Vedic Knowledge System: Ordering and Purpose

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"In regard to the four-fold goal of human life, what is found here may be found elsewhere but what is not here is nowhere" –Jesse H Shera.

Vedic system represents the knowledge of ancient India deeply rooted in triqualities (*trai-gunya*) of *sansar* (material world). *Trai-gunya* represents *sattva* (mode of purity), *rajas* (mode of passion), and *tamas* (mode of ignorance). Accordingly, every individual in pursuit of attaining three purposes/goals of life representing *trivarga*(three ends of human endeavour) or three categories, popularly known as paths of life, i.e. *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (pursuits of wealth), and *kama* (pleasure). Later *Upanishads* and other post-Vedic literature added a new goal 'm*oksha*' attaining peace or liberate oneself from the worldly objects. These four paths of human life collectively are described as *purusarthas* (four paths of life/ purpose of human life) and became bases of knowledge classification. There are various principles of knowledge classification. The paper discusses the vital subjects representing knowledge covered in these four paths of life in *Vedas*. Further, discusses Ranganathan's representation of Vedic knowledge systems in his writings and their relationship with the knowledge classification system (Colon Classification) in ordering of the main subjects in the form of main classes.

Keywords: Colon Classification, Indian knowledge system, Knowledge organisation, Ranganathan's philosophy, Vedic knowledge systems

Introduction

Classification of entities, including knowledge, has been in existence ever since homo sapiens came into being[1]. Vedic system of knowledge classification is the earliest system which is based on the purpose of the human being in society. The civilised society in the past was systematized and well organized one. It had classified knowledge and people and their duties in all walks of life"[2].

The early *Vedic* texts speak of *trivarga* (three categories) of the purpose/goal of human life, i.e. *dharma, artha and kama*. Later Upanishads introduced *moksha* as the fourth purpose[3].

These four purposes are considered as the basis of Vedic knowledge classification which are based on three modes of individual's life (*trai-gunyas*) and through proper balance of these aiming at eternal peace and performing four *purusarthas*.

Vedas deals with three *trai-gunya* (modes) of *sansara* (material or worldly nature, or *aparaprakrti*) and also eternal (*para prakrti*), as narrated by Shree Krishna in Bhagvad Gita:

त्रैगुण्यविषयावेदानिस्त्रैगुण्योभवार्जुन|
निर्द्वन्द्वोनित्यसत्त्वस्थोनिर्योगक्षेमआत्मवान्‖ 2.45‖

(Meaning: The Vedas deal with the three modes of material nature, O Arjun. Rise above the three modes to a state of pure spiritual consciousness. Freeing yourself from dualities, eternally fixed in Truth, and without concern for material gain and safety, be situated in self)[4].

The Vedas enshrine both kinds of knowledge material (d*harma, artha, kama*) and spiritual (*moksha*). Shree Krishna asks Arjun that actions should not be confined with the material knowledge but also elevate himself to the level of absolute truth. All actions of a man fall into the *trai-gunya* which are the bases of *purusarthas*, part of nature as described in Vedas.

The present paper discusses about the modern principles of knowledge classification, namely, ideological, social purpose, scientific order, and arrangement by disciplines. Vedic knowledge system is based on the principles of purpose, i.e. purpose of life. The purpose of Vedic Classification

and order of Vedic system of classification are also discussed.

Principles of Knowledge Classification

The universe of knowledge is the totality of all kind of knowledge that is available in present time and likely to continue to be generated. Knowledge is characterized as infinite, multi-dimensional, dynamic, fragmented, and ever expanding in all directions over the time. D.W. Langridge (1925-2001)[5], a well-known English librarian and a great-admirer of Ranganathan, identifies four principles for mapping of the universe of knowledge. However, these are not mutually exclusive.

Ideological Principle: These are based on some schools of thought, or some ideological principles. Early examples are Christian schemes of middle ages. Latest example is the Russian Classification system BBK which makes Marxism Leninism as the center of the universe of knowledge. To some extent every scheme is based on some ideology. No classification scheme can be value free or independent of the influence of time and culture of its origin. Every scheme is biased towards the values and culture of the society of its origin. That is why the Dewey Decimal Classification has to be modified and adapted to classify African and Asian subjects.

