

# Ranganathan and Public Library System

— R. Raman Na.

## 0. INTRODUCTION

Library and information services to the people have existed for a long time but public library system is a modern concept. According to Dr. Ranganathan, Public Library System means an integrated nation-wide network of public libraries giving free library and information services to one and all of the citizens—literate or illiterate, rich or poor, rural or urban.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. THE CONCEPT

Earlier public libraries were considered as independent single units under government. Laws and rules related to libraries were also framed accordingly. Ranganathan introduced the concept of public library as a system distinct from unitary libraries.<sup>2</sup> This concept emphasises that public library system at different levels, viz. state, city, district along with lower service units should be so interlinked as to form part of a system. Such public library system can be compared with a large irrigation system. It needs a hand-work with a costly dam and large number of distributories and sub-distributories through which water can reach every bit of land. The traditional independent libraries on the other hand, resemble more; the wells and tanks which have served mankind for ages, but they have limited and dwindling use in modern times.

## 2. MODEL LIBRARY ACT, 1930

In the 1920's an ideal library system as conceived by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan hardly existed. Eventhough United Kingdom had the most efficient and earliest legislation for libraries in the modern world, the library network extending from village library through intermediary levels of district, state and zonal levels to State and National Central Libraries, coordinated by a national agency is not conceived by the U.K. legislation. In 1927 Kenyan Committee had pointed out that library authorities grew rapidly in an uncoordinated fashion and standards of library service varied greatly between various library authorities and areas.<sup>3</sup>

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In 1925 while sailing back home after a tour to England, Ranganathan was thinking about a library legislation for India without the defects seen in U.K. legislation. He worked out on it and by 1930 drafted a Model Library Act. At this time Prof. P. Seshadri of Banaras Hindu University asked him to be the Secretary of the Library Service Session of the First All-Asia Educational Conference which was to be held in Banaras (Varanasi) in 1930. This provided him an opportunity to place the draft Model Act for discussion. The Draft Act presented by Ranganathan and the originality and precision of his plan impressed the participants. A complete session of the conference was devoted to a detailed discussion of the several clauses in the Act and the amendments suggested were recorded.<sup>4</sup> This Act was of compulsory nature in as much as it was obligation on the part of the local bodies to levy library cess and on the part of the government to give grants. It was in this Conference at Banaras that the establishment of a public library system and pooling up the total information resources of the nation on a legal basis for the common good is for the first time contemplated and planted in the minds of a gathering which included eminent educationists and librarians. This Model Act is the seed out of which modern library legislation grew.

### 3. MODEL BILLS AND PLANS FOR STATES

For library legislation in the constituent states Ranganathan drafted the following six Model Library Bills and plans; each an improvement over earlier one.<sup>5</sup>

Year of Bill	Place Discussion/Publication
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1930	In the First All-Asia Educational Conference at Banaras. It was also published in his book <i>Five laws of library science</i> .
1942	Fifth All India Library Conference, Bombay, also published as book by ILA.
1950	Published in his book: <i>Library Development Plan: Thirty Year Programme for India with Draft Library Bills for Union and the States</i> .
1957	A revised Model Bill in the new edition of <i>Five laws of library science</i> .
1964	Published in the <i>Quarterly Library Science with a Slant to Documentation</i> .
1972	Model Public Libraries Act revised after the evaluation of the working of existing Acts was published in the book <i>Public Library System</i> edited by him.

Based on these Model Bills and Acts and the requirements assessed from the data supplied by concerned regions, Ranganathan prepared Draft Public Library Bills, Acts and Development Plans for the following constituent states. Most of these Bills were handed over to the concerned Ministers. Others were published in the concerned states.<sup>6</sup>

Year	State
1946	Madras
1946	Central Provinces
1947	Travancore
1947	Cochin
1947	Bombay
1949	United Provinces
1953	Hyderabad
1957	Madhya Pradesh
1957	Andhra Pradesh
1958	West Bengal
1958	Uttar Pradesh
1959	Kerala
1961	Mysore (Karnataka)
1964	Assam

#### 4. DRAFT UNION LIBRARY BILL

In 1948, the Government of India appointed a committee to examine the provision for the National Central Library. In order to make the work of the committee proceed along constructive lines, S.R. Ranganathan who was one of its members, drafted a Union Library Bill and presented it at the second meeting of the Committee held on 14 May, 1948; which was generally approved by the Committee.<sup>7</sup> But no further action was taken by the Government. Sir Maurice Gwyer, the then vice-chancellor of the University of Delhi, a person who was highly interested in Library Development asked Ranganathan not to feel dejected at the indifference of the Government and published his plan including the Draft Union Bill from the University of Delhi so that any future Ministry if interested could make use of that Bill and Plan.<sup>8</sup> Ranganathan published a revised Union Bill in his second edition of *Five laws of library science* in 1957. The influence of these works by Ranganathan in Indian Library movement was tremendous. In most of the states the Library Associations, Legislators or other interested social activists urged the Government to enact library legislation on the Model suggested by Ranganathan. Everywhere movement for legislation became strong.

