



Soul, Subtle Body, Gross Body: S.R. Ranganathan's Ontology of the Book in (Its) Context(s)

Thomas M. Dousa

Metadata Analyst Librarian

The University of Chicago Library

E-Mail: tmdousa@uchicago.edu

Received: 05 February 2024; Accepted: 20 February 2024

This paper examines an ontological model of the book that S.R. Ranganathan developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, according to which a book (or other document) consists of a soul, or thought content; a subtle body, or semiotic modes of expressing thought content; and a gross body, or physical form. Ranganathan derived this ontology from traditional Hindu philosophical sources and creatively adapted it to fit his own theoretical purposes. The paper begins with a brief initial overview of the ontology itself, discussing the circumstances in which it arose and the basic lineaments of its structure. Then it considers the Hindu ontological model from which Ranganathan derived the basic structure of his model of the book and discusses how he adapted it for the purposes of library-science discourse. Next, it examines how Ranganathan deployed his ontology of the book in his writings, showing that it provided him with a useful conceptual base from which to discuss several different topics relating to books, their description, and their processing in libraries as well as certain features of book classifications. Finally, it is shown that Ranganathan's use of his ontology of the book to underpin his discussion of a number of different subjects in his writings can be seen as an instantiation of one of the ideals toward which his thought tended: the principle of *ekavākyatā*, or the unity arising out of diversity.

Keywords: ontology of the book, S.R. Ranganathan, Hindu philosophy, *jīva*, analogy, creativity.

Introduction

Common opinion holds that a creative person is someone who is “inventive” and capable of “using imagination or original ideas as well as routine skill or intellect¹.” On this view, creativity is a dispositional property of human beings that leads them to produce things—be they intellectual or material—that are new and valuable². If one accepts this standard definition of creativity, then it is indisputable that S.R. Ranganathan was a creative thinker, for his writings abound with innovative ideas about various aspects of library science that have had a lasting impact on library and information science (or: on our disciplinary field). A proper appreciation of Ranganathan's creativity, however, requires a nuanced understanding of what made his thought original. His originality did not lie in the absolute novelty of the ideas that he espoused nor did his creativity consist in an intellectual *creatio ex nihilo*. Rather, his creativity lay in his capacity to absorb ideas from a variety of sources^{3,4}, transform them in light of his own thought, and integrate them into a single overarching conceptual framework⁵. A fruitful approach to appreciating the creative nature of

Ranganathan's thought, then, is to consider how he adapted ideas from the intellectual traditions upon which he drew and how he used them in formulating his own ideas.

In this paper, I wish to present a case study, as it were, of Ranganathan's creativity by examining one of his lesser-heralded intellectual creations: a model of the ontological structure of the book that he elaborated in several of his writings. Ranganathan's ontology of the book is worth considering as an example of his creativity for two reasons. First, as several commentators have noted, it seems to anticipate, in its general outlines, ideas about the ontological structure of books (and other information resources) that were later independently developed in the last years of the 20th century by the framers of bibliographical conceptual models such as FRBR (Functional Requirements for Bibliographical Resources)⁶⁻⁹: as such, it certainly qualifies as an original, if somewhat underappreciated, contribution to the theoretical armamentarium of library science. Second and more important for our purposes, Ranganathan based his ontology of the book upon a model drawn from Hindu philosophy. That he did so

is not at all surprising, for he was a practicing Hindu, a Brahman who was well versed in the classical texts of his religious tradition and, indeed, went to invoke them in his writings¹⁰⁻¹². The Hindu provenance of the model is significant because it provides a point of reference against which one can observe how Ranganathan went about transforming the ideas that he inherited and transmuted them by transposing them into, and reusing them in, new contexts. It is especially for this reason that examination of Ranganathan's ontology of the book offers such a fine point of entry into considering his creativity.

The discussion of Ranganathan's ontology of the book that I present here will proceed as follows. I begin with a brief initial overview of the ontology itself, discussing the circumstances in which it arose and the basic lineaments of its structure. Then I consider the Hindu ontological model from which Ranganathan derived the basic structure of his model of the book and discuss how he adapted it for the purposes of bibliothecal discourse. Next, I provide a survey of how Ranganathan deployed his ontology of the book in his writings: as we shall see, it provided him with a useful conceptual base from which to discuss several different topics relating to books, their description, and their processing in libraries. Finally, I set forth the argument that Ranganathan's use of his ontology of the book to underpin his discussion of a number of different subjects in his writings can be seen as an instantiation of one of the ideals toward which his thought tended: the principle of *ekavākyatā*, or the unity arising out of diversity. With this program in mind, let us begin by turning to a consideration of Ranganathan's ontology of the book.

Ranganathan's Ontology of the Book

Ranganathan's ontology of the book was the product of a particular historical conjuncture. From 1947 until 1954, Ranganathan served first as library consultant to, and then as honorary professor of library science at, the University of Delhi¹³⁻¹⁵. His position at Delhi, which he took up after spending two arduous years (re)classifying the library at Banaras Hindu University in Benares (today, Varanasi), afforded him the academic leisure necessary to dedicate himself entirely to research and teaching; it is during this professionally propitious period of his life that he appears to have developed his ontology of the book. Ranganathan expounded varying versions of the ontology in lectures on library science as early as 1948^{16,17} and incorporated elements of it into an

article on documentation that he published in the journal *Libri* in 1951¹⁸. However, it was only in 1952 that he fully unveiled it in three books that he published in that year: *Library Book Selection* (hereafter, *LBS*)¹⁹; *Social Bibliography, or Physical Bibliography for Librarians* (hereafter *SB*)²⁰; and *Social Education Literature for Authors, Artists, Publishers, Teachers, Librarians and Governments* (hereafter, *SEL*)²¹. These books, which Ranganathan considered to be complementary to one another—to form a “small family”, as it were²²—found some resonance in the world of library science, with two of them—*LBS* and *SB*, now retitled *Physical Bibliography for Librarians*—going on into second editions in 1966²³ and 1974²⁴, respectively²⁵. In 1953, Ranganathan again briefly outlined his ontology of the book in the opening address on depth classification that he gave at the Tenth All-India Library Conference held in Hyderabad²⁶. He gave his final major exposition of the ontology four years later in the second edition of the *Prolegomena to Library Classification* (hereafter, *PLC*), which he prepared after he had left his university position in Delhi to live with his son's family in Zurich²⁷⁻²⁸. The ontology thus stems from the middle period of Ranganathan's career, at a time when he intellectually caught his second wind and began elaborating in greater detail the theoretical superstructure of his ideas on diverse facets of library science²⁹.

