

## S. R. Ranganathan: library and documentation scientist

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Siyali Ramamrita Ranganathan (S.R.R.) was a mathematician and renowned library information scientist of our country. His dedication to life, duty and sense was strongly influenced by philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Besides his own research activities on various domains of library and documentation science, S.R.R. has significantly contributed to the policy, planning, formulation and betterment of scientific and technical tools and programmes for the growth and development of library science in India. He is recognized and remembered as the 'Father of Library Science in India' and is widely known throughout the rest of the world for his fundamental work in the field of library and documentation science. In his honour, India celebrates S.R.R.'s birthday as the 'National Library Day'.

S.R.R. was born on 12 August 1892 at Shiyali (at present, Sirkazhi) in Nagapattinam district (earlier Tanjavor district) of Tamil Nadu in southern India, to Ramamrita Iyer and Sita Lakshmi. S.R.R. lost his father at the age of only six years. He did his early and primary education at Sabhanayaka near Shiyali. Then, he was admitted to S. M. Hindu High School at Shiyali. During his high school, S.R.R. came under the influence of P. A. Subramanya Ayyar, a scholar of

Sri Rishi Aurobindo. He obtained admission in the Madras Christian College and passed B A with first class in 1913. He was later admitted for M A in mathematics, with Edward B. Ross as his teacher at the Presidency College, Madras. After completing, his postgraduation in 1916, S.R.R. wanted to become a teacher in mathematics<sup>1</sup>.

S.R.R. was appointed by Subordinate Education Service and employed as an Assistant Lecturer in the Government College in Mangalore and Coimbatore, between 1917 and 1921. He joined as an Assistant Professor of mathematics in Presidency College, in 1921 and taught higher algebra, trigonometry and statistics. S.R.R. was also Secretary of the Mathematics and Science faculties of the Madras Teacher's Guild.

The turning point in his career came in January 1924, when S.R.R. left Presidency College and took charge as the Chief Librarian of Madras University, without any formal training. There, he organized the collection of books and documents in a scientific way. Ranganathan went to England in September 1924, to study contemporary Western practices in library. He contacted with library science grammarian W. C. Berwick Sayers, Chief Librarian of Croydon Public Library and a reputed lecturer in the University School of Librarianship, London. S.R.R. gained extensive knowledge of the literature on the subject of library science, became personally acquainted with methods of management of libraries in Britain, got trained regarding the analytical aspects and returned with enlightened enthusiasm for a library movement in India in July 1925. He was a pioneer of the library movement in the Madras Presidency, which at that time covered almost two-thirds of South India. He introduced open shelf system and provided open access. This encouraged readers to come to the department often.

Ranganathan started a school of library science in 1929, under the auspices of the Madras Library Association which was later taken over by the Madras University. His notable contribution was the Five Laws of Library Science which he enunciated in 1931. They are: (i) books are for use; (ii) every reader must get his

book; (iii) every book must find its reader; (iv) a reader's time must be saved; and (v) a library is a growing organism. These fundamental laws of library science are applicable to any library service at all times<sup>2</sup>.

While at London, one evening, S.R.R. saw the demonstration of working of a Meccano set in a departmental store. He observed that, by combining a dozen slotted strips, wheels, nuts and bolts, a number of toys could be made. Immediately, an idea struck him. He thought the elements constituting a subject could be grouped into few facets, which may be combined together with the help of nuts and bolts for which he used a colon. Hence, the scheme developed by him and published in 1933 is called *Colon (:) Classification*<sup>3</sup>. This classification scheme proved that the design and development of a scheme is a lifetime activity. The first edition of *Classified Catalogue Code* was published in 1934. It was used to understand the multi-dimensional nature of subjects to apply the concept of dimension to the universe of subjects. S.R.R. defined dimension as 'the degree of manifoldness of an aggregate as fixed by the number of parameters necessary, and sufficient, to identify anyone of its members, i.e. to distinguish it from all the others'<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, a line has one dimension, i.e. length only; a square or a rectangle has two dimensions, i.e. length and breadth and a cube has three dimensions, i.e. length, breadth and height. Another major contribution of Ranganathan was the improvement of dynamic theory of classification, which is based on certain normative principles, published in *Prolegomena to Library Classification* in 1937. The postulates, canons and principles formulated by him provide a scientific basis to the theory of library classification. S.R.R. developed, designed and formulated an independent scheme and method for growing of new subjects in the universe of knowledge. He was a great creator of knowledge in that subject fields. His ideas formed the basis of much of the progress made in the classification theory in England during 1950s.

