

## Revisiting contributions of Ranganathan in collection development

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The paper discusses the complexities involved in selection of reading and research material in libraries. Traces the evolution of principles of book selection from the time of Dewey, Drury, Haines and; Carter and Bonk. The main emphasis is on the contribution of Ranganathan in evolving theory of book selection deduced from his *Five Laws of Library Science*. The present IT environment and automation in libraries are in the forefront, not only to comply with the messages of collection development but to the discipline of librarianship as a whole. His principles are as applicable today as were during 1950s and 1960s.

**Keywords:** Book selection; Collection development; S R Ranganathan

### Introduction

The foundations of the libraries are laid down by their rich and balanced collection. This foundation is continuously strengthened by adding new good quality need-based resources. If substandard materials are used in building construction, the whole structure becomes dysfunctional and is likely to collapse. Similarly, in case of academic libraries, it is mainly the library staff, faculty members including library authorities who play the crucial role in selection of resources. Though, librarians are involved in the acquisition of library materials, their role in selection of library materials in most of the libraries is secondary as the selection is often exclusively done by the faculty members. An ideal situation is when faculty and the library staff work together to finalize the selection process. Ranganathan has been often emphasizing in his works that users and the library staff should have close proximity. The process of book selection started becoming more and more complex since 1980s when reading material started appearing in various formats. Today in the present digital era, selection of right resources is a challenging job that requires competence and the experience to select right resources. It is observed that many libraries have good number of books which are rarely consulted which indicates that something is amiss in the selection process. There has been conflict between demand of books versus value of the books. At times, it becomes difficult to decide whether demand should dominate or the value of the book. The cost of the books and databases has been continuously increasing and libraries

have to take a decision in view of the declining trend of budget allocation in most of the libraries. The great proponent of attributing value to books among old writers was Carnovasky<sup>1</sup> who believed that public libraries should provide material which is true. Some of the users also demand popular readings which may not be that valuable. For the right choice of the books, censorship also appeared on the scene. The governing factor in selection of these resources is the demand and needs of the users.

### New developments

Book selection used to be a part of acquisition till the beginning of 1970s and new terminology 'collection development' was coined in 1977 in ALA annual conference held at Detroit. It was recognized as new sub-discipline under librarianship. Its scope became much wider, covering selection, acquisition, collection evaluation, storage, weeding, preservation, replacement and management.

Consequent upon some terminological changes the old term 'Book Selection' changed into new terminology like 'Collection Management', 'Collection Building', 'Library Collection' and 'Library Acquisition'. Presently, *Collection Development*, *Collection Management* and *Collection Development and Management* terms are replacing the old term 'Book Selection.'

During late 1980s, new non-book material started coming up in the form of audios and videos, computer files followed by CD-ROMs. Many international

bibliographical databases in various disciplines started appearing in CD-ROMs enabled easier and faster searching facilities with manifold storing capacities. Libraries had to select some of these databases which were non-traditional and new to the professionals. No sooner did the professionals get familiar with the selection process of these electronic bibliographical databases, e-journals appeared on the scene. This increased the scope of selection combining e-resources and printed material. There was mixed opinion about the choices and preferences of users for print and e-journals. The pricing models and policies of this new media were different from earlier print materials with which libraries were familiar and accustomed to for more than a century. Selection and acquisition of the resources in a new formats posed new challenges to the library staff.

#### **Evolution of theory of book selection (collection development)**

During 1960s and 1970s the books by Drury<sup>2</sup>, Haines<sup>3</sup> and Ranganathan<sup>4</sup> were the text books on book selection. The principles contained in these books still have the relevance and have passed the test of the time, though these principles were formulated for print resources. According to Drury 'A qualified selector, acquainted with demand from his community and knowing the book and the money resource of his library, chooses the varieties of books he believes will be used applying his expert knowledge.'<sup>5</sup> He had identified the pre-requisites and goal of book selection as under<sup>5</sup>:

- To analyze the nature of a community
- To recognize the various uses to which books of varied types are to be put
- Consider the character and policy of a library in adding books
- To cultivate the power of judging the selection of books for purchase with their value and suitability to readers in mind
- To become familiar with the sources of information
- To renew acquaintances with books and writers from the library angle
- To develop the ability to review, criticize and annotate books for library purposes
- To decide where in the library organization book selection fits
- To learn how to perform the necessary fundamental tasks of book selection; and
- To scrutinize the mental and personal fitness of the selector.