Taken together, *LBS*, *SB*, and *SEL* form the *locus classicus* for Ranganathan's ontology of the book and so it is appropriate to take them as the point of departure for our examination of it. According to Ranganathan, the concept of a book is polyvalent, in that “[w]hen the term ‘book’ is uttered, it may bring to mind one or more of several ideas”³⁰. More specifically, the idea of a book is a “composite concept”³¹ that can be resolved into “three sub-ideas”³². The first of these is the “thought-content” of a book, which Ranganathan assimilated to its “soul” or “*atma*”³³. The soul of a book consists of the “subject matter” of which it treats and conditions such properties of the book as its intellectual standard and the nature of its appeal—i.e., whether it is primarily informative, recreative, or inspirational for its readers³⁴. The second conceptually distinct element of a book is the vehicle of communication by means of which its thought-content is expressed—that is to say, the language in which it is written and the “pictorial aids and diagrams” that serve as visual representations

of the ideas being communicated³⁵. In Ranganathan's view, these means of communication form the "subtle body", or "*sukshma sarira*", of a book^{36,37}. The subtle body, which pertains to "the exposition of the book", is characterized by such properties as the style in which it is written, the clarity and quality of its language and illustrations, and, according to *LBS*, the presence (or absence) of an index³⁸: these properties contribute to what Ranganathan called, in another context, the "flavour" of a book³⁹. The third component of a book is the material support, the bound set of pages that make it a tangible object. Ranganathan calls this the "gross body", or "*sthula sarira*", which constitutes the "physique" of a book and encompasses such properties as size, shape, weight, binding, durability, paper quality, page formatting, and print quality⁴⁰. All in all, Ranganathan conceives of a book as a "trinity" consisting of three metaphysical parts: the "soul", or thought-content; the "subtle body", or the semiotic representation of that content; and the "gross body", or physical carrier upon which this representation of the thought-content is imprinted (see Figure 1, below)⁴¹⁻⁴³.

Although Ranganathan posited the triadic nature of the book in *LBS*, *SB*, and *SEL* alike, he also sketched out an alternative version of the model, in which he reduced the three component parts of a book into two. This dyadic version appears in *SEL*, where the gross body—that is to say, the "physical body"—is described as "embodying expressed thought"⁴⁴. Here, the soul of a book—i.e., its thought-content—and its subtle body—i.e., its mode of expression—are merged into a single composite entity—"expressed thought"—which is then embodied in the gross body (see Figure 2 below). Ranganathan underscores the unity between thought and its linguistic or pictorial expression by stating that "the expression and thought are inseparable"⁴⁵, citing the opening lines of the Kalidasa's epic poem *Raghuvamsa*—a favorite reference of his⁴⁶—as his authority for this claim.

This consolidation of the soul and subtle body into a single entity has the effect of creating a dichotomy between the material and immaterial parts of a book that mirrors the metaphysical contrast between body and spirit. Interestingly, Ranganathan had already limned a comparably dichotomous model of the book in his discussion of cataloging in his cycle of lectures published as *Preface to Library Science* in 1948, where he drew the distinction between "the body of the book" and the "soul of the book", arguing that a primary task of the cataloger is to describe the "thought" or "subject content" of the books in a library⁴⁷. There, however, he did not mention the semiotic aspects of the book, confining himself to the bald statement that "books are double commodities—both material and immaterial. ... [A] book has a body as well as a soul; it is embodied thought"⁴⁸. In time, however, Ranganathan elaborated and transformed this dyadic account of the book with reference to the triadic model outlined above. In his important comparative study of cataloging codes, *Heading and Canons*, which appeared in 1955, he distinguishes between "expressed thought" and "embodied thought". The former of these he characterizes as "[t]hought expressed in language or symbols or in any other mode and thereby made communicable" and considers to constitute a "work"⁴⁹; the latter he defines as a "[r]ecord of work on paper or other material, fit for physical handling, transport across space, and preservation through time" and gives it the name of "document"⁵⁰. Here, the concept of "expressed thought" includes both the notions of soul (or thought-content) and subtle body (semiotic expression), while, as Ranganathan later clarified in *PLC*⁵¹, "embodied thought" encompasses all three elements of the triad (See Figure 3, below). It is this distinction between work, or expressed thought, and document, or embodied thought, that Ranganathan routinely invokes in his later works on cataloging⁵².