S.R.R. visited USA in 1950 under the Rockefeller Foundation and wrote the



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book *Classification and Communication*. A significant advancement then took place in Great Britain. It was the formation of the Classification Research Group (CRG) in 1952, influenced and impacted by the work of Ranganathan, with the application of the principles of facet analyses and synthesis for the development of classification schemes for special subjects. He postulated absolute syntax for indexing language. According to Neelameghan, 'Absolute syntax is the sequence in which the component ideas of subjects falling in a subject-field arrange themselves in the minds of majority of normal intellectuals, for instance, when they think and communicate about the subject'<sup>4</sup>. S.R.R. evaluated the concept of librametry, which is application of statistics to library and information science.

In 1957, during the centenary celebrations of the Madras University, S.R.R. donated his life's savings of Rs 100,000 with which an endowment chair known as Sarada Ranganathan Professorship in Library Science was created. The students of this stream have taken leading part at all levels of activity – local, national and international.

After having performed active library service for 21 years, S.R.R. took voluntary retirement in 1945 and engaged himself in active research. In the meantime, he received an invitation from S. Radhakrishnan, Vice-Chancellor, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi, to organize, improve and modernize the library techniques and services at BHU.

In 1947, S.R.R. moved to Delhi University on an invitation from Sir Maurice Gwyer. Under his guidance the University began Bachelor of Library Sciences and Master of Library Sciences courses

between 1947 and 1950. The Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre, Delhi was also founded in 1950. S.R.R. was intimately involved in the founding of the Documentation Committee of the Indian Standards Institution, of which he was the Chairman up to 1967. While in Delhi, S.R.R. drafted a comprehensive 30-year plan for the development of library and documentation information system and services as a whole<sup>5</sup>. During this period, he also promoted the Madras Public Library Act. S.R.R. then confined himself to teaching and research activities in library science. He introduced many new ideas and innovations, for betterment in this field. During his time three subject journals, namely *Annals of Library Science*, *Library Bulletin*, and *Granthalaya* were founded. The *Annals* contained research papers of the Delhi Research Circle and soon gained international acclaim and Ranganathan's international contacts began to expand. As an academician and library scientist, S.R.R. wrote many books and articles in prestigious journals, worldwide.

The Government of India (GoI) bestowed on him the Rao Sahib Award and also awarded him the Padmashri in 1957 for his valuable contributions to library science. Ranganathan received the D Lit degree from Delhi University in 1948 and from Pittsburgh University, USA in 1964 for his unique services in the field of library and documentation science. Ranganathan was recognized and nominated by GoI as the National Research Professor of Library Science in 1965. He was an adviser to the Planning Commission and University Grants Commission, Government of India.

S.R.R. then moved to Bengaluru and in 1962 founded the Documentation

Research and Training Centre, with encouragement from P. C. Mahalanobis (Indian Statistical Institute). The basic functions of this Centre are research and training in library and information science. He was Honorary Professor of the Centre from 1962 to 1972. S.R.R. directed the institution's activities with great efficiency and created an atmosphere of good academic excellence<sup>1</sup>. He had close liaison with Donker-Duyvis, the dynamic Secretary-General of the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID). S.R.R. was Chairman of the Classification Research Group of (FID), from 1950 to 1962. A large number of research papers and 12 research reports for FID were published during this period. S.R.R. was the Honorary Chairman of FID/CR<sup>4</sup>. S.R.R. passed away on 27 September 1972 after leading a full life.

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