

DR. RANGANATHAN—THE PATRIARCH OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

BY

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The place Mahatma Gandhi had in the Indian National Congress and the struggle for India's Independence, is what Dr. Ranganathan acquired in the field of Library Science and Indian Librarianship. In India it is an unforgettable chapter of creativity during the tumultuous era of growth of Indian Libraries and Librarianship, in which he would for ever be given a venerable niche of glory. Those who are the symbols of the gigantic struggle are leaving us, and Time is taking a heavy toll of them. India mourns the loss of Dr. Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan (12 August 1892—27 September, 1972) and the youngmen are sore as to why good men are made scarce among the old. One such bright gleaming star left its abode for the unknown destination of the Soul, perhaps over-looking the activity of Librarians from a far ethereal region.

He was a dedicated Scientist, whose first and last love is Library Science, and Library Science alone. Rest of the world is nothing, in that intensity of concentration. Even his wife after battling long, had to take a humble role of the care-taker, to sustain the physique through time. Newspapers were a nuisance, except as media for carrying news of Library Science Colloquia, Seminars, and demands for Public Library Legislation. Chief Ministers, Bureaucrats and their ilk are useful in enacting Public Library Legislation to promote Library Movement in India, and nothing more. Whoever touched Library Science is a sacred soul, a comrade in arms, to be loved, supported and supplemented in his efforts. Library Science and its practitioners formed a family, to which he was a father figure.

He loved research and suffered administration as an evil necessity and a supplementary responsibility. In this labour of love, he questioned vehemently the place of holidays, irregular

habits and even tiresomeness. He himself practised his theories and is quite difficult to emulate even. Highest intellectual action through loving obedience to routines of learning, would lead to a spark in creativity and develop powers of intuition was his strong belief. Gods mercies would fall on the hard working and the deserving, not on the idle worshippers in easy chairs, waiting for *Manna* to fall on desert lands. He was a *Jnani*, believing in *Karma*, and dedicating it, than wait like a *Bhakta* in an encamped state of love which has transfixed the person, waiting for the celestial moon beam to touch the inner-self. He was quibbling, logical, methodical, took leaps in knowledge, worked hard to establish the new subject i.e. Library Science, used all his powers, drew heavily on his inner endowments, and prayed fervently for more, when he found his energies insufficient.

He started as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics in the Madras State. His teaching of Mathematics was so unusual that the parents had doubts whether the students were learning in the right way. At the end of the year, the college got cent per cent results, and the students proved superior to the question papers. A few of those early students made a mark in their later life and remembered their affectionate debt to Dr Ranganathan.

He had six or eight papers to his credit in those early days on Mathematics. By sheer will-power he overcame stammering to become a redoubtable exponent on public platforms. He initiated for the first time in the Mathematical Conference, the method of expounding the paper than reading it out. This he did, closing his eyes, which was not visible to the audience in the big hall, and the exposition was a thundering success, though he could not believe it himself. In those early days, when he was trying to stand as it were, he gratefully remembered Prof. Seshu Iyer and Principal Anandarao.

While at Madras, working in the Presidency college, he was persuaded to apply for the Librarian's post of Madras University. Once having accepted responsibility there was no turning back. Unlike many Indians of those days, who went to London, got a higher degree, occupied higher positions and formed exclusive clubs and coteries, he dedicated himself wholesale to the task of development of his Library and realised that Library movement is a similar social responsibility of a conscientious Librarian. He was also a courageous man of character who refused to be burdened with foreign languages in the Library Science Classes, made his own

reading of the subjects, and visited Public Libraries of England, the special programme of study and visits being planned and encouraged by his Professor Berwick Sayers. Under the regulations he could not be given the Diploma, but he boldly came back without, only to be awarded the Fellowship of the Library Association much later.

His stay and study in England left him thinking about how best to arrange books in a library. In the ship in which he came back, he classified and catalogued that Library, before he landed at Colombo. Brown's Subject Classification attracted him and he furiously thought of analysing the subjects into their component parts, so that new formations can be had by linking unused parts. Binomial theorem is at the root of it all, in attempting a systematic theme of permutations and combinations in the field of knowledge.

The Five Fundamental Categories were thus formulated to be inherent in all the subjects, and the necessary schedules were worked out in facets for each one of the categories. He adopted mixed notation to give the advantage of multiple-infinite hospitality, accepted 9 as a sectorising digit, and the connecting symbol at the end of each round was decided to be colon, by which the classification was christened Colon Classification. Through experimentation in the Madras University Library, discussions with eminent Professors who were leaders in their subjects, and seeing its effect in use on readers, he brought revisions of his scheme in various editions.