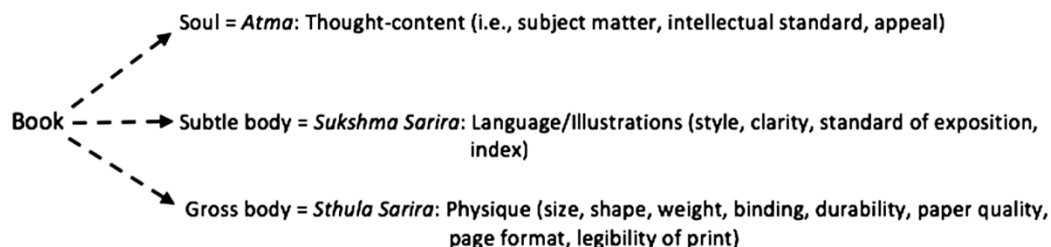


Fig. 1 — Ranganathan's Model of the Book as a Trinity of Metaphysical Parts

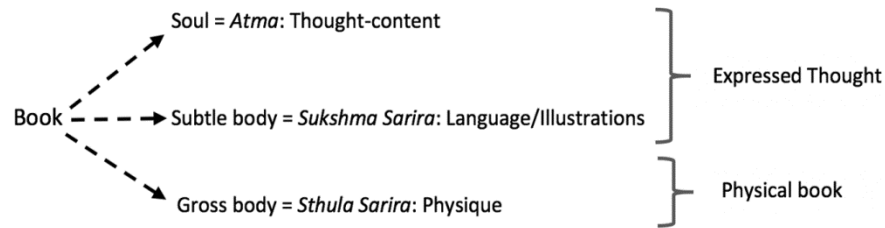


Fig. 2 — Ranganathan’s Model of the Book in *SEL*

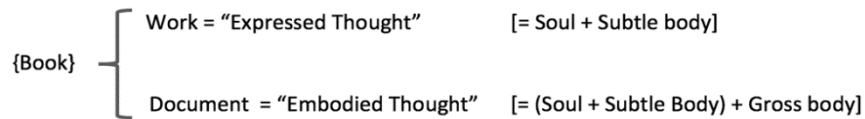


Fig. 3 — Ranganathan’s dyadic model of the book in *Heading and Canons*

Ranganathan’s ontology of the book, then, can take two forms: a triadic form, according to which a book consists of the *soul* (i.e., thought-content), *subtle body* (i.e., mode of semiotic representation), and *gross body* (i.e., the physical book), or a dyadic one, which distinguishes between the *work* and *document*. It is noteworthy that, whereas Ranganathan consistently uses the Hindu metaphysical imagery of soul, subtle body, and gross body in his discussions of the triadic version of his ontology of the book, his presentations of the dyadic model sometimes drop this imagery, moving from a distinction between the soul and body of a book to one between work and document. Ranganathan’s retention of the metaphysical imagery in his discussions of the triadic version suggests that, contrary to some commentators, it was not simply “ornamental” or utilized purely for rhetorical effect^{53,54}, but played a significant part in the intellectual constitution of the model. We will thus do well to consider the Hindu philosophical background to the bibliographic triad of soul, subtle body, and gross body and how Ranganathan deployed this background for his own ends.

The Hindu Vorlage to Ranganathan’s Ontology of the Book: Adoption and Adaptation

The terms that Ranganathan uses to refer to the three metaphysical parts of a book—“soul”, “subtle body”, and “gross body”—are translations of three Sanskrit words forming part of Hindu philosophical and religious discourse: *ātma*, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, and *sthūla-śarīra*, respectively⁵⁵. In Hindu philosophy, these words refer to three ontologically distinct parts of a *jīva*. Perhaps best glossed as “the empirical self”, a *jīva* is a living individual being that stands in a first-person (“I”) relationship to the world⁵⁶. The concept

of the *jīva* is prominent in all major *darśanas* (i.e., Hindu philosophical schools of thought), though the specific doctrines concerning it vary across different traditions⁵⁷. The concepts of *ātma*, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, and *sthūla-śarīra* play an especially salient role in thought about the *jīva* in the philosophical traditions of Sāṅkhya⁵⁸, Yoga⁵⁹, and Vedānta⁶⁰. If we prescind from the considerable differences in metaphysical assumptions across these *darśanas*, the nature and function of the *ātma*, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, and *sthūla-śarīra* in relation to the *jīva* can be broadly characterized as follows. The *ātma*, which Ranganathan translated as “soul”, is better glossed as “the essential or real self⁶¹.” It is “the self of a [living individual being] revealed when stripped of all that is temporary, perishable and subject to the limitations of space and time⁶².” The *ātma* is “of the nature of pure self-consciousness, which is beyond all bodily and mental conditions” and exists beyond the nexus of psychophysical causal connections that constitutes the world in which a *jīva* lives and with which it interacts⁶³. As such, the *ātma* is eternal, indestructible, and immutable, and so forms the existential and spiritual core of the *jīva*⁶⁴. The second component of a *jīva*, the *sūkṣma-śarīra*, or subtle body, encompasses the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*), including the intellect or cognitive capacity (*buddhi*), the ability to feel a sense of individuality or ego (*ahaṁkāra*), and the faculty of processing sensory data (*manas*), as well as the *jīva*’s five faculties for perceiving objects in the world (*buddhindriyas* or *jñānendriyas*), its five faculties taking physical action (*karmendriyas*), and the five vital breaths (*prāṇas*) that animate its physical body⁶⁵. It provides the means for carrying out all the “vital, mental, and intellectual functions” of the *jīva* in this world^{66,67}. The *sthūla-śarīra*, or gross body, on the

other hand, is the physical body tout court: firmly grounded in the material world, it serves as “the support of the subtle body” while a *jīva* is alive⁶⁸. In short, a *jīva* consists of an *ātma*, or purely spiritual self that exists beyond the confines of the phenomenal world bounded by space and time; a *sūkṣma-śarīra*, or subtle body that is the basis of life, thought, and ego-consciousness in this world; and the *sthūla-śarīra*, which provides the necessary material foundation on which the subtle body can exercise its functions (see Figure 4, below). (For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that Advaita Vedānta identifies one other body in the constitution of the *jīva*, namely the *kāraṇa-śarīra*, or causal body, which is ontologically closest to the *ātma* and, in ontogenesis, serves as the seed for the emergence of the *sūkṣma-śarīra* and *sthūla-śarīra*^{69,70}. Ranganathan did not take this concept over into his ontology of the book and so we need not consider it further here.)

