

Editorial Introduction

Ranganathan and his Legacy: Past, Present, Future.

A volume to commemorate the centenary of Ranganathan's entry into the library profession

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The beginning of the year 2024 marks an important anniversary in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS). For it was on January 4, 1924 that S.R. Ranganathan, then serving as an assistant professor of mathematics at the Presidency College in Madras, was appointed university librarian of the University of Madras and so embarked upon a career in librarianship¹⁻³. To be sure, Ranganathan's first few months in this new position were by no means easy. As he later recalled, "[i]n the first few weeks, there was hardly anything to do. I felt bored; and I very much wished to go back to the college. ... The number of readers visiting the library seldom exceeded a dozen in a day"¹. In fact, such was the sense of isolation and ennui that he felt in the library offices that, only eight days into his tenure, he paid a special visit to the president of Presidency College to request that he be allowed to resume his work as a teacher of mathematics there on the grounds that he couldn't bear "that solitary imprisonment day after day"⁴⁻⁶. Despite these initial difficulties in adapting to his new role, Ranganathan persevered, albeit without enthusiasm, and soon began learning the duties of his position: by his second week as a librarian, he had begun to learn how to catalog and by the end of his first month, had undertaken the task of cataloguing the thousands of uncatalogued volumes in the University of Madras Library⁷. A fundamental fillip to his professional development came in the nine months from September 1924 to July 1925, which he spent in England, where he had the opportunity both to attend library school at University College London and to visit almost 120 libraries throughout Great Britain^{8,9}. It was during this stay abroad that Ranganathan came to realise that the design of efficient and effective library services requires a strong intellectual foundation¹⁰ and that he began to formulate some of his innovative ideas about how to improve techniques in such areas of librarianship as classification¹¹⁻¹². No less important, Ranganathan's experiences during his English sojourn fully convinced him that librarianship could both be intellectually satisfying and make a contribution to the greater social good; this realisation cemented his resolve to devote his life to this field¹³. Upon his return to India in 1925, he reassumed his duties at the Madras University Library with renewed vigour and purpose and, over the next several years thoroughly reconceptualised the function of that library and library service in general¹⁴, formulating, *inter multa alia*, the Five Laws of Library Science and the initial version of the Colon Classification.

Despite its unpromising beginnings, then, Ranganathan's appointment to the post of university librarian at the University of Madras inaugurated a fruitful career that would have a lasting influence on LIS not only in

India but throughout the world. It thus seems appropriate to mark the centenary of this occasion by considering *de novo* Ranganathan and his legacy. This is what the current special commemorative issue of ALIS sets out to do. Assembled in its pages are eleven invited studies by LIS scholars, both from India and from abroad, that discuss various facets of Ranganathan's thought and its enduring effect upon LIS theory and practice. These papers can be divided into three thematic tranches. The first of these deals with Ranganathan the man and his thought, the second examines his continuing influence in LIS, and the third considers Ranganathan and his legacy in light of the latest advances in the practice of information system design. These three thematic clusters can be roughly mapped to the three dimensions of time—the past, the present, and the future. In this sense, they collectively convey the message that Ranganathan was an LIS thinker whose intellectual contributions—a product of a specific time and place—have much to teach us not only today but well into tomorrow as well.