The Catalogue too was reshaped into the Classified part and the alphabetical indexes. He connected the Classification number to the Catalogue through the subject index got by chain procedure, and the Feature headings denoting the hierarchical descent. Chain procedure is accepted as an invention by the British National Bibliography, being the first to grasp its utility, and the Indian National Bibliography is also making good use of it.

He conceived of education as Library-centred, and gave lectures to Teachers on the proper use of the Library in the class-room and outside it. Such extension activity gave rise to the Madras

Library Association, which published his Colon Classification, Prolegomena, and the Five Laws, whose copy-right he turned over to the Association. The three books were landmarks of achievement and sold like hot cakes, demanding revision, and in the process the Madras Library Association became rich.

Under the dynamic leadership of Krishnaswamy Iyengar, the President of the Association, a certificate course of three months duration was started, which was later taken over by the Madras University to be developed into an year's diploma course. Dr. Ranganathan was the very life of that school, and was so instrumental in its growth, that for almost a decade it was the only school that taught Colon Classification, and Classified Catalogue Code. Practical work in the Library, theoretical teaching in the Library School, Publication and organisational work of the Madras Library Association completed the mosaic of his life at Madras.

In his Library he worked hard unsparingly, and was fortunate in having Sundaram, Sivaraman, Ramabhadran, and Parthasarathy to assist him. In those early days such was his foresight that he got posts for Reference Assistants sanctioned, and initiated operations research work in the Library administration ! They ran an ideal Reference Service, threw open the Library membership to all, with open access, and even rendered Bibliographic and Documentation service. Such was the influence that Library workers wielded, that even in Marina Beach, High Court Judges, Leading Lawyers, and ICS officers respectfully, talked to them, because of the intellectual service they were rendering, which others could not divine, except enquire the pay scales and wonder at the incongruity.

Not that he was very comfortable and it was a cake walk. Although his stay, the anti-brahmin feeling persecuted him relentlessly at the level of the Vice-Chancellor, Senate and at the lower level in the staff of the Library itself. His brilliance by itself created rivals, in that mediocres joined round and got encouragement from citadels of power, and it was an eternal struggle from the beginning to the very last day of service. It is a wonder whether the swords are back in the scabbard yet. In spite of the bad atmosphere, singleminded devotion, intellectual integrity, honesty, excellence, a passionate love for research and teaching in Library Science, and the joy of seeing the Library grow, saw him through the ups and downs of life. In

the days of the British regime, when Indians were not given independent positions nor powers to decide, and European habits corrupted the few highly placed intellectuals, to have used independent judgement, finding a new subject like Library Science, initiating Research in it, raised many eye brows, but the sheer excellence of work and concept have survived opposition, to the extent of being awarded public recognitions like 'Rao Sahib' 'Padmashri' and Honoris Causa 'D Litt' of Pittsburgh and Delhi Universities.

From the platform of the Madras Library Association, he was one of the founders of the Indian Library Association, and with his own team, always contributed a sheaf of Papers on a single well chosen theme. From both the platforms he advocated for Library Legislation to take his country forward in lesser time than normal, and prepared a spate of Bills for the States of Madras, Kerala, Hyderabad, Bengal, Mysore and a Library Act for the Central Government also. It required political contacts, and time helped him in throwing up Shri Avinasalingam Chettiar as Education Minister of Madras, he being one of his Classmates. He courageously steered the first Library Bill and got it passed into an Act. Andhra State inherited the Act when it separated, and later got fused with Hyderabad Library Act with more favourable structure of Libraries. At Mysore, through the good offices of the then Chief Minister Nijalingappa, Education Minister Manjappa, and the Speaker Valkuntha Baliga, who was also the President of the Mysore Library Association, the library act came into being in 1965, based on the very much altered structure of taxes after Independence. Maharashtra has also passed a Bill recently in 1969. Northern States and the Centre have not yet listened to the call of Libraries.

He hopped from Madras University after retirement to Banaras and from thence to Delhi. At Delhi he started the two year course in Library Science and initiated research for Ph.D. In these efforts he was ably helped by his patron Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Vice-Chancellor and Das Gupta the University Librarian. He also started a Research circle, which discussed every week problems of research and produced papers as a consequence.

Such Research activity lead him to the editing of Library Science periodicals. His Editorship has a mark of excellence

although, be it 'Abgila', 'Annals in Library Science' or 'Library Science with a slant to Documentation'. Had it not been for a separate journal in his hands it would have been difficult to publish so many papers, belonging to a single school of thought. As soon as he relinquished editorship of the journals, they lost their personality, almost lost the grip of the feet, tottered and fell and could never live up to the name they had.