It is evident that Ranganathan made use of Hindu metaphysical concepts relating to the *jīva* to formulate his ontology of the book. This was an audacious move on his part, for it required reapplying concepts originally pertaining to living beings to a particular species of inanimate objects, namely books. Ranganathan himself was well aware of the semantic transposition that this involved, for he characterized the triadic version of his ontology as a “metaphysical analogy”⁷¹. Since the kind of analogy involved is what philosophers call the analogy of proportion—that is to say, an analogy akin to metaphor in which the concepts in one of two different contexts being compared stand in the same relation to one another as the concepts in the other context do⁷², it is instructive to compare the use and function of the concepts in Ranganathan’s model to their use and function in their original religio-philosophical setting: in this way, one can gain insight into how Ranganathan both adopted and adapted the intellectual tradition from which he drew. Of the three concepts, that of the gross body, or *sthūla-śarīra*, requires no comment, for, in both models, it serves simply as the physical substrate of the entity in question: just as the gross body is the physical body of a living being like a man, horse, or

mosquito, so is the gross body of a book simply the physical object containing text and illustrations. Matters become more complex when one considers the other two concepts, the *ātma* and the subtle body, or *sthūla-śarīra*.

As we have seen, Ranganathan defined the *ātma*, or “soul”, of a book as being its thought-content. At first glance, such an idea of the *ātma* seems somewhat removed from the traditional philosophical notion, according to which the *ātma* is the eternal, immutable, and utterly transcendent spiritual self of a *jīva*: after all, the thought-content of a book is the creation of its author, whereas the essential self of a *jīva* is uncreated. However, Ranganathan had good reasons for making the analogy. For one thing, he held that “creators”—that is to say, truly creative “authors and artists”—create their works through a form of intuition that gives them access to thoughts and modes of expression derived from beyond the phenomenal world: in his words, “[w]orks come through them [sci., the authors and artists—TMD] and not from them”⁷³. To be sure, not all authors are favored with intuitive insight: in fact, Ranganathan held that most authors lack true creativity and must rely on their own intellectual labor and technique in the writing of their books⁷⁴. Nevertheless, it appears that there was enough of a link, in his mind, between true authorial creativity and spiritual transcendence to make the analogy between the transcendental and timeless spirituality of the *ātma* of a *jīva*, and the space- and time-bound *ātma*, or thought content, of a book plausible. Second, there was, in Ranganathan’s view, an attenuated sense in which the thought-content of a book, especially a classic work of literature can be, if not eternal, at least immortal: as he put it, “[w]hen we say that a classic is immortal, we really mean that the thought-content of it is immortal”, even if individual copies wear out and are discarded or “perish”⁷⁵. Furthermore, the *ātma* of a *jīva* and the *ātma* of a book play very similar roles in relation to the entities of which they form part. We have seen that, insofar as the *ātma* is the essential self of the *jīva*, it constitutes its existential core, the very ground of its being. Now Ranganathan held that, as a

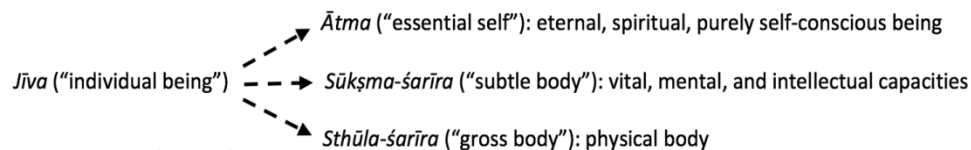


Fig. 4 — A (Simplified) Model of the *Jīva*

general rule, the primary purpose of books is to serve as vehicles for ideas⁷⁶:

“Books make communication transcend the limitations of time and space. These may be said to transform the *idea*, to be communicated into physical entities called books, and thus make it fit for transport across space and through time. ... In this physical form, an *idea* is carried from any point to any other point on earth and it is also preserved for any length of time. ... The *ideas* of the thinkers of today are embodied in books; and they are thus rendered fit for communication to the endless generations to come”.

On this view, the propagation of ideas is the *raison d'être* for the existence of books: thus, insofar as the thought-content of a book is that for the sake of which the book is produced⁷⁷, it is legitimate to consider it to be the essential core of the book. Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, in both the traditional ontology of the *jīva* and in Ranganathan's ontology of the book, the *ātma* forms the immaterial part of the entity in question: it is undoubtedly this quality of the *ātma* of the book that aligns it most firmly with the *ātma* of the *jīva*.

The analogy between the subtle body of the book and the subtle body of the *jīva* likewise initially seems rather curious. As noted earlier, the subtle body comprises the vital, mental, and intellectual faculties of the *jīva*. Insofar as it governs and enacts the processes of mental and intellectual life, it seems to deal with a sphere of activity that is at least as congruent with the notion of thought-content that constitutes the *ātma*, or soul, of the book as with the idea of linguistic and pictorial expression that, according to Ranganathan, characterizes the subtle body of the book. One may wonder, then, why Ranganathan chose to map the concept to the latter rather than the former. There are, in fact, several reasons that may have led him to do so. First, as we have just observed, Ranganathan considered the thought-content of a book to be immaterial in nature. By contrast, traditional philosophical doctrine holds that the *sūkṣma-śarīra*, or subtle body, of a *jīva* is composed of matter, with the proviso that the material of which it consists is far more fine and subtle than that which makes up the gross body⁷⁸. The incongruity between the immateriality of thought-content and the material nature of the subtle body in the traditional model of a *jīva* may well have led Ranganathan to assimilate the former to the *ātma* of a *jīva*, which is likewise immaterial, while reserving the

