

CHAPTER - XI

REVISION WORK

We are not going to have perfection tomorrow;
...it is going to take time.

S R Ranganathan¹

'Truth is the daughter of time' says a Latin epigram. Knowledge is intrinsically ever incomplete. Knowledge is dynamically moving, so is ever changing and ever new. Therefore, it is always moving towards its eternally unattainable goal. It was in this spirit Sir Richard Gregory said that "Man...pursues his enquiry into the unknown, and his children's children will continue the search"² Pursuit for knowledge is endless. Ideas like institutions and cultures ceaselessly rejuvenate themselves, or, conversely it is the ideas that transform a culture. By nature theories are ephemeral and continuously changing. As a rule, and by definition, theories change with time. There is nothing absolute or permanent about a theory: a theory is true or false only in the context of time. A theory, like a tool, is to be replaced by a better theory. In established disciplines theories are relatively more stable for a considerable time. It is a "requirement that any new theory must in some manner relate to the previous and established theory concerned with the same subject matter"³ says Ernest Hutten.

Verification of theories always results in their revision and modification - as verification never gives cent percent

satisfactory results. A given body of knowledge is in two ways affected by time. With time, new instruments are invented and some new techniques are developed which help the collection of data more precisely and more deeply. That may help to develop a science further. For example, information science has been possible only with the coming of computers; and medicine would not have made this much progress without electronics. Information technology has opened many new avenues in all areas of intellectual endeavours. Secondly, many new revolutionary theories usually affect thinking and research in other fields. Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest and the evolution of species have implications much more beyond the realm of biology and anthropology. To philosophy, theology, ethics and social sciences; Darwin has given new substance and directions. Similarly, researches say, in biology and physics have provided new clues to researches in social sciences, even in humanities.

Society changes with time. New values come up; outlooks change; priorities change. This social change provides new directions and priorities to researchers in different social and intellectual fields. It may require alteration of the old views to be in consonance with the modern views and new facts. Therefore, social laws have to be adapted in the new and changed context. Ranganathan writes that at any particular moment there is a boundary line which may change after say

fifty years. "A man must be able to adapt himself to the changing conditions of the state of the art in library work".⁴

He elaborates the conviction elsewhere:

The social outlook, the social purpose and the social range of any social institution or activity change from age to age. Therefore, the fundamental laws of any branch of social science may change from the boundary conditions set by the society from time to time on social outlook, social purpose and social range. Even when they do not themselves change, the derived principles in respect of a branch of the social science may have to be varied with the boundary conditions set by the society....⁵

In simple words, the laws are subject to the basic principle of reinterpretation. To clarify further Ranganathan states "The hypothesis and normative principles will lose their validity when the possible facts and experiences indicated by the deduced laws are found to be untrue. Then they are replaced by another set of Hypothesis or Normative Principles".⁶ There is nothing permanent about them. "It is possible", he said, "that the postulates in current use may be replaced by a smaller number of postulates giving equally or even more helpful results". But this happens not by research but by a stroke of sudden intuition. That is no research, he says.⁷ To particularize in context of classification, he writes: "Since the univers of subjects is ever dynamic, any theory capable of guiding principles to design a scheme for its classification should itself be dynamic. The theory in the Prolegomena Ed 3 has an element of such dynamism. A dynamic theory of classification implies of science of classification".⁸

Development is the law of life and nature, and of knowledge as demonstrated by his spiral. As a scientist, Ranganathan's work is characterised by development. Being a prolific writer and a busy administrator it is rather amazing that he revised his books. Revision of books or major works is not usual for a person of his calibre and stature. Although Ranganathan was reaching for some kind of stability in presentation of ideas yet he was quick to adapt to the required demands of the situation, viewed Professor Gopinath in a personal conversation.⁹ He condescended to revise, a job which should have been better left to his schoolmen and disciples. Revision in Ranganathan is on many accounts and of more than one kind. It is obvious, rather trite to say that Ranganathan always developed his thoughts. There is nothing rigid in his faith. He was his own best critic. Palmer recalls how Ranganathan will say objectively: "'The Colon classification has a mistake in the subdivisions here', as though it were the work of another".¹¹

Only on the basis of development in his thoughts Ranganathan's career has been divided into different phases.¹² In Ranganathan, the revision of ideas may be divided into two categories: changing, amending or even discarding the existing rules or canons if they have failed to deliver goods in the past. Revision is also necessary to keep in tune with the changing contexts; to incorporate the newly gained experience,

or to find new interpretations of theories. These revisions may be by Ranganathan himself or by some other individuals or groups. M.A. Gopinath affirms that Ranganathan "remodelled many of his thoughts to changing contexts. He was quick to grasp the modern concepts and incorporated them in his teaching and writings".¹³