#### 5. LIBRARY LEGISLATION IN STATES

The writings of Ranganathan, his Model Acts, Bills and Library Development Plans created in the States movements for library legislation and gave them strength and clear-cut principles. Whenever it became possible, Ranganathan personally went to the States and gave expert advice and support to these activities. Till now in eight of the states the move for Library legislation has become fruitful and all of them except Kerala totally or partially accepted the principles and plan developed by Ranganathan.

#### 51. Movement for Library Legislation in Kerala

Ranganathan was responsible for blowing into Kerala also, the modern concept of public library as a system, which shattered the traditional independent

self sufficient public library idea. When Ranganathan was the President of Indian Library Association, he made extensive library tour in Kerala in 1944 and 1946. In the second tour he also participated in the library conference organized by Kerala Granthasala Sangham and gave an inspiring talk on the need for library legislation in the state. In the same year Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, the then Dewan of Travancore requested Ranganathan to draft a library bill for Travancore.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly he drafted a bill. He had also appended to the bill a thirty year library development plan for Travancore.

### **511. Library Bill for Travancore, 1947**

The library bill and development plan for Travancore was sent to the Dewan. During the library tour in 1947 Ranganathan tried to discuss it with the Dewan. As the Dewan had to leave for Delhi he ordered the Director of Education to meet Ranganathan and to discuss the library bill and development plan with him. Accordingly, the Director of Education and the Director of Co-operative Societies met Ranganathan. They complained that thirty years for the library development suggested by him was too long.<sup>10</sup> They also objected to many of the other clauses and provisions in the bill and plan. They lacked the interest and ideas the Dewan had on this matter.

During his visits to Kerala, Ranganathan met many noted activists of social, cultural and library fields. He discussed with them the need for library legislation and influenced them to urge the government to enact a library legislation. He also gave a copy of his draft bill to Granthasala Sangham. The bill was placed for discussion in the annual conference of the Sangham. Most of the participants who wanted the state to have an efficient system for library and information service to the people were fascinated by Ranganathan's plan. But the conference, instead of recommending the bill objected to its acceptance by Government.

On his way back to Banaras (Varanasi), in 1947 Ranganathan met C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar at Madras. Aiyar asked him to spend a month with him in Trivandrum about the middle of that year to discuss directly and finalize the bill. Aiyar also promised that he would surely put the bill through.<sup>11</sup> But Aiyar had to resign unexpectedly. Immediately the bureaucrats wrote to Ranganathan that "we do not think that a Library Act is necessary. We have already many libraries."<sup>12</sup> The bureaucracy knows the right time to dispose of files in which the higher authorities are interested.

### **512. Library Bill for Cochin, 1947**

On the same tour, Ranganathan visited Cochin also and met its Education Minister Panampally Govinda Menon; as the Minister had invited him to discuss about library development in Cochin. When they met, Menon told Ranganathan, "A few years ago, I was a student of the Law College in Madras. I was then a regular reader in your splendid library. You might not have noticed me; one of the thousands of students who came there. I was impressed by your organization and service. Your library was so charming. It had an atmosphere. One day I wrote in my diary, Cochin State must have a library like this. As soon as I became the Education Minister, I turned through the pages of my diary to refresh my memory with my dreams of youth. I also read the news about your

last visit to Kerala to inaugurate the library conference and your talk on library development and legislation. So I invited you to give guidance for enacting a library legislation in Cochin. Tell me how I should proceed." In response to the request of Menon; Ranganathan after returning to Benaras prepared and sent to Cochin a draft library Bill with a thirty year library development plan for Cochin. But before Menon could take any action, important political changes came and Travancore and Cochin were merged into a single state.