latter for mapping to the mode of semiotic expression embodied in a book. Now, if such was the case, then Ranganathan's claim that, in his ontology of the book, “the subtle body is a purely mental creation” may seem puzzling⁷⁹, for the mental nature of the subtle body could, at first blush, be taken to imply immateriality. However, if one recalls that it is precisely the subtle body that constitutes the capacity for mental operations in a *jīva*, then Ranganathan's characterization of the subtle body of a book as “a purely mental creation” is perfectly congruent with the philosophical tradition from which he drew, though he subtly transforms the concept of the subtle body from its original form of a capacity for carrying out mental processes to one of being a product of such processes. Most likely, though, the primary consideration that led Ranganathan to characterize the mode of semiotic expression of a book as its subtle body lay in the mediatory link that it creates between the thought-content of a book and its physical realization. According to the traditional ontology of the *jīva*, the *ātma*, which is purely spiritual in nature, has no direct contact with the physical world in which the gross body exists: it is the subtle body, with its capacity to perceive and think about material objects and yet remain open to spiritual illumination from the *ātma*, that serves as the interface between the *ātma* and the physical world⁸⁰. Now linguistic and pictorial expression performs a similar function with respect to the book. We have already seen that, in *SEL*, Ranganathan described the text and illustrations of a book as expressed thought and the physical form of the book as embodied thought. According to this version of his model, it is the semiotic representation of a book's thought-content as text and illustrations that provides the *Bindeglied* between the immaterial world of thought and the material substrate of the book, for the text and illustrations through which thought is expressed are imprinted upon the pages of the book and so make the thought-content accessible to readers who, after all, exist in the physical world. There is thus an undeniable logic to Ranganathan's characterization of a book's mode of semiotic expression as the subtle body of a book.

A feature of Ranganathan's ontology of the book already noted above but worth exploring further is the close connection between the soul, or *ātma*, of a book and its subtle body, which he considered to be “inseparable” from one another in practice⁸¹. The inseparability of the two is readily explicable, within

the framework of Ranganathan’s model, by their common status as products of mental processes that are operative in the act of creation. As we have already noted, he was wont to invoke the poet Kalidasa as an authority for positing a particularly close relationship between the *ātma* and the subtle body of a book. However, the traditional model of the *jīva* provided additional warrant for associating the *ātma* and the subtle body in so intimate a manner. The context in which the closeness of these two metaphysical parts of the *jīva* is most evident is the doctrine of *samsāra* or the cycle of reincarnation⁸². According to this teaching, a *jīva* undergoes a series of lives within a cycle of deaths and rebirths, the course of which is determined by *karma*—that is to say, the moral consequences of voluntary acts that the *jīva* has performed over the course of its lifetime(s)⁸³. Now the belief that the *jīva* lives multiple lives *seriatim* entails some principle of continuity that carries over the burden of *karma* from one life to the other over the course of the cycle. This cannot be the gross body, which undergoes dissolution at death^{84,85}. The *ātma* and the subtle body, by contrast, both survive death (See Figure 5 below). As we saw earlier, the *ātma* is eternal, changeless, and transcendent, and has nothing to do with the causal network of phenomenal world, which is the realm within which *karma* is accrued and discharged. The subtle body, on the other hand, fully participates in the phenomenal world and, insofar as it encompasses the mental and intellectual faculties, is both subject to change and serves as the locus of voluntary action. For this reason, it becomes the carrier of *karma*—that is to say, it bears the moral consequences of a given *jīva*’s voluntary acts in the world and determines the kind of gross body that the *jīva* will assume in its next life⁸⁶. The subtle body thus accompanies the *ātma* from one gross body to another over the course of the cycle of deaths and rebirths, bearing the imprint of *karma* upon itself⁸⁷. In the context of *samsāra*, then, the subtle body of a *jīva* stands in intimate connection to its *ātma*. In fact, so close is the linkage between the two that the subtle body is considered to be a sign

(*līnga*) of the presence of the *ātma* and is therefore sometimes called the *līnga-śarīra*, or “indicatory body”⁸⁸.

It is unclear whether the close association of the *ātma* and subtle body in the doctrine of *samsāra* influenced Ranganathan’s original formulation of his triadic model, for he does not allude to it in the works in which he first presents it—*LBS*, *SB*, and *SEL*. However, the doctrine did leave its imprint on his later discussion of the model, for, in the second edition of *PLC*, he writes⁸⁹:

“In certain systems of Indian Philosophy—and perhaps in others too, and certainly in theosophy—every living being is postulated to have three sheaths, viz. soul, subtle body and gross body. All these are separable. Soul can exist by itself; even then it is a being; there is the term, disembodied soul. A combination of soul and subtle body alone is postulated; this too is a being, the eschatology of many religions describe [sic] such a being. A combination of soul, subtle body, and gross body is a living being; this alone is commonly recognized as a living being; perhaps because this combination alone becomes manifest to the primary senses. The other two are cognizable only as an intellectual or intuitive experience.

The following hypothesis is common. A soul can get embodied in any number of subtle bodies in succession or even at the same time. A combination of soul and subtle body can get embodied in any number of gross bodies in success or even at the same time. The *Bhagavad-gīta*, for example, emphasizes this; The soul puts on and casts off bodies, even as we can put on and cast of clothes”.

Although much could be said about this interesting passage, there are three points that are especially salient here. First of all, whereas Ranganathan states that, in principle, the soul, subtle body, and gross body are separable from each other, he, in fact, only allows for three combinations: the soul can exist by itself; the soul and subtle body can exist conjointly; and the soul, subtle body, and gross body can exist in tandem with one another. Other possible