For example, the Colon classification was revised from time to time to rectify the existing imperfections in the system or to make it a sharper tool for analysis and organization of knowledge. Most of the revisions were on the basis of feedback from experience, and to incorporate new developments in the growth and structure of knowledge. As another example, Ranganathan himself states: "During the last thirty years the chain indexing method has been continuously reformed to meet the requirements of micro subjects. This process of requirement has opened up an apparently never ending line of research for cataloguers...Many interesting results of research in chain indexing are coming up almost every year in the annual seminars of DRTC Bangalore".¹⁴ As still another example, at random, the rules in the classified catalogue code were revised many times, and these still have to be revised to cover the large variety of documents that have come up since the 5th edition (1964). Krishan Kumar affirms that Ranganathan believed that catalogue code could not be a static document. Its rules have to be revised from time to time keeping step with the

changing context. Thus a code should be modified and revised to adopt changes in context.¹⁵ Girja Kumar and Krishan Kumar ascribe his revision to his wide ranging work. He had to switch his mind from one subject^{to} another. By the time, he returned to an earlier subject he found his earlier work on the subject dated "The outdatedness of his writings is directly related to the time sequence", they write.¹⁶

After Ranganathan left Madras in 1944, and his international phase started, he gained new and wider perspectives based on more experience. He found strong elements of internationalism in library science: He believed that communication could spiritually unite the world.¹⁷ In a romantic outburst he declared that he belongs to the whole world. And thus came a rapid development in his ideas and outlook. Experience and observation of documentation and information activities abroad, and tete-a-tete exchange of views with internationally known experts broadened his outlook and horizon. The developed and evolved views were mostly enshrined in revised editions of his books. Most of his known and widely used books were revised to bring second even third editions. The notable books in revised editions are:

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| The five laws | (1931, 1957) |
| Prolegomena | (1937, 1957, 1967) |
| Library book selection | (1952, 1966) |
| Reference service | (1940, 1961) |
| Library manual | (1951, 1967) |

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Library administration | (1935, 1959) |
| Elements of library classification | (1945, 1959, 1962) |
| Physical bibliography | (1952, 1974) |

(All these books have now been reprinted in 1988/1989). Among his popular books, Education for leisure (1945, 1949, 1954, 1961) underwent four editions. Some of the revised books such as College and university libraries, and Social bibliography bore new titles in revised editions.

The two revisions of the Prolegomena (1937) in 1957 and 1967 make a typical case study. The first edition was precipitated by reading (to catch sleep) two famous books on the "Organization of Knowledge" by H E Bliss. Actually, the first edition was the result of 12 years of work in forging, applying it to 50,000 books, testing and publishing the Colon classification and also teaching the principles of classification for 9 years. The substance of the second edition had been formed slowly and bit by bit. It had been drastically revised and practically recast both in terms of contents and language by a team of British disciples led by D J Foskett. In place of nine chapters grouped into two parts entitled "theory" and "comparative study" respectively, the second edition had 64 chapters grouped into eight parts. The 28 canons of the first edition were expanded to 33 canons, 21 postulates and 11 principles. In the second edition, the C C was mostly compared

with the U D C, B C-1, D D C, L C and S C, besides incorporating all changes upto the 5th edition (1957) of the C C. The third edition (1967) which took 2400 man hours brought in further far reaching changes. It comprises of 22 parts splitted into 187 chapters of varying lengths and denoted by literal notation. It is much more illustrated. Layout and enumerative pattern is easy to follow.¹⁸ Examples have been drawn from the C C-7 (then under preparation) and from the projected but never published book: Classification: retrospective and prospective. Newly added scheme used for comparison is Rider's International classification (1961). Chapters on individual classification systems, history and organization of classification have been extricated. In nutshell, it incapsulates advance and more abstract version of his classification theory. Nevertheless, it does not enshrine his latest thoughts. It took more time in publication and by that time his theory had advanced a bit. This edition now needs another revision, as it is now incompatible with the theory of the C C - 7 (1987).

