culture and an analytical mind. A profuse smile dances on his lips. His good cheer and dynamism will be almost contagious.
He will be a sublimated salesman of the contents of documents, with readers as his clientele. In effect, he will be the most dynamic, cheerful, symapathetic and resourceful companion of the readers in the library.

7 LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE AND REFERENCE SERVICE

All the laws of library science plead fervently for the introduction of reference service in every kind of library.

71 Fourth Law

The fourth law "Save the time of the reader" was the first to insist on reference service in business and research libraries. The men in industry who had to devote the full energy to boost production, could not afford to spend their precious time in searching for information. They wanted the information to flow to them to the shop floor right then and at the moment. An efficient reference service became a necessity for them. The research workers had to spend their high order of calibre and ingenuity to wade through the document-complex as a preparation and supplement to their research projects. Naturally this was a cumbersome and non-creative affair for them. It blocked the flow of their intellectual and intuitional spring. It reduced the amount of contributions they could have made in their life time. It is estimated that a scientific research worker in the West spends on the average 33. 4 per cent of his total time, for information work. To reduce this time for more creative work a good reference service became a necessity. Thus the fourth law declared that reference service is a necessity and not a luxury. Necessity is the mother of invention. Hence the practice is coming into life in many dimensions.

72 First Law

Books are for use. This law insists the reference librarian to put every document in his ken to use. To allow them to rust unused spells, a curse on him. He should infuse them with life.

The readers enter the stack room, quite often, with undefined interests. They find rows of books sitting on lines and lines of shelves. None of them speak. They are taciturn and mute. Lo! there comes a reference librarian with a glow in his eyes and a smile on his face. He leads the reader with all sweetness through the gangways across the rows of books. Now the reader finds the old books in the same old stackroom in a new light. On one shelf he finds Shakespeare sitting with omnicient majesty, on the other Milton with didactic serenity, on the third Dickens with Pickwickian flamboyancy and so on a galaxy of the master minds of the ages come to life and whisper to him make him like them and take them home for their enlightenment and use. They realise "Books are for use". The brandishments of the wit, humour and knowledge of a good reference librarian among the readers amidst the books will make many a reader exclaim in ecstasy, "Ah! I never knew this before.... How nice of you!" This sends a cool breeze of delight into the personality of the reference librarian. He gets exhilarated. He is puffed to do his work with doubled zest and zeal. If Shakespeare would have had an occasion he would have warbled,

Reference service is twice blest,

It blesseth him that takes, and him that gives.

73 Second and Third Laws

To find for every reader the right book and every book the right reader is the insistence of the laws. To do this in a personal and effective way, a reference librarian who knows intimately the complexity of documents and the interests and likings of the clientele is a necessity. He is a live-link, between the readers and the documents. His mission is to convert every potential reader into an active reader, and every dormant book into a useful book.
Library is a growing organism. The document production rate is overwhelmingly great both in kind and form. This makes it impossible for any library to be self-sufficient in every section of knowledge. Hence it is imperative at any library system should have a cellular structure, each cell specialising in a particular branch so that all the cells attempt to constitute the whole. In such a setup, the reference librarian should stretch his hand even across the boundaries of his library to other libraries—near and far.

Reference Service and Documentation

The growth of knowledge is in geometrical progression. This makes it difficult for a specialist to keep pace with the nascent microthought even in his own field. People in industry are hard pressed for time to keep abreast of the technical advances in the field of their products. Here the reference librarian has the immense responsibility of scanning, screening, abstracting and serving pin-pointedly and relevantly the nascent micro-thought coming in periodical publications to the men in business and industry, so that no piece of vital information is lost sight of. Similar service is to be rendered for research workers. This part of reference service is coming to be called as Documentation service. The relationship between reference service and Documentation service is explained by Dr Ranganathan in this book. "Documentation service is reference service with emphasis on specialist readers and on nascent microthought. This is a new ramification of reference service, made dominant by the social demands of the post war period". In effect, this falls into the region of long range reference service. The reference librarian should keep in touch with national and international documentation centres. He should make use of documentation lists and abstracts made by them. He may even have to edit them to provide a slant of direct usefulness to the clientele he serves. He may even have to point out to the documentation centres the lacunae in their work.

Long Range and Ready Reference Services

Ready reference service is reference service finished in a very short time. Most of it will be served with the help of a dictionary, encyclopaedia, year book, directory and similar reference books. This is the service rendered by "Information desks" in Western libraries.