The best books to the largest number at the least cost' and 'right book to the right reader at the right time' given by Dewey<sup>6</sup> and Drury<sup>2</sup> respectively reflect strong founding principles of selection.

#### **Ranganathan and theory of book selection**

In all the branches of librarianship, Ranganathan's contribution has been most significant. However, he is better known for his works like; Five Laws of Library Science, colon classification, cataloguing, chain procedure, library administration, etc. Nevertheless, his contribution in the field of book selection is also significant. One of the his interactions with the foreign students at Chaucer House, London revealed that the students were quite familiar with his works on classification, cataloguing, reference services, organization, administration and physical bibliography, which they had enjoyed reading. But they were unaware of his works on book selection. Realizing the importance of book selection, one of them asked Ranganathan, 'why have you not written similar book on book selection as you have written on other branches of librarianship?' They were obviously not aware about his book on book selection. This showed that his work on book selection was not well known, may be because the subject itself was not that important. The first edition of his book entitled '*Library book selection*' was published in the year 1951, followed by its second edition published in 1964. It is a fact that right from the beginning, selection of reading material did not get due attention, though it lays the foundation of the library. That is why some of the books (resources) acquired in the libraries don't find users to read them.

Before Ranganathan, there were some good textbooks on the subject by well-known writers on book selection which had given empirical principles of book selection<sup>7</sup>. Ranganathan mainly derived the principles of book selection from the Five Laws of Library Science based upon—*Universe of Readers, Universe of Documents and Finance*. These principles constitute the corpus of the theory of book selection. He identified the following responsibilities of the librarian in the process of book selection:

- i) Keeps informing himself, from week to week of the books actually published and even merely announced during the week
- ii) Makes a preliminary selection from his sources
- iii) Sorts them out by subject fields, standards, and languages; and

- iv) Places them before the appropriate panel members and takes their opinion on each book in the form of 'selected' or 'rejected', or 'deferred'.<sup>4</sup>

In making preliminary selection, the librarian needs to give full weight to the:

- i) Actual needs of the readers; and
- ii) Policy laid down by the book selection committee.

In practice neither of the above are strictly followed. There have been large number of studies on information needs of users, but when it comes to the selection of resources, the findings of these studies had hardly been considered and implemented. So far as book selection policies are concerned, there will be very few libraries which have written book selection policy. The procedure being followed is unwritten and ad-hoc. Only the constitution and functions of the Library Committee is a part of ordinance or regulations in most of the Indian universities. When the real process of selection begins, all principles and guidelines go into background and actual practices are dominated by many other factors and subjective approaches to make selections by different individuals involved in the process. If some written guidelines in the form of collection development policies are there in every library, it may improve upon the process of selection. The process of selection of right resources has become more complex in view of multiple media of information available in the present era in which hybrid approach to print and e-resources has to be provided.

### **Relevance of five laws of library science in collection development**

The Five Laws of Library Science have close relationship with collection development even in the present digital scenario. Usability of all resources likely to be selected is to be anticipated based upon user survey or feedback from the users. A survey of one of the university libraries was conducted about the usability of resources purchased during the last three years. The results were quite discouraging showing that use of those books were too low. Even those who had made recommendations to purchase these books had not used them. This reveals the casual way of selection of resources. Similar is the discouraging scenario of usage of e-resources being subscribed/purchased by the libraries.

Ranganathan in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of his book entitled 'Book Selection' has given as many as 181 guiding

principles of book selection which are worth considering even in the modern digital era. These messages have been distributed among different types of libraries<sup>7</sup>. He believed that different libraries have different requirements, therefore, they have to follow different principles.