The first tranche of papers considers Ranganathan's philosophy (broadly construed), his style of thought, and the contexts that moulded them. It opens with a paper by M.P. Satija and Dinesh K. Gupta entitled "S R Ranganathan: Making of the Man and his Method". In this programmatic essay, Satija and Gupta offer a panoramic overview of the various factors—personal, cultural, and intellectual—that shaped Ranganathan's thought. They pass in review the various persons who were formative influences on Ranganathan—from his father through his teachers to other library theorists—as well as the various cultural streams of tradition—Indian and Western—from which he drew inspiration for his thought, and discuss how he sought to reconcile this polymorphous "heritage": "into a single intellectual synthesis". Similarly wide-ranging is the following essay by Vanda Broughton, which bears the title "Ranganathan's Religion and Its Influence on His Library Science". Broughton presents a broad yet detailed survey of the evidence for Ranganathan's religious life, his views about religion, and the effects of these views on his treatment of religion and allied topics in the Colon Classification. The picture that emerges from her research is complex. Raised as a Hindu Brahmin, Ranganathan followed the practices of his religion and found inspiration in the rich philosophical and literary traditions that had grown up around it, even if his practice grew more unconventional and, apparently, less heartfelt as he grew older. Arguably more important to him than religion as such was the concept of mysticism, which he associated with the concept of intuition—that is to say, the immediate knowledge of objects in the world gained without the use of sense experience. Although Ranganathan did not consider himself to be a mystic, his interest in mysticism led him to dabble in occultism at certain points in his life and to accord mysticism as a central place in the disciplinary structure of main classes in the Colon classification. Broughton convincingly argues that, despite his flirtations with mysticism, Ranganathan took a rather rationalist view of religion as a discipline that allowed him to reconcile his own religious practice with the scientific outlook of his Library Science work.

The next two papers are more specific case studies that examine specific aspects of the influence of traditional Hindu culture on Ranganathan's thought and style. As the title of their essay, "Lights from the *Ramayana* in Ranganathan's Philosophy", indicates, Dinesh K. Gupta and M.P. Satija explore the influence of the great Indian epic poem upon Ranganathan's worldview and his view of librarianship. Exposed to the *Ramayana* by his father from his earliest childhood, Ranganathan early developed a habit of reading an extended passage from the poem daily—a practice that he continued for much of his life—and was not shy in reading from, and commenting on, it in the presence of his students before professional meetings, nor from speaking about it to Western colleagues. Gupta and Satija show that, for Ranganathan, as for many Hindu people, the adventures of Rama served as a lodestar of values and a holistic guide to the conduct of life. They also demonstrate that the *Ramayana* exerted a powerful influence on Ranganathan's understanding of social ethics in general and the ethics of librarianship in particular, offering a conspectus of places in his writings where he drew upon episodes from the poem to illustrate and exemplify what he considered to be the proper professional values of librarians. Thomas M. Dousa considers a different strand of traditional

cultural influence in a paper entitled “Soul, Subtle Body, Gross Body: S.R. Ranganathan’s Ontology of the Book in (Its) Context(s)”. In this study, Dousa examines how Ranganathan drew upon, and adapted, a common Hindu philosophical conceptualization of the metaphysical structure of the “empirical self” (*jīva*) that forms the basis of every living being to elaborate a distinctive conceptual model of the book. Just as every living being consists of an essential real self, or “soul” (*ātma*), a “subtle body” (*sūkṣma-śarīra*) constituting vital, mental and intellectual capacities, and a “gross body” (*sthūla-śarīra*) that constitutes its physical form, so, according to Ranganathan, does every book, or document, consist of a “soul” (i.e., its thought content), a “subtle body” (its semiotic and stylistic mode of expressing the thought content), and a “gross body” (its physical form). Dousa discusses Ranganathan’s use of this analogy in his writings and shows that, although Ranganathan deployed it primarily to structure the discussions of the various topics in Library Science to which he applied it—namely, book selection, the taxonomy of bibliography, and the conditions of literary production—, he also used it to justify theoretically the structure of call numbers in library classification. In this case, at least, Ranganathan creatively transmuted a metaphysical tenet of Hindu philosophy into a theoretical grounding for a Library Science practice.

