



ON HIS BIRTH CENTENARY

MP Satija

*Guru Nanak Dev University
Amritsar-143 005*

Abstract

Brings out a life sketch of Dr Ranganathan as a legend. Gives an account of the achievements and milestones, he set during his life span and how the current status of libraries and the profession differs from that of his dreams. Highlights the national and international recognition of his work, and the awards and laurels conferred to him.

It is a matter of great pride for all Indians that in library science, India is considered among the world leaders. Librarians of the world have expectedly looked towards India for some conceptual innovations in the area of information organisation and retrieval. Dr Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan Iyer, deservedly known as the Father of the Indian library movement, rather revived the proud tradition of ancient India to attract scholars from abroad to learn from our savants. Such an inspired genius was born on 12 August 1892 in an Iyer Brahmin family of village Shiyali in the then Madras Presidency. Family

was poor but cultured and deeply religious. Early death of his father, a small farmer, made his life strewn with difficulties. Wading his way through hardships, he passed MA in Mathematics in 1916 from Madras Christian College, and became a teacher of mathematics in Government College of Madras Presidency. He loved both mathematics and teaching. Life was going on, and he was already past thirty without any inkling of the great task ahead that the providence had assigned him.

Suddenly in 1924, he crossed over to librarianship which in those days was

not a career for active scholars and ambitious persons. After a brief training in librarianship from the University College, London, he returned home with his mind swarming with new ideas. After that, neither he nor library science remained the same. His new-found profession provided him intellectual, social and spiritual fulfilment and fame. The then library science curricula and teaching methods did not satisfy his inquiring mind trained in science and mathematics. Nevertheless, he was very much impressed by the variety, extent and intensity of library services provided to each British citizen by the legislation-based British library network. He set before himself the twin tasks of providing wide library facilities at par with the British services to every Indian on statutory basis. The second aim was to make library science true to the name of science by writing it anew on rigidly scientific lines. From the very day, he occupied himself to work for the goals he had set before himself. The foremost indigenous need was to create a social awakening for the value of libraries. He availed every opportunity, platform and available media to convince the statesmen, scholars, bureaucrats and laymen alike that libraries are depositories of our culture, and an apparatus of social memory. Libraries are indispensable to uplift the nation socially, economically and educationally. In the beginning, his was the one man library movement. He planned and worked tirelessly for an integrated countrywide system of public and academic libraries. He was opposed to desultory establishment of libraries. For this, he drafted many library plans and library bills and wrote many books on the organisation of libraries. His dream was to provide free book service to all Indians. Political leadership

respected him, but had no money for his massive plans. He, an incorrigible optimist, never gave in despite successive failures, even personal discomfitures. At last in 1948, the library legislation was enacted by the then Madras state. Now library legislations exist in nine Indian states namely, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tripura, Manipur, and Haryana. But the state of libraries and their services is far from his dreams. The All-India Library System that he wanted to build has not come up. Libraries here and there are not linked in any system. The information and book policy has not yet been finalised. We have a Central National Library, national libraries for different subjects such as arts, sciences, agriculture, medicine; there are legal depositories of books, state and city libraries; but there is no library structure. There is no scheme of cooperation: there is unnecessary duplication of our meagre library resources. UGC's multimillion libraries and information network (INFLIBNET) is still not past its conceptual stage. The bibliographical activities of the nation are far from adequate. Yet the model he proposed is still valid; and his dream will continue to inspire and guide the Indian library leaders.

Crusader in him never stifled the scientist he was. He possessed a radical mind. His deliberations on the theory of library science metamorphosed its very face. In his first book *The Five Laws of Library Science* (1931), now a classic (reprinted many times), he gave library science its normative principles. His laws are as true as laws of any social science. By induction, deduction and other methods of intellectual elaboration, he carved out as simple corollaries of the Laws, the principles and implica-

tions for all branches of library science. His range was amazingly ecumenical. He was a prolific as well as an innovative writer with uncanny insights and synthetic capacity of the mind. The full volume of his writings measures upto 60 books and 2000 papers. His *Colon Classification* (1933) has been acknowledged as a greatest breakthrough in library classification. Its principles are taught in all the library schools the world over. His work has gained so much acceptance that it forms the very bedrock of new researches in library science, and finds applications in new fields such as artificial intelligence and expert systems. He is to library science that Einstein is to physics. His work has been considerably furthered by some of his British and Indian disciples. International Standards Organisation (The Hague) always sought and valued his advice. His influence in international librarianship was all pervasive. It is believed that without his advice the UN Library would have been another US library.