### **513. Attempts by First Communist Ministry**

During the next decade government has to settle many other political and administrative problems and no considerable move came from the part of government or Sangham to enact a library legislation. During the time of the first Communist Ministry Sri E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister invited Ranganathan to visit Kerala as a consultant for the development of the state library system and for drafting a bill to be introduced in the Legislature.<sup>13</sup> Joseph Mundasseri, the then Education Minister and an eminent literary figure of Kerala also wrote similarly.<sup>14</sup> Ranganathan gladly accepted the invitation and came to Kerala. He had his first meeting with the two Ministers on 6th July 1959.<sup>15</sup> In the meeting Mundasseri outlined the problems on which Ranganathan was expected to work. During his stay in Kerala, Ranganathan had many discussions with Director of Public Instruction, Secretary for Education and other concerned higher officials, on the bill and the library development plans. He visited many libraries of Kerala to study the situation. He had also discussed his ideas and plans with the representatives of Kerala Granthasala Sangham, Chairman of the District Library Authority of Calicut and many other library activists and important persons of related fields. He also scrutinised the concerned statistical data furnished by the government. Then he worked out the library bill and development plan.

### **514. Library Bill for Kerala, 1959**

In a conference in which, Education Minister, Director of Public Instruction, Secretary for Education and other concerned officials were present Ranganathan presented the Library development plan, with a draft library bill for the Kerala State.<sup>16</sup>

It was a comprehensive report in five parts which touched all aspects of the development of a public library system in the state.<sup>17</sup> It consisted of the general principles for the design of a public library system as part one. The second part was the Kerala Public Library Bill. It was based on the earlier bill made for Travancore and the Madras Library Act. But carefully evaluating a decade's working of the Madras Library Act, Ranganathan had rectified its weak points in the bill for Kerala. He also considered all the later developments throughout the world while preparing this new bill. The system envisaged in the bill was one having a state Central Library for the whole state, a city library for every city having a population of more than 1,00,000 about 250 branch libraries and about 10,000 service stations. The bill contained provisions for State Library Authority, the Chairman of which would be Minister for Education. There were provisions for State Library Committee, City Library Authority and Rural Library Authority. Provisions were also there for executive committees, sub-

committees, branch committees and village library committees with specified duties and powers. There was also provision for collection of library cess by local authorities and for transmission to the local library authorities concerned within the end of three months after the collection. Third part of the report provided model rules. Fourth part suggested several phases for the implementation of the Act, during which integration of the innumerable small libraries and establishment of viable number of central and branch libraries was to be achieved. An estimate is made of the ultimate and immediate number of professional and semi-professional staff required and their qualifications, salary scales and status. The last part of the report explained the need for immediate recognition of Trivandrum Public Library, the oldest and largest collection of documents existing at that time as state central library in such a way that it will fit in with the system and that collection will become useful for all the people of Kerala. The pooling together of the resources of Education Library, Kerala Legislature Library, Secretariat Central Library etc., for the mutual benefit was also suggested.<sup>18</sup> In the plan Ranganathan has included even the syllabus for Bachelor's Degree and Certificate Courses in Library Science; which are to train professionals required for the system. The document also pointed out the limitations of the existing set-up and trends.

In the conference, Ranganathan discussed with the Education Minister and other officials all the clauses of the bill and all aspects of the development plan. Mundasseri was highly impressed by Ranganathan's ideas and the bill and the plan received the general approval of the Minister and officials.<sup>19</sup> To make the Bill and the plan available to the public for discussion, before it being moved in the legislature, Government published Ranganathan's Report containing the bill and plan in 1960.

The Library bill and the development plan met with strong opposition from the Kerala Granthasala Sangham. Before Mundasseri could seek further advice on the matter the Ministry was dismissed by the centre.

## **52. Madras Public Library Act, 1948**

It was the untiring efforts of Ranganathan that resulted in the enactment of the first library legislation in India at Madras. In 1946, Mr Avinasilingam Chettiyar a student of Ranganathan became Education Minister of Madras, Ranganathan directly discussed with the Minister his Draft Bill for Madras. Minister got it examined through Law Department. Some modifications were made in it by legal experts. The Minister then piloted the bill in the Legislature which was enacted as the Official Bill of the Government. Thus we got the Madras Public Library Act which was assented by the Governor General on 29th January, 1949 which ushered in a new phase in library history of India.<sup>20</sup>

## **53. Hyderabad Public Library Act, 1955**

The second state that enacted library law in India was Hyderabad. This Act emerged in an atmosphere charged with enthusiasm for the library movement and it was the result of pressure exerted by a group of enthusiasts which included the State's Minister of Education. The draft bill prepared by Ranganathan was discussed in a seminar directed by him in which Members of the Legislature, officers of Government, Education Minister and Chief Minister

were present. Everyone including Education Minister was convinced with the bill. They presented it in the Legislature and the same was enacted in 1955.