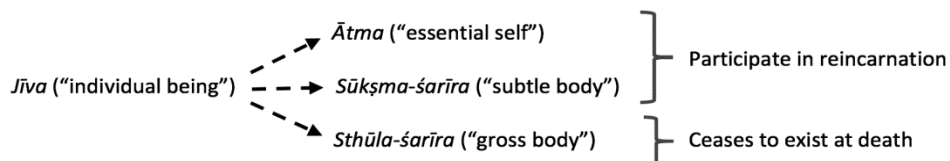


Fig 5 — The *Jīva* in the Cycle of Death and Rebirth (*Samsāra*)

combinations, such as the subtle body or gross body existing alone, subtle body and gross body existing together, or soul and gross body existing in tandem, are not mentioned because they are incompatible both with the traditional doctrine of *samsāra* and with Ranganathan's ontology of the book. Second, Ranganathan associates the soul and the subtle body together over against the gross body, though this time on epistemological grounds: a disembodied soul or a soul-cum-subtle body are imperceptible to the senses, whereas the combination of soul, subtle body, and gross body can be perceived in virtue of the physicality of the gross body. Finally, Ranganathan claims that reincarnation can take one of two possible forms: a soul can be associated with many subtle bodies, either *seriatim* or simultaneously, just as a soul-cum-subtle body can be embodied in many gross bodies, either in succession or at the same time. Now the idea of serial reincarnation reflects standard Hindu doctrine, whereas that of multiple simultaneous reincarnation, which is attested only in a few cultures outside of India^{90,91}, does not. Ranganathan appears to have included the latter "heterodox" version of reincarnation in his theory largely to allow for the existence of a one-to-many relationship between souls and subtle bodies on the one hand and souls-cum-subtle bodies and gross bodies on the other⁹². Such an intellectual move was necessary to allow for his ontology of the book to accommodate the presence of multiple translations and editions of works, for, in his view, new translations are tantamount to new subtle bodies for the soul of a work, while new editions constitute new "physiques", or gross bodies, for the expressed thought of a work⁹³. It is thus evident that Ranganathan's treatment of the doctrine of *samsāra* involved both adoption and adaptation: he remained faithful to some elements of the doctrine, such as the allowable combinations of soul, subtle body, and gross body, while altering it in other respects, as in the admission of multiple simultaneous reincarnation, to fit the conceptual requirements of his ontology of the book.

Ranganathan's Use of the Ontology of the Book in his Writings

Now that we have seen how Ranganathan adopted and adapted the traditional Hindu ontology of the *jīva* to formulate his ontology of the book, it remains to consider the use to which he put the latter model in his writings. This is best accomplished by passing in review one by one the writings in which he deployed

his ontology, commencing with the three books from 1952 in which he most fully outlined it. I begin with *LBS*, since this is the volume in which the model makes its most sustained appearance. *LBS* was intended to articulate and establish principles for guiding the selection of books for libraries. Ranganathan organizes the book around his Five Laws of Library Science, which he deemed to be foundational for all library work. In this context, he associates his ontology of the book with two of the laws in particular, the first—"Books are for use"—and the fifth—"A library is a growing organism"⁹⁴. The longest section of *LBS* is the discussion of the First Law, in which Ranganathan passes in review various aspects of books that need to be considered during the process of selection. He begins the section by presenting his model of the book, beginning with the gross body, then going on to the subtle body, and culminating with the soul⁹⁵. He then proceeds to discuss the specific attributes of each of these three metaphysical parts of the book and, with regard to each attribute, he formulates principles of selection. Attributes of the gross body of the book that receive attention include various aspects of the "physique" of the book, including its aesthetic attractiveness; its shape, size, and weight; and the durability of its paper and binding⁹⁶, as well as the legibility of its typeface and the quality of its layout⁹⁷. Ranganathan then turns his attention to the properties of the subtle body that he considers germane for book selection: these are various aspects of language and style that make up the "exposition of the book"; the presence of quality illustrations; and, quite interestingly, the presence or absence of an index⁹⁸. Finally, he discusses attributes of the soul of a book salient for the purpose of selection: these encompass its "standard of thought" (i.e., its intellectual quality and the nature of its scholarly significance within the literature of the field to which it belongs) and its "kind of appeal" (i.e., the kind of effect—informative, recreative, inspirational, or bibliophilic—that it has on its readers) as well as the various kinds of subject matter—humanities, social sciences, applied sciences, and pure sciences—susceptible to literary treatment⁹⁹.

As we have seen, Ranganathan's ontology of the book provides the primary intellectual scaffolding for his structuring of the section of *LBS* relating to the First Law. It plays a comparable role in the much shorter section on the Fifth Law, which considers the selection of library materials in light of collection

growth¹⁰⁰. Here again, Ranganathan commences with considerations relating to the “physique of books”, outlining the circumstances in which it is appropriate to choose “micro-reprograph” forms of publications for a collection or to select multiple bound copies of the same work, as well as to lay down principles regarding the selection of different editions of “classics” (i.e., canonical works generating large bibliographical families)¹⁰¹. He then moves to a discussion of the parameters for choosing translations of works written in foreign languages as well as works of foreign-language literature for library collections, which, in his view, pertain to the subtle body of books¹⁰². He ends the section with a brief comment on the utility of collecting at least some books on difficult subjects, which he justifies on the grounds that, as library collections grow, so do the number and, over time, the intellectual capacities of their patrons: this he takes to relate to the soul, or intellectual content, of books¹⁰³.

In *LBS*, Ranganathan deploys his ontology of the book as a means of providing a secondary structure for organizing his text under the overarching framework of the Five Laws of Library Science. In sharp contrast, he employs the inverse strategy in *SB*. There, after introducing his tripartite model of the book, he uses it as the basis for a taxonomy of different kinds of approaches to bibliography. Certain kinds of bibliography, which Ranganathan places under the rubric of “Document Bibliography” are “dominantly associated with the soul of books”¹⁰⁴. Examples of document bibliography include subject bibliographies, “linguistic bibliographies” (i.e., bibliographies listing items in specific languages), “expositional bibliographies” (i.e., bibliographies based on genre), national bibliographies, “economico-bibliographical lists” (i.e., publishers’ catalogs, copyright lists, and other bibliographic lists prepared for use in the book trade), and personal bibliographies¹⁰⁵. In contrast to document bibliography, “Physical Bibliography” is “concerned only with the gross body or physique of the book”¹⁰⁶. Falling into the category of physical bibliography are descriptive bibliography, which “deals with books as material objects formed by the mechanical process of printing;” historical bibliography, which chronologically collates the results of descriptive bibliography; and textual, or critical, bibliography, which is a form of descriptive bibliography used in the service of textual criticism¹⁰⁷. These, in turn, are so many species of what