In 1943, Ranganathan got pre-mature retirement from Madras. In 1945, he joined the Benaras Hindu University on the invitation of Dr S Radhakrishnan, who was its Vice-Chancellor then. In 1947, on the request of Sir Maurice Gwyer, the eminent jurist, Chief Judge of Federal Courts (now Supreme Court) and Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, he joined the University as Honorary Professor. At Delhi, he promoted higher education and research in library science. Delhi University became the first in entire British Commonwealth, to institute master and doctoral degrees in library science. From 1944 to 1953, he unanimously remained President of the Indian Library Association. From 1955 to 1957 he lived in Zurich and obtained a first hand knowledge of the use of

library services to industry and R&D units. In 1962, the Government of India founded for him the Documentation Research and Training Centre at Bangalore to carry on his research and to train librarians in the advanced work of information handling. It is now a world famous centre. He died on 27th September 1972 at Bangalore after a brief illness.

In his life time he had become a household name, and a legendary figure in library circles. Library experts in advanced countries were keen to confer with him. Invitations were pouring in from various countries. Sponsored by the British Council and the Rockefeller Foundation in 1948, he visited Europe and America, and many times thereafter to participate in international meetings, conferences, and to deliver lectures or to advise library organisations. He remained always the focus in any gathering he participated. He was a valuable speaker, and westerners saw in him an embodiment of eastern wisdom, and addressed him as a *guru*. His work got so much acceptance that in 1957 an international conference of classificationists held at Dorking, England deliberated and scrutinised his work. His theory of classification became the theory of classification in general. He received universal recognition for his work cutting across political borders and mental prejudices that discount the intellectual work emanating from developing countries. So penetrating was his influence, and personality so peerless that American librarians addressed him as **Librarian to the World**. British librarians named his life time as **Ranganathan Age**. He is the architect of the Indian library profession and bequeathed us with a rich legacy.

He won laurels and acclaims at home and abroad for his single minded devotion, creativity, and revolutionary work. Inventory of his awards and honours is long. Important among them include Padma Shri in 1957—the first year of institution of this award; honorary DLitt from the University of Delhi (1948) and University of Pittsburgh (1964); National Research Professorship in Library Science (1965); and a two-volume festschrift by an international committee (1962); honorary Vice-Presidentship of the British Library Association (1957); and membership of honour of the International Federation for Documentation, The Hague (1957). Personal tributes vary from founder of a distinguished school of thought to bringing cultural cooperation between the East and the West; and to enrichment of English language with his new terminology. In 1985, a successful and widely participated conference on Ranganathan's philosophy and relevance was held in New Delhi. Experts from Asia, Europe, South Africa and North America endorsed his continued relevance in present times. It was the first international library conference devoted to the work of an individual.

As a man, he was deeply religious, simple and modest living a spartan life. In 1957, he donated his savings of one

lakh rupees for the promotion of library education. Thereafter, he frequently gave away his wealth for the promotion of library profession in India. Temperamentally, he was a mystic and a philosopher. Most of his writing is inspired and intuitive. As a teacher, he was *Socratic* who trained the minds of his students in the art of thinking. More than facts and figures, he taught us attitude, spirits and the scientific method. Steeped in Indian philosophy, he saw the entire universe from flowers to stars linked in a **Great Chain of Being**. Accordingly, he saw the entire humanity as one big family. For him libraries and free flow of information were the instruments to promote peace and enlightenment. The scientist was a spiritualist at heart. His contribution to information science is enduring; and his niche is secure amongst the immortals of the library science world. In the year of his birth centenary and standing on the threshold of information society, we love the man for his dedication and humility; marvel the thinker for the profundity and enigmatic energy of his mind; remember the statesman for his vision and crusades; and awfully admire the librarian for his immense faith in power of libraries to enrich life in every human endeavour.

“The mind, if established in a state of activation, is not exhausted as quickly as the body. It recovers from exhaustion much earlier than the body . . . The soul, when activated, knows no exhaustion. It is ever in ecstasy and it radiates.”

-SR Ranganathan in *Library Book Selection*