Principle of Social Purpose: The Vedic system (1500 BCE) which divides knowledge into *dharma* (Normative principles), a*rtha* (social sciences) k*ama* (Pure sciences and arts) and m*oksha* (spiritual knowledge) is an example of this principle. This is a broad classification which arranges knowledge in an order of decreasing social utility and in the increasing potential for future use. This is a theoretical classification which has never been the basis of a library classification or any detailed knowledge/philosophical classification. These were the values by which life was to be lived in ancient India, and still by the believers. Ranganathan was bit influenced by it, discussed in his writings in establishing the relationship with the newer subjects, but he could not use it as the basis of his Colon Classification to make it an international system.

Scientific Order: It is an order based on some natural and logical order of subjects. Its principles were first crystallized by E.C. Richardson in his famous book, *Classification*: *Theoretical and Practical* (1901). C A Cutter (1837-1903) used the evolutionary order of main classes in his Expansive Classification (1893) and also H E Bliss (1870-1955) scientific and educational principles (consensus) (1935). Cutter was of the opinion that nature has an evolutionary order which should be reflected in knowledge organization. His system is based upon the assumption, "Order of sciences is the order of things, and order of things is the order of their complexity". This is obviously under the influence of the theory of origin of species as given by the Naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882). Entities in nature have evolved from atomic through molecular to molar forms. These principles were used to some extent by J D Brown (1862-1914) in his Subject Classification (1906) and H E Bliss (1870-1955) in his Bibliographic Classification (1935). The arrangement of classes in the Library of Congress Classification is also based on this principle. The arrangement of classes in botany and zoology in the DDC and CC is predominantly taxonomic. But its full implications were explored by the Classification Research Group (CRG) London (established in 1952) when the Group attempted to solve the problems of general classification schemes and tried without much results to design a new system of library classification. The vague evolutionary order was more deeply explored and precisely defined in the theory of Integrative Levels by J E L Farradane (1906-1989). The objective of this theory was to "identify all the entities or objects of knowledge in existence, and to order them by means of a theory and thus provide a structure of knowledge"[6]. Obviously, this theory applies mostly to natural objects which have physically evolved. It is also applicable to social entitles which obviously are always in a state of slow social evolution.

Principle of Arrangement by Disciplines: A discipline is a major and cohesive chunk of knowledge formed by a single research mode, or have the similar objects of study. Major contribution of Melvil Dewey (1851-1931) was to divide knowledge by discipline. The DDC defines a discipline as "An organized field of study or branch of learning dealing with specific kinds of subjects and/or subjects considered from specific points of view". Disciplines differentiate knowledge into number of logically distinct domains characterized by the possession of cohesive types of concepts, structure and method of verification/acceptance of new knowledge. The division by discipline offers hope for better solution to the problems of information retrieval and to meet library user needs. First exposition of this method is

from the *Advancement of Learning (1605)* by famous English philosopher, man of letters, and scientist Francis Bacon (1561-1626). He deeply examined the then prevailing state of knowledge and means of its progress. He suggested that there are three kinds (major disciplines) of knowledge based upon three faculties of mind, namely Memory, Imagination and Reason. This produces correspondingly three major disciplines: History, Arts, and Sciences. However, it is debatable whether these disciplines are autonomous, mutually exclusive and fuse to make an integrated whole of knowledge. Anyhow, the present age is the age of division by discipline in unison with the trends pursued by scholars and reflected by the university academic organization. However, with the emergence of multidisciplinary subjects since the early 20th century hence a need of phenomena-based knowledge classification is being felt due to the emergence of area studies, integrated studies like women studies, energy studies, etc. etc.[7]

Now let us see how the universe of knowledge has been represented classifications in the Vedic system of knowledge

Vedic Knowledge System

Vedas, the liturgical hymns, were compiled from oral sources by the sage Vyasa during 1500-1250 BCE. A system of knowledge is implied in the U*panishads* (which expound the Vedas) forming the philosophical and the mystic supplements to the different recensions of the four Vedas of ancient India. This is perhaps the earliest known knowledge system which was adopted by the later Indian epics, and the encyclopedias known as *Puranas*.

In dealing with life pattern in Indian society, Louis Renou points out that there are at least three ways of "placing" or classifying an individual: according to stages or modes of life (*ashramas*), according to the professions/vocation pursued by them in the ~~of~~ society into four classes (*varnaas*), and naturally it is according to the "phases of human activity. "dharma or moral activity (the highest), artha or interested activity, and kama or playful activity. These three ends reflect, in part at least, the three functions. They are subordinate to a fourth end: moksha or liberation" [8].