In Library Science he was the first exponent that research cannot be carried in a vacuum, and considered Teaching as a testing ground for research. His method of creating interest in the subject of the lesson through leading questions, drawing on the experience of the class, and after consolidating the knowledge so gathered, throw up problems, test the ingenuity of students, and try to solve the difficulty by lending a helping hand, or at that stage deliver his thesis on the problem, to the great relief of the class and the expectant students. The class has a personality of its own, the teacher being just an elderly leader and guide, helping the students to find out their own potentialities. Sometimes the minds are prepared by the assignments given on the previous day, the different solutions given by the students forming the base for reasoning and conflict, the teacher playing the role of an umpire-cum-leader and the lecture coming on the top of it, to establish higher principles that resolve conflicts of the lower level. Then alone the relevant section in the text is cited, and invariably the collective thought had added an improvement to the printed text. Such improvements or findings of diverse investigations, formed subjects for Colloquia and then theme for the papers to be published in Library Science periodicals.

In the Colloquia, it is a clean fight, between two groups, as if lawyers in a Court, to establish their theories, on previously chosen subjects. The Chair acts as the Judge here. In such dire defences and onslaughts, the subject enters the emotion and blood of the participants. The liaison with newspaper's prior announcement, publication of the short summary in it, and the long summary for Herald of Library Science, the detailed version being reserved for the detailed minutes of the meeting, all in maximum two days time, is a training in itself. With new findings an article too could come out.

The students are to participate in an annual Seminar, where other luminaries in the profession participate. Group discussions, rotating leadership and rapporteurship, process of discussing propositions by proposing amendments, and at the end of it, see the crystallisation of the Beauty of Truth that emerges out of the intellectual churning of the comity assembled, is the crown of teaching. They act too as an annual refresher course to the participants.

He also patterned the Documentation Course in consultation with Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis, which tried to cut short a regular two year course, into an intensive Academic Year's, by eliminating non-essentials of the normal M. Lib. Sc., and patterning it to launch after a period of introduction, to Depth Classification, Subject indexes, Special Classification Schemes, Documentation List, Abstracts and Reviews of Literature in the subject field. Ten batches have come through by the time of his expiry. His presence was an inspiration to DRTC where relentless work went on. His absence would be grievously felt by them who are used to work with him.

The potential for Research that he has imparted, not only met the exigencies of Documentation in an industrially advancing country, but also gave content to the equation of the UGC. that a Professor and a Librarian are on the same level. The young professionals are confidently able to rub shoulders with University Teaching staff, by the excellence of the mettle. His munificent grant of a lakh of rupees for a Chair in Library Science at Madras University, is another string of love by which he ties the profession. Another such endowment consisting of Royalties on his books and the income he got out of the National Research Professorship in Library Science, was perhaps in the offing, but before he could speak it out, he departed. He used to emphatically say that he would be born again and again to serve Library Science, if need be. He was a solace to Librarians, both young and old, who were harrassed for no fault of theirs. He was extremely outspoken in his letters, calling a spado a spade, and sometimes carried his agony or joy into his articles and speeches.

He fought althrough his life but commanded calmness whenever he wanted. In the midst of raging storms in the profession.

where lesser mortals would have drawn the sword, he went on with research undaunted, almost closing his mind to the controversies. He need not become a *greater devil* to conquer a *devil*, was his attitude. He was so disillusioned with his generation, that he banked heavily on the younger generation. When even the younger generation complained, he compared his times, and proved that the present with all its problems, is a better world to live in. After having seen a Rana Pratap with a hundred battle scars, the young steeled their hearts and bent their pens for a mightier purpose.

His good wife is not an educated lady, and in the early days could not fully understand the intellectual worth of her husband. She was very much disturbed by the mad work into which he flung himself and it was a job to get him out of it, for meals or family engagements. She was very disturbed but kept quiet. She was convinced when she saw his crowded meetings, big people coming to consult him, that the eccentricity is a beneficial phenomenon to the Society, and threw herself heart and soul, with devotion to take full care of him and keep him good humoured at home, so that he could spare his better self for Library Science. Her love for him was such that she encouraged him when he proposed to establish a chair for Library Science at Madras, making the generosity, even, between them, more so, from her side. The Nation mourns her loss and the profession can only fold its hands in salutation to her and her distinguished husband. Here was another Mahatma, inspiring us from high heavens to go ahead in Library Science. An age has ended with his demise, and a new age has also begun without Dr. Ranganathan. May his soul feel proud of us, and never be ashamed.