Whereas the first four papers in the first tranche of studies focus primarily on factors influencing Ranganathan’s thought, the fifth and final paper in this cluster considers the originality and singularity of his ideas vis-à-vis those of his contemporaries and predecessors. In their essay entitled “Ranganathan’s Documentation in Opposition to European Documentation: A Position Based on Library Science”, Rodrigo de Sales and Igor Soares Amorim compare Ranganathan’s vision of Documentation with those of Western European proponents of this field of endeavour, such as Paul Otlet, Samuel C. Bradford, and Susanne Briet. Sales and Amorim argue that, although Ranganathan agreed with the Western theorists of Documentation on a number of issues, such as the need for information workers to deal with what Ranganathan called “microdocuments” (i.e., information resources less extensive in scope than books, such as research articles and grey literature) and the kinds of intensive analyses required to make such microdocuments fully accessible to researchers, he differed fundamentally from them in his view of the proper social context for documentation activities. Whereas Otlet and his successors considered Documentation to be an autonomous field of activity to be carried out by a distinct class of professional worker—the documentalist—, Ranganathan firmly believed that documentation work was to be carried out by librarians within the framework of librarianship. Sales and Amorim strikingly frame Ranganathan’s steadfast refusal to accord Documentation the status of an independent discipline as a reflection of his enduring commitment to Library Science.

The second tranche of essays in this issue contains four papers that explore, in various ways, Ranganathan’s enduring influence on LIS. Two of the essays in this section have to do with the reception of Ranganathan’s thought. First, in his article “Ranganathan’s Legacy in Italy (2009-2023)”, Carlo Bianchini charts the reception of Ranganathan’s writings and ideas in Italy over the last decade and a half. Bianchini, who has himself been a prime mover in this reception, indicates that, prior to the twenty-first century, Ranganathan’s writings had virtually no impact on LIS in Italy. This situation changed notably with the translation of two of Ranganathan’s key works into Italian, most notably *Reference Service as Il servizio di reference* in 2009 and *The Five Laws of Library Science as Le cinque leggi della biblioteconomia* in 2010. These translations have served as catalysts for a series of events, celebrations, conferences, and tributes dedicated to the life and thought of the great Indian librarian and have also helped to stimulate the production of a growing secondary literature both in Italian and in English by Italian scholars on Ranganathanian themes, of which Bianchini presents a useful bibliographical survey. The vigour of the Italian reception of Ranganathan continues unabated for the present, for, as Bianchini points out, in 2023, the

translation of a third of his books, *The Organization of Libraries* has been published in open access under the title *L'organizzazione delle biblioteche*¹⁶, albeit only in electronic form because of copyright restrictions imposed by the copyright holder, SRELS. It is to be hoped that such restrictions may be loosened in the future so as to promote a yet more abundant reception of Ranganathan's writings and thought in Italy.

Whereas Bianchini describes, in the form of a historical narrative, the reception of Ranganathan's writings and thought in a particular geographical and cultural region, Daniel Martínez-Ávila, Patrícia de Almeida, Bianca Savegnago de Mira, and Maria Cláudia Cabrini Grácio focus on tracking the reception of a single work from Ranganathan's extensive body of writings. As the title of their contribution, "A Domain Analysis of the Influence of *The Five Laws of Library Science*", indicates, the object of their investigation is none other than the work that Ranganathan himself considered to be his *opus magnum*, *The Five Laws of Library Science*. Originally published in 1931, this programmatic work not only holds a significant place in Ranganathan's *oeuvre*, as it laid the foundations for his subsequent influential texts but is also widely acknowledged as a seminal text within the literature of LIS. Basing themselves on data drawn from the Web of Science Core collection, Martínez-Ávila and his co-authors undertake a searching bibliometric analysis of 306 texts citing *The Five Laws* that considers such features of the citing documents as their context and venue of publication, their language, their authors, and their subject keywords. The results of their investigation show, *inter multa alia*, that the citation of *The Five Laws* appears to be accelerating in the 21st century and that it is being cited not only in works that deal with traditional LIS topics, such as classification and information retrieval, but also in those that treat subjects relating to newer information technologies such as digital libraries. Martínez-Ávila and his co-authors thus conclude that *The Five Laws of Library Science* is indeed a classic of LIS literature that, 90 years after its original publication, continues to have relevance for the field and is likely to do so into the foreseeable future.