The recognition of the four functional or fundamental values of life that pervades in the Vedic and post-Vedic literature is recognized as characteristic of an individual in its standard formulation to attain worldly success (*artha*),

fulfillment of desires (*kama*), virtue (*dharma*) and liberation of the self (*moksha*), and these four are popularly known as *purusarthas* of life[9].

Accordingly Vedic Knowledge based on the p*urusarthas* and the Vedic system divided the universe of knowledge into four ordered main classes, namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. These correspond to the four fundamental values of an individual in society.

In fact, any universe whatever be it of humans, animals, plants, phenomena, or concepts of any kind, was broadly classified on the basis of these four values. The values themselves and the corresponding classes were usually arranged in the above mentioned order. As, Bhagvad Gita, the entire universe or *prakrti* is based on three *gunas* (qualities), namely *sattva, rajas and tamas* and these three contribute all the elements of the universe, as indicated by Shree Krishna:

प्रकृतेर्गुणसम्मूढाःसज्जन्तेगुणकर्मसु।
तानकृत्स्नविदोमन्दान्कृत्स्नविन्नविचालयेत्॥ (3.29)

(Meaning: Having true knowledge of respective spheres of modes (*guna*) and actions, the knowing soul does not get attached with them, by realising that, it is an interplay of the modes)[10]

The entire universe, including the body, senses, mind, intellect, creatures, objects etc., is constituent of three modes. This is the sphere of modes of nature. Actions performed with body is a sphere of action. These actions are related with value and behavior of an individual/person leading to *dharma* from *sattva, artha* from *rajas* and *kama* from *tamas* and on the bases of good deals in life one is attaining *moksha* which is the ultimate objective of human life.

As per different philosophical thoughts and source(s), entire universe (*prakrti*/manifestation) is classified into 25 fundamental elements (*prakrti* is divided into two, *apara* (24 elements) and *para* or *purusha* or supreme soul), reproduced from B G Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* in Table-1.

Vedas are more renowned for their *para vidya* or spiritual knowledge. And even superior is the realized knowledge of the Vedic rishis or saints - that which is beyond the objective knowledge of modern science - knowledge of the eternal realm of *sat-chit-ananda* - eternality, blissfulness and full knowledge[11].

The philosophers have been interested in the division of knowledge qua knowledge and not of subjects qua subjects. Moreover, they had only attempted to break down the Universe of Knowledge

Table 1 — Classification of the twenty-five fundamental elements [Prakrti]			
Sāṁkhya Classification.	Elements.	Vedānta Classification.	Gītā Classification.
1. Neither prakriti nor vikrti.	1 SPIRIT	(1) The superior form of Parabrahman	(1) *parā* Prakṛti.
1. Fundamental prakrti. 7. Prakarti-vikrti.	1 PRAKRTI	(8) The inferior form of Parabrahman *(eight-fold)*	(1) *aparā* Prakṛti. (8) These are eight sub-divisions of the *aparā* Prakṛti.
	1 Mahān. 1 Ahaṁkāra. 5 Tanmātras.		
16. Vikāras.	1 MIND 5 Organs of Perception. 5 Organs of Action. 5 Primordial Elements.	(16) These sixteen Elements are not looked upon as Fundamental Elements by Vedāntists, as they are *vikāras*) (evolutes).	(15) These fifteen elements are not looked upon as Fundamental Elements by Gītā, as they are *vikāras* (evolutes)
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25	25	25	25

(Source:Tilak B G, Sri Bhagvadgita Rahasya or Karma-Yoga-Sastra, vol. 1, (Lokmanya Tilak Mandir; Poona City), 1935, p. 249)

Table 2 — Broad Knowledge Classification in Colon Classification			
	Matter and force	Mind	Record
A Generalia	B-D Physical Science	Life E-F Biological Science G-H Ethnology, Medicine, I Economic Biology, Domestic Arts	J-K Philosophy and Religion L Social and Political Science	M Language and Literature N Literary Forms, Fiction, Poetry O-W History and Geography X Biography

(Source: Ranganathan S R,*Prolegomena to library classification*,(Madras Library Association; Madras), 1937, p. 196).

into a few broad divisions and arrange them in a helpful sequence. and sequence consisted of the following four Divisions of knowledge from the Vedic times downwards[12].

Library classification schemes mostly discuss about the *apara vidya* or material knowledge of the Vedic literatures.