Long range reference service requires a longer period and the search for information has to stretch beyond the reference books and even beyond a particular library. The percentage of long range and ready references sought in three main types of library are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of library</th>
<th>Percentage of ready reference problems</th>
<th>Percentage of long range reference problems</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Library</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Library</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

Fig 1 Funnel Diagram
81 Funnel Diagram

The information which lies in the area of either long range or ready reference service is relative. It is dependent upon the volume and variety of reference books available. The Funnel Diagram (Fig. 1) represents this phenomenon. The hollow cone represents the infinite region of long range reference service information to be retrieved out of the universe of knowledge. This intangible region is to be explored for an indefinite time. The narrow small tube represents the area of ready reference service. The information in this area is tangible, within our control and flows readily to the universe of readers. There is a continuous flow between these two regions. What is a long range reference service to-day may turn out to be a ready reference service ten years hence owing to the coming of a new reference book. That piece of information is pushed into the tube region of the funnel. Similarly an ephemeral information may be in the forefront fifty years ago. Now it might have been forgotten as having no importance. Some special circumstance may again create a demand for it. Then the task of unravelling it from the deposits of dead memory turns out to be a long range reference service. That piece of information has slipped out of the tube region to the cone region. Similarly an enquiry on chemical fertiliser storage methods—unusual and unexpected—in a library of the Machine Tools Industry would naturally become a long range reference service problem. The same topic will, however, become a ready reference question in the library of the Sindri Fertiliser Factory.

82 An Appeal

In the modern phase of industrialisation, time is measured in terms of money. In an industrial concern it is the philosophy of a cost accountant. The time lag avoided in any part of the work flow of a product results in greater productivity and lower cost of the product. So it is implied that as many of the long range reference services should be converted into ready reference services. In the long run, this is bound to result in greater utilisation of national wealth as also in the increase of productivity. This in turn will bring about greater happiness to mankind. The Funnel diagram clearly represents that the emergence of each good reference book derives the information from the rather nebulous region of the long range reference service (cone) to the crystalized region of ready reference service (tube). So the greater the number of reference books, the greater the area of ready reference service information. But by their very nature reference books cannot be produced by individuals. So, for their own benefit and prosperity the governments, industries and academic and research institutions should pool their knowledge experience, men and money to compile as many reference books as possible in the respective fields of their specialisation. This is a combined appeal of all the laws of library science. The experience of reference librarians throughout the country may be tapped to locate the fallow regions to be filled up with reference books.

![Fig 2 Holistic Picture of Reference Service](image-url)
9 HOLISTIC PICTURE OF REFERENCE SERVICE

Reference service cannot and will not exist independent of other techniques of library science. In fact, it derives its life blood from them. In turn, it aids to discover the weaknesses of various techniques and tries to renovate and rejuvenate them. The Tank-flow diagram (Fig. 2) gives a holistic picture of reference service. An efficient exhaustive, pin pointed and expeditious reference service can be given only if it is aided by an open-access system with an efficient classified catalogue and a proper faceted classification. The facet analysis method is a very useful apparatus for the diagnosis and crystallization of the diffused and opaque problems of the readers. Further an efficient administration and a proper organisational link-up of the libraries of the country are prerequisite to successful reference service. Again the reference service floor becomes the laboratory for the acid test of the various techniques and policies of library service. The reference librarian becomes a liaison agency for the different technical departments and the top management. He helps the technical departments to devise and reinforce the techniques in the light of his experience. Similarly his experience is of help for the top management in stepping up administrative efficiency and in making proper organisational policy decisions. A clear conception of this holistic view of the different facets of library service—their inter-connection, inter-relation and mutual reinforcement—is the very quintessence of the philosophy of reference service.

91 Mystic Picture of Reference Service

The sublime philosophy of reference service has been drawn obliquely from the Vedas, the classics, and the mystics of India. They fill us with the supreme delight of the mystics. Here is an exhortation to the practising reference librarian as drawn from a passage in Taittriya—Upanishad

"The reader-guest is supreme to you.

Give him service with all attention and in all sincerity.

Give him service to the entire capacity at your command.

Give him service in all modesty and in full freedom from any touch of prestige or ego.

Give him service in full measure lest there should be any offence to the Laws of Library Science.

Acquire the best of knowledge and information for giving him your service."

The reference librarian should combine in his personality the distinguishing characters of the four sons of Dasaratha, the pearls of Raghu family. He should, like Satrughna, control the ego in him which prompts him to do least and seek most. Like Lakshmana he should do service for its own sake without flirting for its fruits. It is the Karmayogic call of the Gita also. In devotion to duty, reticence, integrity and depth he should emulate Bharata. In geniality, charm, sociability and helpfulness associated with modesty and equableness of thought, word and deed Rama should be his guide. A reference librarian treading the foot-steps of the sons of Dasaratha shall be an excellent gem of his profession and a Kalpa Vraksha for the society.

92 Light from Aurobindo's Mother

Drawing inspiration from the four attributes of Sakti—Maheswari (Wisdom) Mahakali (Strength) Mahalakshmi (Harmony) and Mahasaraswathi (Perfection)—as interpreted by Shri Aurobindo, the great mystic of India, the author reaches the pinnacle in explaining the mystic experience of reference service.

"This inspiration should embrace both his external doings and inner adjustment. The inner adjustment is that of self-discipline and self-perfection. It should help him to get illumined knowledge, to lose himself in universal love and delight, and to establish himself in supreme self-mastery and all-mastery. Perfection will come with the advent of the feeling of his being an eternal portion of the consciousness and force of Sakti, the being of her Being, the force of her Force and the ananda of her Ananda. When this condition is entire, knowledge, will, and action will become sure, simple; luminous, spontaneous, and flawless, and an outflow from the Supreme."