The final two essays in the second tranche of papers turn from questions of reception to a consideration of the conceptual legacy of Ranganathan. Each of the two studies addresses the ways in which one of Ranganathan's best known innovations—the facet-analytic approach to classification—continues to be developed within the field of knowledge organisation today. In his theoretically-inflected paper entitled "Facet, Facet Analysis and Facet-Analytic Theory", K.S. Raghavan questions whether the facet-analytic approach is a theory or a methodology, proposing to resolve this question through a critical examination of the terminology in use. Such terminological clarification, he observes, is highly needed because, although the notions of Facet and Facet Analysis have existed for nearly a century, they have been interpreted in various ways by different thinkers. Raghavan reviews the various definitions of Facet, Facet Analysis, and Facet Analytic Theory found in the writings of Ranganathan, his associates, and members of the British Classification Research Group (CRG), most of whom were strongly influenced by Ranganathan but developed his ideas in different directions. On the basis of his conceptual analysis of these terms, Raghavan comes to the conclusion that a Facet is best understood as a component, or aspect, of a subject and that Facet Analysis constitutes the general methodology for identifying the different Facets of a subject.

In the subsequent paper, entitled "Ranganathan's Principles and a Fully "Freely Faceted" Classification", Claudio Gnoli demonstrates that one of Ranganathan's most cherished goals—the design of a "freely faceted classification"—can best be realised in practice by moving from a discipline-based classification, such as Ranganathan's Colon Classification, to a phenomenon-based classification, of which the most advanced—and most fully functional—example created to date is Gnoli's own Integrative Levels Classification (ILC). Gnoli examines such features of Ranganathan's method of constructing faceted classification as the elaboration of fundamental categories, the stipulation of phase relations between concepts, and the expressiveness of notation, and illustrates with concrete examples how, in virtue of its phenomenon-based classificatory frameworks, the ILC has been able to utilise these features to maximal effect, thus creating a classification that can claim to be

fully freely faceted. Gnoli's paper thus shows that Ranganathan's pioneering insights into the structural features of faceted classification can be further elaborated, extended, and refined in a way that holds great promise for the use of such classifications in a digital environment.

We come now to the third and final tranche of papers in this issue, which the relevance of Ranganathan and his legacy for ontology-based information systems on the Web. In the first of the two papers in this section, entitled "From Knowledge Organization to Knowledge Representation and Back", Fausto Giunchiglia, Mayukh Bagchi, and Subhashis Das draw a distinction between Knowledge Organisation (KO) and Knowledge Representation (KR) methodologies, the former being characteristic of information systems developed within LIS and the latter, of information systems developed within field of artificial intelligence (AI). Giunchiglia and his co-authors argue that it is possible to map the various elements of Ranganathan's facet-analytical KO methodology to the KR methodology and provide such a mapping. This leads them to propose an integrated KR-enriched KO methodology that combines the standard components of KO methodology with advanced technologies from the KR approach, and so leverages Ranganathan's facet-analytical principles within the robust technological framework of AI. In the second paper of this section, which bears the title "Rediscovering Ranganathan: A Prismatic View of His Life through the Knowledge Graph Spectrum", Biswanath Dutta and Shakeeb Arzoo demonstrate how modern technologies can enhance the knowledge representation of Ranganathan's life within the Semantic Web environment. To this end, they present a knowledge graph (KG) relating to S. R. Ranganathan. This state-of-the-art KG offers a fully rounded view of Ranganathan's life and achievements, utilising a facet-based methodology for the identification of vital biographical aspects and the development of an ontological model, the Biographical Ontology or Ontobio.¹⁷ Dutta and Arzoo provide a detailed account of how they developed this pioneering Ranganathan Knowledge Graph (RKG), which serves as a comprehensive and openly accessible resource for anyone interested in exploring, using, reusing, and contributing data to further the understanding of Ranganathan's life and legacy.

Such, then, are the contents of this special issue commemorating the hundredth anniversary of S.R. Ranganathan's entry into the library profession. The variety of subjects aptly reflects the complexity and many-sidedness of Ranganathan and his thought, and so forms a fitting tribute to the greatest Renaissance man of LIS. We believe that these studies bear eloquent witness to the continuing interest that Ranganathan and his legacy hold for today, and hope that they will inspire readers to engage further with his writings and his thought.

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