Ranganathan in *Prolegomena to Library Classification* (1937)[13], interprets and broadly classifies knowledge in the subjects/elements of universe as shown in Table-2:

Ranganathan describes the first array or layout of subjects in Colon Classification (*Prolegomena to Library Classification*). Though above classification represents 24 subjects of four broad elements, viz matter and force, life, mind and record similar to the 24 subjects of *apara vidya*. however, this number of subjects increased in the following editions of Colon Classification.

Ranganathan further kept continuing to interpret in his writing about the classification of the Vedic System corresponding to the modern subjects/partially comprehensive classes/ensemble of modern Main Subjects collectively, as produced in Table-3:

As in the Table 3, above three works of Ranganathan take a basis of *purusarthas* as basis for expansion of subjects in different time-frame and are related main classes of Colon Classification to some extent. Main subjects and auxiliaries were added and given as per the latest edition of the Colon Classification. Further, Ranganathan mentions that, "both numerical and alphabetical mnemonics had been elaborately developed during the Vedic period and later. But, the notational system, if any, as to whether it has been used during the Vedic period is not now known"[17].

Connotations of the Vedic Subjects

Dharma (Normative Moral and Social Principles)

The knowledge in the first main class, *Dharma*, is centered on the preservation and perpetuation of society as a coherent functional organisation. *Dharma* means 'that which holds together". It means the religion or the eternal laws that govern our life, here it actually means righteousness, i.e., duty towards society, family, and humanity. So, one has to observe *dharma* while living in society by respecting the laws and traditions of the society and doing the right things. It is above a*rtha* and *kama*. It corresponds to the modern classes of law, theology, ethics and sociology which lay down the rightful duty of a person. Evidently, this is regarded as the minimum and primary knowledge with which any person should start in building his/her own stock of knowledge, and

Table 3 — Vedic Classification Corresponding to Modern Main Subjects

S. N.	Vedic Group Subjects	Correspondingly to modern partially comprehensive classes (1965)[14]	The Vedic comprehending the ensemble of the modern Main Subjects collectively of (1968)[15]	Corresponding to Modern Subjects (1987)[16]
1	Dharma	Religio-Social Sciences with Natural Natural Sciences as auxiliaries	Law, Religion, Ethics, and Sociology;	Law, Theology, Ethics, Sociology
2	Artha	Economico-political Sciences with Natural Sciences as auxiliaries	'Applied Sciences' — natural as well social	Applied Natural Science, Political Science, Economics and Social Applied Sciences
3	Kama	Creative or Fine Arts including Literature with Linguistics and Psychology as auxiliaries	Linguistics, Fine Arts, and those denoted by the term 'Pure Sciences'	Pure Sciences, Fine Arts and Literature
4	Moksha	Spiritual Experience with Logic, Epistemology, and Metaphysics as distant intellectual auxiliaries mediating between intellectual and trans-intellectual experiences	Philosophy and Mystical experience.	Philosophy, Mystic experiences

practice to become a useful and participative member of the community. These are of a normative nature to keep a society integrated, peaceful, functional and progressive.

Artha (Prosperity)

Artha includes all knowledge of applied sciences for wealth production, natural as well as social for economic progress. It is the pursuit of material wealth for economic development of the society and satisfy individual needs. These subjects are needed by the society, at the material, economic and political levels. This group forms the main class *Artha* from the point of view of physical sustenance, social well-being and material happiness. The applied arts and skills have to be continuously innovated by the engineers applying the advances made by the pure sciences. This is the social motive and pressure for the development of pure sciences to provide for the physical needs and well-being of the individuals in the society[18].

Kama (Joy and Entertainment)

Kama means desire. In the modern context, it means love and lust, especially sexual—a vice to be controlled. The class *Kama* comprehends all pure sciences, linguistics, fine arts, music, literature and sports. Apart from this, some individuals involuntarily seek joy in the pursuit of pure sciences due to some inner urge. Many find joy in the involuntary creation of works of literature and all other forms of visual and performing arts. This involuntary pursuit of subjects is inherent in the nature of few individuals, called artists who profess 'art for art's sake'. It is largely an individual's inner urge to create with imagination for aesthetic pleasure, joy, beauty and entertainment. *Sahitya* holds mirror to the society. It is a matter of one's own will and pleasure, whether to create or merely to enjoy what has been created by others. Only a few people are endowed with literary creativity in society. This is perhaps the reason for denoting the main class comprising these subjects by the term *kama* –desire for pleasure, individual desire.