But more than that, his ideas constantly evolved through many new papers. Many readers genuinely find annoying repetition of ideas and thoughts in his entire body of writing. One factor that can be attributed to this phenomenon in Ranganathan is the evolution of his thoughts. Most of his later papers further developed the ideas already presented in earlier papers. Some revisions were more than this. Girja Kumar found him

constantly experimenting with new ideas, accepting some today and rejecting the same tomorrow."¹⁹ Again in an obituary, evaluating the man and his works Girja Kumar was rather candid:

The profession was critical, because what he accepted today, he rejected the very next day. The change was so fast that it was difficult for most people to keep up in the race. Considerable amount of intellectual dis-satisfaction in the library profession arose as a result of the inability of the traditionalists to catch up with him.²⁰

Same were the feelings of his long time disciple and colleague late R S Parkhi (1901-1968) who found his theories so dynamic and so racing that one may even feel breathless in efforts to keep pace with him. Once Parkhi innocently asked Ranganathan: "why do you not delay the publications of your results until they became stable?".²¹ This was a puerile question which reflected much on the questioner. Ranganathan replied wisely and with humility. His answer was revealing in consonance of the philosophy of Victorian poet Robert Browning (1812-1889), which states that pleasure lies not in arriving at the goal but moving hopefully and continuously towards it. Ranganathan replied Parkhi:

Have you forgotten Law 5 of Library Science? Do you not remember that reaching stability or a static state means heading towards death? We keep growing or we die. So also a subject keeps racing forth or it petrifies...Remember our old traditional saying 'What is achieved is only a step toward further achievement which may even question the validity of the earlier achievement'.²²

It is a divine truth that every institution like human being, is evolutionary and mortal:

All our little systems have their day
They have their day and cease to be.

Thus sang the Victorian poet Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892).

He was only echoing Darwin's theory of natural selection which states that life evolves, species evolve, and there is only the survival of the fittest i.e. species which adapt to the environment. Darwin is equally applicable to the world of ideas. Only those ideas survive which keep themselves adapting to the changing environments. Every idea, every institution petrifies and becomes the stepping stone for the successors.

It was in this spirit that the great Isaac Newton (1642-1727) said, "If I have been able to see farther than others, it is on the shoulders of giants". Always there is evolution of ideas. Always the "old order changeth yielding place to the new".

A J wells commenting the remarkable works of Ranganathan that have contributed so much towards the tools and theories of information retrieval, foresees that "the end product of this re-evaluation may produce a system which looks very different from the work now going on in Bangalore, but without that work and without the single minded devotion of Ranganathan's himself", Wells doubts "whether it would have been possible at all".²³ As another example, the CRG though started with Ranganathan's concepts in classification is now going away

from it as the basis of its work and assumptions. On the suggestions of CRG members, Ranganathan modified many of his theories and concepts even terminology. The first International Study Conference on Classification (Dordrecht 1957) though made Ranganathan's theories as the basis of discussion, the third conference in the series held in Bombay in 1975 seemed too away from his theories.²⁴ To some, it seemed too far from traditional classification even. Summing up the proceedings of the Ranganathan conference (1985) M A Gopinath affirmed that we need not accept the postulates of Ranganathan in toto. They need variations and additional input.²⁵

Science is democratic to the core. Scientific truth is open to all, and everybody has the right to challenge it if s/he feels so. We have already seen the constant evolution in Ranganathan's thoughts. It will be no surprise if tomorrow any of his conviction is totally falsified. Bernard I Palmer (1910-1979) a great admirer of Ranganathan wrote:

He gave us doubts about things that seemed fixed and eternal, such as main classes and rules of division, causing us to look again at the theory we thought we had safely learnt once and for all. He taught us to look beyond the boundary wall of universally applied scheme of classification, and to find instead unifying principles. If, in turn, he finds his own work being scrutinised and partly outmoded, he will recognise that as a continuation of processes of life, and if he finds new work valid he will accept it.²⁶

A Neelamegham and G Bhattacharyya developed POPS I at

DRTC, which has added advantages over the famous chain indexing. It is very much in the spirit of the advancement of knowledge that Derek Austin was conferred the first FID/CR Ranganathan award in 1976 for invention of the PRECIS which has replaced Ranganathan's chain indexing in the British National Bibliography. Another such awardee is J Mills (1982) who learnt from Ranganathan, refined his concepts and successfully applied them in BC-2. Ranganathan might have approvingly noded the choices.

From the foregoing it is clear that Ranganathan, as a true scholar, never hesitated to revise even discard his own work. He periodically revised his books, and some of them were revised more than once. Prior to incorporating new ideas in books, the new thoughts were expressed mostly through journal articles. This also resulted in duplication of thoughts. Always restless to keep pace with the advancing wave front of knowledge and to move and strive toward perfection is an essential characteristic of Ranganathan's methods.

To ensure the future revision of his books, he associated some of his colleagues with the revision work. Revision of books was a planned policy. To ensure continuous revision of his books Ranganathan once talked of constituting a board as heir to all his intellectual property. The people who will serve the board:

will be those who are themselves competent to revise the books and bring them upto date, in order to suit new developments in the universe of knowledge and in light of the results of research in the field concerned...Therefore this Board will establish a panel with the approval of the Endowment. For each book, they will try to pick out from the panel someone who has the ability to do the revision.²⁷

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