Ranganathan calls “Palaeo-Bibliography,” the scholarly form of bibliography that seeks to reconstruct texts on the basis of the history of their textual transmission.¹⁰⁸ Over against the rarefied realm of paleo-bibliography, Ranganathan defines, and calls for the development of, “Social Bibliography”, a species of physical bibliography for librarians that focuses on publications of literature produced for “the self-education and self-entertainment of the masses”¹⁰⁹ with the goal of assessing which features of books are likely to attract readers and, in this way, of promoting literacy and supporting the “socialization of the book” across all sectors of society¹¹⁰. The remainder of the book is given over to an extensive discussion of social bibliography and is divided in accordance to the Five Laws of Library Science. In *SB*, then, it is Ranganathan’s ontology of the book that provides the initial overarching framework for the discussion of bibliography, one species of which—social bibliography—is then singled out for further discussion, which is articulated in accordance with the Five Laws.

A careful reader of *SB* cannot fail to note that, whereas Ranganathan sets forth the triadic form of his ontology of the book at the beginning of the volume, the contrast between “Document Bibliography” and “Physical Bibliography” that he develops is, in fact, dyadic in form, for the former has to do with the soul of the book and the latter, with the gross body of the book. Ranganathan does not invoke the subtle body at all in his taxonomy of bibliographies. What is more, he assigns certain kinds of bibliography that one would expect to be associated with the subtle body of a book—namely, linguistic bibliography and expositional bibliography—to the category of document bibliography without comment. The reason for this effacement of the subtle body of the book from Ranganathan’s taxonomy of bibliographies is unclear. It may well be that, in the context of his discussion of bibliographies, it was simply easier to work with the dichotomous division between those pertaining to the soul of a book and those concerned with its gross body or physical form, especially since the bulk of *SB* was devoted to a detailed account of the latter. At any rate, Ranganathan could have easily justified the omission by reference to his argument that thought and expression are inseparable and thus can be treated as the single unit of expressed thought, for that is, in effect, what he did in subsuming linguistic and genre-based, as well as subject-based,

bibliographies under the single category of document bibliography. It is worth observing that this is not the only place in *SB* where Ranganathan deviated somewhat from the application of his ontology of the book that he had given in *LBS*: in his treatise on book selection, he had considered the index of a book to form a component of its subtle body, whereas, in his discussion of social bibliography, he treated it as if it were associated with the gross body¹¹¹.

When we turn to *SEL*, we see that it represents yet another variation in Ranganathan's use of his ontology of the book to organize the structure of a text. In this book, which was intended to give an overview of the various factors at play in the production of literature for socially disadvantaged classes in India¹¹², the Five Laws of Library Science play no role in the organization of the discourse and the ontology is invoked in only two of seven chapters. At the outset of the third chapter, entitled "Author and Artist", Ranganathan briefly introduces the triadic form of the ontology and immediately states the principle that "the expression and thought expressed are inseparable"¹¹³; after some brief remarks on the creation of literature, he goes on to discuss the subjects of books, the language and style in which they are written, the use of illustrations, and the translation and adaptation (i.e., paraphrasing) of works from one language into another¹¹⁴. The principle of inseparability clearly plays a role in the formulation of the chapter, which encompasses aspects of the creation of literature that relate both to the soul of a book (i.e., subject-content) and to its subtle body (i.e., language, style, use of illustrations, and translation and adaptation), for they are treated as a thematic unity—namely, as "the expressed form of Social Education Literature"¹¹⁵. The following chapter, which bears the title of "Book Trade", "examine[s] the creation of the gross body of Social Education Literature" and covers in turn "the aesthetics of the book"; its shape, size and weight; its design of its dust jacket; its binding; the general layout of the book; its typographical features; the layout of its pages; and the quality of its paper¹¹⁶. The attributes of the gross body discussed in *SEL* overlap considerably with those in *LBS*, though there are some striking discrepancies as well: most notably, the index of a book features, again, among the properties of the gross body, as was the case in *SB*¹¹⁷. On a more general level, it is noteworthy that, whereas Ranganathan presents his ontology of the book in *SEL*

as triadic, it is, in fact, functionally dyadic, since the attributes of the soul and subtle body are treated as if they formed a single, continuous unit, and so stand conjointly in contrast to the gross body.

Ranganathan's use of his ontology of the book in *LBS*, *SB*, and *SEL* varied in significant ways across these three works, as he sought to accommodate it to three different subjects: the selection of books, bibliography and the description of books as physical objects, and the creation of literature designed for the purpose of social uplift. Nevertheless, in all three cases, his model of the book played, in essence, the same role—namely, to serve as a conceptual framework around which Ranganathan could organize his exposition of the subjects he was discussing. Ranganathan's use of the model, however, was not restricted to this rhetorical function, for, elsewhere in his writings, he deployed the ontology to provide theoretical justification for substantive arguments about classification. In the second edition of the *PLC*, Ranganathan, who, as is well known, had a strong mathematical background¹¹⁸, derived the triadic form of his model from the dyadic version through what he called the "Equation of Book": beginning with the bipartite formula "Book (or document) = Work + Body", he expanded it into the tripartite form "Book (or document) = Thought + Subtle Body + Gross Body" and then, substituting terms on the righthand side of the equation, he derived a final version: "Book (or document) = Thought + Expression + Physique"¹¹⁹. On the basis of this equation, Ranganathan set forth the thesis that "book classification" should include three elements: a "knowledge classification" to reflect the thought-content of books; mechanisms, such as a "Form Facet", for indicating the expressive "form and medium" of books; and a means of distinguishing between different physical copies of the same book¹²⁰. More concretely yet, Ranganathan argued that these three elements of the book should be expressed in the notational plane of a classification by three distinct parts of the call number: the *class number*, which represents the thought-content, or soul, of the book; the *book number*, which indicates the language or form of exposition—that is to say, the subtle body—of the book and the *collection number*, which typically indicates the physical format, or gross body, of a document^{121,122}. *Mutatis mutandis*, all three of these elements were, in fact, incorporated into the ideal structure of the call number in the Colon

Classification, albeit without any reference to the ontological model with which Ranganathan had justified them in the *PLC*¹²³. Here, then, we can find traces, even if only indirect ones, of Ranganathan's ontology of the book in what is perhaps his best-known intellectual creation.