#### **54. Andhra Pradesh Public Library Act, 1960**

Andhra Pradesh was the third state to enact library legislation in 1960.<sup>21</sup> A peculiar situation arose in the state with the bifurcation of the then composite Madras State in 1955 and merging of the several districts from the disintegrated Hyderabad State. So two Library Acts were in operation in the districts of Andhra Pradesh; one Madras Library Act 1948 and the other Hyderabad Public Libraries Act, 1955. To remove the anomaly created by the provisions of the two different Acts, the Government consulted Ranganathan and enacted the Andhra Pradesh Public Library Act in 1960.

#### **55. Karnataka Public Library Act, 1965**

Karnataka was the fourth State to bring a Library Act into operation.<sup>22</sup> In 1962, Ranganathan having retired from the North established DRTC at Bangalore. He also founded the Karnataka Library Association with Mr. Vaikunta Baliga, Speaker of Karnataka Legislative Assembly as its President. Due to the request of the Association, Government set up a Library Committee to draft a library bill and development plan for the State with Ranganathan as Chairman and Education Minister also as a member. The Committee provided Ranganathan maximum freedom to draft a comprehensive Library Bill with some new classes not provided in earlier acts but necessitated by the later developments. Ranganathan submitted the bill for consideration of Government. The draft bill was accepted by the Government and enacted into Karnataka Public Library Act in 1965.

Karnataka Public Library Act is considered as a great advance over the Madras and Andhra Pradesh Library Acts. It has more realistic financial classes. The Act has created Karnataka Library Service. This provision had virtually nationalised the library service and the will.

#### **56. Maharashtra Public Library Act, 1967**

Maharashtra government through its officials prepared a draft library bill based on some earlier bills of Ranganathan. The bill was enacted into Maharashtra Public Libraries Act in 1967.<sup>23</sup> The Act made certain departures from the earlier Acts as it did not provide for library cess, but had a provision for library grants by the government for the maintenance and development of libraries.

#### **57. West Bengal, Manipur, Kerala and Haryana Acts**

West Bengal was the fifth state to enact public library legislation. It has carefully studied the working of the existing acts and accordingly revised the Bill prepared for that state by Ranganathan in 1958 which was enacted as West Bengal Public Libraries Act 1979.<sup>24</sup> After that Manipur has enacted a legislation. By enacting Kerala Public Library Act in May 1989, Kerala became the seventh state to have Library legislation. But it followed a totally different pattern than other states. Haryana enacted Library Legislation in September 1989 and it accepted most of the principles of Ranganathan and the good aspects of the other existing Library Acts.

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## 6. CHATTOPADHYAYA COMMITTEE, 1986

While constituting Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation, Government of India entrusted it the work of formulating a National Policy on Library and Information System. In 1984, the Foundation submitted a draft policy.<sup>25</sup> In 1985 Indian Library Association also submitted another draft policy. So the Government of India set up a committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya for considering these drafts and for the formulation of a final document on National Library and Information Policy in the context of the expanding library movement. The committee submitted its report in May 1986. The committee has stressed that establishing, maintaining and strengthening free public library service in the country and enabling them to work as a system is the most important task before the Government.<sup>26</sup> The committee has also suggested that the Central Government should revise the Model Public Library Bill in the light of the experience gained and the developments happened after its preparation and urge upon the states to enact uniform legislations based on this revised Model Act so that national level coordination will become possible. All libraries in the state should form part of a network extending from the community library of the village through intermediary levels to the district and to the state central library. This state network should eventually be connected with the national level network.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The recommendations of Chattopadhyaya Committee are based on the concepts of most advanced principles behind public library systems existing throughout the world. The objectives of the socialist information systems for the people is to pool the total information resources of the nation and make it available to all the citizens in an equal and unbiased way. It also makes it possible for anyone poor or wealthy to get any recorded information available anywhere in the nation or outside, through the information service outlet maintained by the State near his home, in his village or town. But to us there is actually nothing new in these recommendations. S.R. Ranganathan has continuously suggested the same system since 1948 in his writings and his library development plans. He has always stressed that Government should give high priority to public library system legislation because it is the only system which makes for the people the access to information easy and free.

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