S R Ranganathan has given an elaborate account of book selection which covers the details of book as a physical entity, subject matter, language, style of writing, etc. His writings were outcome of his personal experiences working in libraries. All these principles of document selection are deducible from his Five Laws taking into account all aspects of the documents like:

*Gross body*: Physical structure

*Subtle body*: Language, style of writing, etc.

*Soul*: Contents (subject-matter)

#### *Gross body*

When Ranganathan wrote the book on library book selection, there were only printed material available for selection in the form of the books and journals. He also took into account the physical structure of the book; i.e. quality of paper, binding and printing, etc. When non-book material appeared, the same principles were applicable to them also. However, today there are various virtual resources which have no physical structure as printed documents. Nevertheless, digital information is available in file formats such as PDF, HTML etc. There are also different software to store and retrieve information. In case of printed documents, physical features like binding, typing, layout of text, etc. should be attractive and according to the national or international standards so that usability of such resources after procurement is not affected adversely.

#### *Subtle body*

Books and documents are published in different languages. Library should acquire more material in the languages of the library or the language of community. It does not mean that resources published in other languages should not be acquired. But all languages should be given proper representation. It is implied that distribution of resources and their priority should be according to the popularity and use of the languages. Subtle body also includes style, standard, illustration and index of the book in addition to the language. All these attributes promote the use of books complying the message of first law of library science.

### Soul of documents

The soul of the documents is the subject content of documents or the product; be it printed or digital. Principle which may be deduced is to select that subject matter(s) which would be used. This would vary from library to library as per the requirement of the clientele or the community being served. This is what Ranganathan had emphasized.

### Book selection (collection development) and five laws

#### *First Law: Books Are For Use*

When Five Laws of Library Science were evolved, reading material were limited to only books and journals. Therefore, the term book was used. It is implied that in the present context *every bit of information and knowledge irrespective of their embodiment or containers are for use anywhere anytime*. This law emphasizes that no such documents; digital or non-digital should be acquired which are not likely to be used by the potential users of the library. This also conveys that whatever information sources are acquired or are available must be used. This also implies that librarians have to play crucial role to popularize the resources and promote their use. Promotion of usage is only possible if the collection is useful. The resources are to be advertised particularly virtual resources which don't have visibility as printed resources. This principle also satisfies the call of the present knowledge society to make knowledge freely available and accessible. To satisfy the first law in respect of selection, all the three components of the book discussed above—gross and subtle body and the soul have to be taken into consideration to enhance usability. Ranganathan has given full detail of selection in different disciplines like—humanities, arts and craft, social science, pure science and biological sciences. In one of the messages, he states that *'in a generalist library—be it a public library or children's library—book selection should include a good deal of popular books and periodicals on the latest thought in the different subjects in the natural sciences—written with flair and with plenty of illustrations but free from the jargon or technical details and yet without loss of accuracy.'*<sup>4</sup>

#### *Second Law: Books for All and Every Reader His Book*

Every reader has a right to read and get his reading and research material in the library which may not be possible for the library to acquire. In such circumstances, the volume of the demand is normally taken into account. Dewey's motto is applicable in such circumstances where libraries have budget constraint—Best books to the largest number at the

least cost. In the present context when possession and ownership of resources are not so important, library should be in a position to provide access to such material from external resources. The resources acquired in the library should serve the majority of the users. At the same time, specific needs of limited number of users also cannot be ignored. *Every user his resource, which means that everyone should get his resource*. Individual as well as collective demands both are important. In case of financial constrain, demand theory which is based upon *value, volume and variety* may resolve the problem.<sup>8</sup>

Present age is an age of resource sharing and network. As requirement of all users cannot be met, so libraries should depend on one another to borrow and lend material. Instead of buying infrequently used resources, sharing of resources among libraries is more cost effective and useful. Ranganathan suggested that wants of the users whether it is present or past, individual or collective have to be taken into consideration for selection of resources. All categories of users should get their material in all the subjects in all the languages of the library. The distribution of subjects should be rational and justifiable. His message is that high character and integrity on the part of the library professional should be brought to bear on the discharge of its duties in regard to book selection along with an all-round attempt to assess the potential wants of the users—free from any sneaking tendency to please the whims and fancies of the individual members of the library authorities.