Conclusion: Ranganathan's Ontology of the Book and the Principle of *Ekavākyatā*

In the foregoing pages, we have traced Ranganathan's ontology of the book across several different contexts in which it was embedded. We have considered its broader intellectual context, examining how Ranganathan derived his model of the book as a composite of soul, or thought-content; subtle body, or mode of semiotic representation; and gross body, or physical form, from Hindu metaphysical doctrines about the constitution of the *jīva*, or empirical self of living things, and how he adapted the latter in various ways to fit the library-science context in which he applied the model. We have seen that Ranganathan developed two different, yet compatible, versions of his ontology of the book, a triadic one in which soul, subtle body, and gross body all feature as metaphysical parts of a book, and a dyadic one in which the concepts of soul and subtle body are merged into the single notion of expressed thought, or work, which then stand in contrast to the gross body, or physical book. We have also explored the various contexts within which he deployed the ontology in his writings. We have observed how Ranganathan utilized it to help organize his exposition of various subjects relating to the book, including the selection of library books, the physical constitution and description of books, and the creation and production of literature promoting literature for self-cultivation of the masses. We have also had occasion to see that Ranganathan invoked the tripartite version of his model to provide theoretical support for his ideas about the design of book classifications and about the components of an ideal call number in a library classification. In all of this, Ranganathan was taking up traditional metaphysical concepts, transferring them to a new object, and transforming them so as to formulate a model of the book that he, in turn, could use to inform his discussions of the book and different processes relating to it—selection, description, production, and classification—in various contexts. Here we see a form of creativity that pours old conceptual wine into new disciplinary skins and so

produces an intellectual framework that illuminates a subject of discourse—in *casu*, the book—in a novel way.

Ranganathan's use of the ontology of the book can also be viewed as reflecting a more general tendency of his thought that underlay his individual form of creativity—specifically, as an application of the principle of *ekavākyatā*. In certain schools of Hindu hermeneutic thought, the concept of *ekavākyatā*—literally, “one-sentence-ness”, “sentence unity”¹²⁴, or, more loosely, “syntactic unity”¹²⁵—is used as a means of explaining the syntactic and, ultimately, semantic cohesion of texts. Despite the fact that a sentence is made up of different categories of words and a text is made up of different sentences, it is possible to discern an underlying unity of thought that binds these diverse elements together; it is this unity that constitutes *ekavākyatā*. Ranganathan was well aware of the exegetical roots of this principle, for as he observed in *LBS*¹²⁶,

“The Vedas form, in a sense, a single “sentence” embodying a unit of thought. So does every chapter of it forms [sic] a unit of thought. Of course every sentence in it is a single “sentence” embodying a unit of thought”.

The implications of *ekavākyatā* can go beyond the realm of language in its relation to thought and it can be interpreted in a more profound sense as relating to the metaphysical structure of the universe at large; as one scholar of Hindu thought has put it¹²⁷:

“On this principle [sci., *ekavākyatā*], the disjointed elements of the universe could be coordinated together, a concatenated structure of the cosmos could be conjured up and thus an idea of the totality of the universe could be gained. In fine, all plurality could be sunk into the Absolute”.

For Ranganathan, *ekavākyatā* represented “seeing the unity hidden behind diversity,” and, significantly, he viewed it as a principle that guided the development of his own thought¹²⁸. Among other things, he considered the corpus of his writings to be a manifestation of *ekavākyatā*: in his view, all of his many books were but elaborations, developments, and refinements, in different areas of library science, of ideas originally expressed in his great manifesto *The Five Laws of Library Science*¹²⁹. Ranganathan's belief that his corpus of works constitute a unity was not merely a matter of self-perception, for, as commentators have noted, his writings are marked by a holism that manifests itself in the form of numerous

intertextual connections between the different works of his corpus, which are best interpreted as an attempt to express a unitary system of thought lying beneath the variegated surface of diverse texts¹³⁰.

Insofar as *ekavākyatā* represents a drive towards the unification of thought, it is not difficult to see how Ranganathan's ontology of the book can be viewed as one particular manifestation of this drive. For one thing, the use of a single model of the book across different subject areas made it a point of contact between them and so Ranganathan was able to bind together such disparate fields as book selection for libraries, physical bibliography, the production of literature, and classification. Moreover, in creating two different, but fully compatible, models of the book—one triadic and one dyadic—he brought together two structurally diverse visions of the metaphysics of a book and made them into mutually reinforcing versions of one another. Finally, elements of Ranganathan's model of the book—for example the merger of the soul, or thought-content, and subtle body, or semiotic mode of expression, of a book into the single concept of “expressed thought” in the dyadic version—became part of the fabric of other of his writings in which he did not explicitly set forth the model, thus contributing to the intertextual holism of his *oeuvre*. If one accepts Ranganathan's view that *ekavākyatā* was a regulative principle of his intellectual creativity, there can be little doubt that his ontology of the book provides an especially revealing example of how he carried out this principle in practice.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Carlo Bianchini for his thoughtful and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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