Moksha (Salvation)

Our soul thus gets trapped in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Therefore, *moksha* is necessary to liberate the soul from this cycle. *Moksha* is the ultimate aim of a Hindu's life.

This knowledge is for liberating the soul from this tormenting cycle. *Moksha* covers philosophy, and mystic experience unmediated by the intellect or the primary senses, says Ranganathan. This type of knowledge involving individualism par excellence is put into the last main class *moksha*. It means liberation, the realization of the Self, and is the ultimate destination of this human incarnation. It is the stage of inner realization and actualization that the individual self is the same as the Supreme Self. Only a small minority in any community is able to realise or even appreciate such attainments. Individualism reaches its very heights in relation to mystical and intuitive experiences. It is only one person in several millions that feels at home in this region of knowledge and living. Such persons though seemingly recluse are extremely beneficial to society[19]. It is the vision attained through these subjects that saves humanity in moments of spiritual or moral crisis.

This was not merely categorizing knowledge; these were the values to be applied by the individuals and the society collectivelyfor living meaningful social

and spiritual life[20]. The order was strict, for example *dharma* must first be in place to indulge in the latter three values. Similarly, if the society does not provide the basic needs of the individual, then there would be no time and thought for the *kama* and *moksha*. When satiated and aware of the need to attain *moksha* the desire to pursue earthly wealth automatically dies away, paving the way for *moksha*. It means that one's desires need to be fulfilled in one's lifetime, albeit in a state of awareness. For a person to evolve spiritually and to reach the ultimate destination, the barrier of their desires needs to be crossed. This can be done either by fulfilling the desires or by sublimating or transcending them. If there is a clash between *dharma* and *artha*, *dharma* should be given all priority than to*artha*[21].If normative subjects are necessary for the maintenance of and order in society, if applied subjects (*artha*) are necessary to ensure physical sustenance and well-being of society, if pure sciences are necessary to make applied arts meet the physical needs of social beings, the subjects in the *moksha* class are necessary to enrich all the other main classes and exalt them to the higher pitch needed to meet social needs from time to time. Thus, the four main classes in the Vedic system of knowledge are arranged in the sequence of decreasing popular comprehension, decreasing immediacy in social use, and increasing fundamental quality of life, and its potentiality for future use. It is essentially a socio-centered principle of knowledge organisation. This broad classification arranges knowledge in an order of decreasing current social utility and in the increasing potential for future use. Dharma is essential for the formation and preservation of a society, *artha* for economic progress while *kama* is bit optional, whereas *moksha* which is rare is totally concerned with the 'life' beyond death!

Ranganathan (1989)[22] mentions that "The four main subjects in the Vedic system of subjects are arranged in the sequence of decreasing popular comprehension, decreasing immediacy in social use, and increasing 'fundamental' quality and potentiality for social use. It is essentially socio-centered".

Acknowledgements

Conclusion

Vedic knowledge system is based on the four purposes of the life and accordingly the knowledge classification was based comprehensively on Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. This is a logically ordered applied knowledge. However, Ranganathan subscribed to it and even used it as the broad basis of his Colon Classification as evident from the sources.

The four objectives of *purusarthas* have also found a place in Ranganthan's approach work for the basis of classification. Ranganathan in his writings correlates main classes of Colon Classes with this broad classification of knowledge, however little variation in combination/cluster of subjects is witnessed.

Further, Ranganathan implicitly applied these values of *Purusarthas* in attaining value in librarianship resulting into attainment of moksha for library professionals:

"Ranganathan also aimed at four values in librarianship Ranganathan's conceptualisation of these four goals in conformity with the Indian tradition of fundamental values of life (*prursharthas*), *dharma, artha, kama* and *moksha*. He considered 'personal profit'in the category of *artha* (wealth). The social betterment of *samuhika-sukha* belongs to the category of *kama* or happiness in the vital plane. The two values creative work' (*swiya dharma*) and 'nation's welfare' (*desiya-dharma*) combine together to serve the purpose of *dharma* which ultimately lead to *ananda* or delight. The fifth purpose for pursuing the career of librarianship relates to the attainment of *moksha* or 'Release" which is concomitant of *ananda*. Ranganathan, therefore, advised the librarians to activate theinner spirit and do meditation of love, joy, serenity and service, if they want to attain*moksha* (eternal bliss) by working in the library"[23].

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