



SR RANGANATHAN—AN EXEMPLARY TEACHER AND A GUIDE

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This year, we are celebrating Dr SR Ranganathan's Birth Centenary. I am taking this opportunity to recollect some of my thoughts on my acquaintance with Dr Ranganathan while I was a student of Associateship in Documentation Course at the Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore during the year 1968-69, on deputation from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Dr Ranganathan had moved over to Bangalore in 1957. He was responsible for the establishment of DRTC at Bangalore in 1962 under the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Calcutta. The main objective of the Centre was to conduct research and teaching in library sciences. Dr Ranganathan served as an honorary professor of DRTC during 1962-72. Although I had heard earlier about this famous librarian, I got the first opportunity to come in contact with him when I joined DRTC.

I admit that before joining this course, I had very little idea about

various aspects of library science and documentation. My first month of the DRTC was rather a big struggle. It meant a total change in the type of education and the type of work I had experienced earlier. I had a Masters' Degree in Mathematics with specialisation in Statistics and Astronomy. I had started my service career in the DRDO and most of my work related to collection and analysis of statistics on various R&D aspects. When I was introduced to the subjects of cataloguing and classification in the first few weeks of my training in documentation, I thought it to be too simple and ordinary for a post-graduate student of mathematics. Little did I realise their importance at that moment. Even on a few occasions, I used to make a mockery of these new subjects before the fellow students. My first encounter with Dr Ranganathan was immediately after first three weeks of my training. While asking about my educational qualifications, experience etc, he asked how I felt about the course. Before a dynamic per-

sonality like that of Dr Ranganathan, I remained silent. But he could immediately sense my inner feelings by looking at my face. Then came one full hour's lecture/sermons from him with regard to organising one's work in the office in an efficient manner. This lecture contained several anecdotes as to how he had made senior officials of Government of India realise the importance of organising information and even using the methods of indexing and classification in their office files. While listening to him, I kept on nodding my head as a faithful student without realising the importance of his sermons at that time. My views about the course were also shared by one of the fellow students who was by profession an engineer. Both of us quite often discussed confidentially about how bad we felt about the course in the beginning. After some time my colleague left the course and joined as a lecturer in Dharwar in Karnataka. But I could not act in the similar fashion as I was officially deputed for this course and was considered to be on official duty. Now I really consider myself very fortunate in having successfully completed the course since after having undergone this course, I learnt how to effectively organise information for accurate search of knowledge and study. In fact, my entire way of functioning in private and public changed after gaining knowledge at DRTC. I could search for information very effectively, write survey/technical reports and give comments on various aspects of R&D which began receiving appreciation from my seniors. Eventually all these helped me in achieving a dramatic rise in my career, for which the entire credit goes to Dr Ranganathan and the highly intellectual professors and teachers of DRTC.

The DRTC under Dr Ranganathan was like a *Gurukul*. On many occasions Dr Ranganathan called students at his house for discussions. Many a time, he himself used to come to DRTC although with great difficulty because of his deteriorating health. Occasionally he used to sit and attend the regular colloquiums where students of the course were divided into two groups for discussing and debating several aspects of library science. He used to watch keenly everyone of us and appreciate the ideas given and also apprise us of the facts and knowledge in a very simple way. He would involve all of us in the 'question-answer' method of teaching in order to prepare our minds to receive new knowledge after scaling the calibre and existing knowledge contents of each of us individually. He was all through playful and lead the students to arrive at correct decisions. If a solution was given, he would pose a problem to a student and watch the psychological struggle and attitude of other students towards the same.

Dr Ranganathan, was a very interesting speaker with his bag full of anecdotes like stories narrated in the *Puranas*, could talk endlessly for hours together. He had strong will power; but certainly; could not sustain it all the time because of his deteriorating health. When we visited his house on a few occasions, we could find Mrs Ranganathan's sincere love and selfless devotion for her husband. In spite of his ill health, he was always anxious to translate the new ideas instantaneously. He felt it necessary to communicate with others for this purpose and did not have much discipline while talking to others and those whom he allowed to visit him only for a few minutes initially, continued to discuss with them for more than two hours.

This showed his enthusiasm to prove his point and that the new idea which came to him was fool-proof. Not only Dr Ranganathan was a veteran speaker but also a prolific writer. While he started his career as a teacher in mathematics, it was not widely known that he had also first class degree in English literature. The Five Laws of Library Science happened to be one of his earliest works in simple language and extremely precise for expressing to the librarians as well as to the non-librarians. This work could be said to be the best testament of the library profession. He used to write at great length. One could see him writing endlessly sitting on his hard bed at his residence. Anyone could also see the simple life he used to live. The house of this giant professor was simple with no luxuries around.

'The work and nothing but work' was his motto. This implied a total surrender on the part of those who worked with him. He sought to build up the atmosphere of an *Ashram* around DRTC. We were required to reside on the campus and one of us who was local and married was not allowed to visit his family even on week days. We were required to complete so many assignments that we had hardly any time left to go out for a walk or to cinema even on Sundays. Although, in the beginning this kind of hard work was difficult but slowly and gradually we all started enjoying since the course was made in the real professional style and conducted in a much thoughtful and interesting manner.

While we were nearing the completion of the course, we had DRTC Annual Seminar in December 1968, where I had prepared hard for presenting a paper. I went through many of the papers to be presented in the Seminar and noted down ideas and questions. I was hoping that Dr Ranganathan would be there to see how a new entrant to the library profession interacted with professionals in the field. But alas! my enthusiasm was short lived when I heard that Dr Ranganathan was not well and he would not be in a position to attend the seminar. A taped version of his speech was played before the participants. I was rather disappointed for his absence.

Dr Ranganathan could be seen as an optimist who had great hopes for the country's future as well as the library profession in India. He is truly called the 'Father of Library Science in India'. His Colon Classification and Classified Catalogue code received much attention not only in India but all over the world. Only a few Indians can claim to have received such an honour. Dr Ranganathan has left several admirers all over India and abroad. The news of his death on 27 September 1972 sent waves of shock among his admirers. I was much grieved at the sad demise of this exemplary teacher and guide. Nevertheless, it gives me immense pleasure to notice that DRTC continues to follow his principles and bring out every year a select band of trainees full of intellect and knowledge.