#### *Third Law: Every Book Its Reader*

Second law gives emphasis on reader whereas third law's approach is on the book. Second law is based upon users' actual demand. But third law emphasizes on selection of only those products that have probability of use in present and future both. Librarians are very hesitantly acquiring e-book packages because of the uncertainty of their justified use.

Most of the messages of second law are also applicable in third law. Selectors should anticipate the probability of resources to be used which depends upon the vision of the library staff to anticipate such requirements well in advance. Book selection in any library should be based on the probability of use by the readers, and should never be vitiated by considerations of patronage.<sup>4</sup> This law demands that probability of demand should be ascertained by way of knowing reading interests of the community, course curriculum, intellectual level of users,

languages and subject scatter. Present as well as future demands should be taken into consideration. Overall requirement of this law is to anticipate mainly the requirement and probability of resources likely to be used by the potential users.

**Fourth Law: Save the Time of the User**

The time lag between the release of the book by the publisher and availability of the same to the reader in a library should be reduced to the minimum. This is a challenging job where professionals engaged in collection development shall have to keep abreast with the new titles and take steps to procure them as soon as possible. Advance announcement by the publishers of their forthcoming titles may also reduce the time. This law also demands that there should be definite rhythm in selection process. Bulk order should be avoided particularly during the closing of financial year. Libraries normally place order 2-3 times in year. However, it should be weekly or monthly process so that information sources are acquired as and when required. It is a common experience that acquisition of resources are often delayed due to wrong policy of approval by the committees. Librarians don't enjoy the autonomy of placing order without the approval of the committee(s) or any other competent authorities. The library committee does not meet frequently as required. In the modern context, selection of resources and placing order using electronic media are implied which can reduce the time in acquisition and processing of resources. Automation is good compliant to forth law which reduces a lot of time in procurement and processing of the material to make them serviceable.

**Fifth Law: Library is a Growing Organism**

Library grows in collection, staff, users and many other things like infrastructure, etc., which require more and more space which most of the libraries are not able to provide. Implication of this law is that traditional libraries should change into hybrid or electronic libraries where some of the collection would be in a digital form. Ranganathan had suggested that book selection has to resort to *micro reprography* form which is now digital form. As such, it prescribes that digital resources should also be selected and acquired to solve the space problem. Since collection development also includes maintenance, therefore, this law demands that some of the existing resources should be digitized or converted into reduced forms to save the space. The emphasis of Fifth Law is more for maintenance and management rather than selection. Every library should have

weeding out policy to save the space. All libraries should also weed out periodically unwanted and infrequently used books and periodicals.

**Conclusion**

Collection development process is fundamentally same for both physical and digital material, hence all principles of book selection given by Ranganathan are equally applicable to all types of reading and research material. Reviewing the book of Ranganathan on book selection, Langridge had rightly commented that the vast majority of principles are as valid for the most highly developed western countries as they are for India. It can be safely added that these principles are as valid as were during 1950s and 1960s. In the present digital era, e-resources are dominating printed material and users' preferences are also more towards these resources mainly because of convenience in use; anytime anywhere. However, libraries are not able to part with their traditional printed resources. Therefore, libraries have to select all types of resources which requires evaluating ability, up-to-date subject knowledge of the selectors. Ranganathan's principles serves as canons of collection development. All his principles of book selection are applicable to select any type of resource of past, present as well as future. Types of resources cannot change the fundamental principles applicable to the subject and the discipline. Today, IT environment is all pervasive in almost all the libraries. The present and future advances in the field of IT are going to be main tools to satisfy the laws of Library science. Reiterating his thoughts and writings will ever be refreshing and guiding.

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