UNIT 3: FIVE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Know the five laws of library and information science;
- Explain the need and usefulness of the five laws;
- Find out the implications of each law;
- Explain the variants of the five laws in the light of new perspectives.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Libraries are the democratic institutions for the profit and enjoyment of all. So, in the recent years much thought has been given to the best methods of popularizing the use of libraries. How to attract readers to libraries? How to extend to all classes the facilities for using them? How to

render the maximum amount of help to those who desire to use libraries and how to save the time of the reader and library staff alike are some issues to counter.

According to Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan, considered by librarians all over India as the father of library science, "there can be no doubt however, that there are certain essential principles underlying the management of library according to the present days' need and conception". Ranganathan expounded these principles in a systematic form and reduced them to five cardinal principles. He has developed all these rules of library organization and management as the necessary implication and inevitable corollaries of his five laws.

3.3 NEED OF THE LAWS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

In the past before the formulation of library science laws there was no evidence of an overall view of libraries. It looked as if future development were totally unpredictable. By proposing the laws Ranganathan solved the problem. The basic needs of the laws of library science are:



Hypothesis: Proposed explanation of some thing made on the basis of limited evidence used as a starting point for further investigation.

a) **Give Pressure at the Subconscious Level to Work:** Scientific methods are applicable equally in both natural and social sciences. The only difference lies in the status of the basic principles. These were ***hypothesis*** in the *natural science* and normative principles in the *social sciences*.

b) **Helps Library Science to Become an Independent Subject:** A subject cannot stand in its position unless some fundamental laws are not attached to it, so by proposing the laws Ranganathan put the first stone in this direction.

c) **Denote Library Practices:** Laws of library science contain in a latest form all the library practices of the past and the present and those which are likely to be evolved in the future.

d) **Serve as a Higher Court:** These laws are applicable to any problem in the areas of library science, library service and library practice. In

case of conflict between *canons*, an appeal is made to the five laws of library science to resolve the conflict.

e) Boundary Condition: Laws of library science locate the boundary condition within which the librarian might work.

3.4 FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

In the context of library science Dr. S. R. Ranganathan conceived the five laws of library science in 1924. The statement embodying these laws were formulated i.e. the laws took the final form in 1928 and a detail account of these laws and their implication were published in the form of a book in 1931 by Bombay Asia Publishing House (This is also the year in which Melville Dewey passed away). Most librarians worldwide accept them as the foundations of their philosophy.

The five laws of library science are:

- Books are for use.
- Every reader his / her book (i.e. books are for all).
- Every book its reader (i.e. every book in a library must find its reader)
- Save the time of the reader (i.e. a user is supposed to be a busy person. So his / her time must be saved). Corollary: Save the time of the staff.
- Library is a growing organism (A library always grows in terms of document i.e. book, reader or user and staff).

Ranganathan at first formulated the statement of four laws only, Laws 2-5 in the present state. The first law emerged last from the casual hint provided by his professor E. B. Ross.

3.5 USEFULNESS OF THE FIVE LAWS

a) Act as Fundamental Laws: The five laws of library science are fundamental laws of library and information science and are applicable to any problem in the areas of library science, library service and library practice. Five laws are guiding norms; these are the verified principles applicable everywhere in the library world.

b) **Help in Deriving Canon, Principles and Postulates:** With the help of these five laws of Library Science we can derive *canons, principles* and *postulates* applicable in different fields of library and information science. These fundamental laws will serve as a source of inspiration and guidance in the years to come.

c) **Resolve Conflict Between Cannons:** The laws of library science help in solving any conflict that may arise during the functioning of libraries. The five laws serve as a higher court. So in case of conflict between canons of cataloguing, classification etc. an appeal is made to the five laws of library science to resolve the conflict.

d) **Guiding Rules:** The laws of library science guide the staff in decision making about what is right and what is wrong in a given situation. As such Ranganathan's five laws of library science have found universal acceptance as Pentagon of Library Philosophy.

3.6 VARIANTS OF THE FIVE LAWS OF LIS

According to Ranganathan's own words "One is the generalization of the concept 'Book' this has been emphasized in recent years in the term document", so Ranganathan later on in his "Documentation and its Facets" reformulated the laws as

a) Documents are for use.
b) Every reader his / her document.
c) Every document its reader.
d) Save the time of the reader.
e) Library is a growing organism.

In 1998, librarian Michael Gorman (past president of the American Library Association, 2005-2006), recommended the following laws in addition to Ranganathan's five in his small book, "Our Singular Strengths":

a) Libraries serve humanity.
b) Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated.
c) Use technology intelligently to enhance service.
d) Protect free access to knowledge.
e) Honor the past and create the future.

In 2004, librarian Alireza Noruzi recommended applying Ranganathan's laws to the web in his paper, "Application of Ranganathan's Laws to the Web"

a) Web resources are for use.
b) Every user his or her web resource.
c) Every web resource its user.
d) Save the time of the user.
e) The Web is a growing organism.

3.7 FIRST LAW: BOOKS ARE FOR USE

The first law embodies an elementary principle and all the other laws of library science are based on the first law. The library becomes great not because of its collection or building but as a result of the use made of by its users. Therefore, the motto of a librarian should be to acquire process and serve document for use. The implication of this law is limited to make the physical carrier of information accessible to the user. A modern librarian who has belief in first law will feel satisfied only if the user keeps the shelves constantly empty.

In Ranganathan own words the implications of the first laws of library science are

a) Location of the Library: Location of the library should be the one which is *conveniently accessible* to the community to be served. A public library should be at a place which most citizens can frequently visit regularly on some business or other; at the same time the location should be as free from noise and other disturbances as possible so that serious study can be made. A University library should be centrally located. A special library should be near the factory entrance or factory canteen. In case of school and college libraries the location does not matter very much because distances are small from various sections. However it would be preferable to have it centrally located.

b) Library Building and Furniture: The library building should be *well planned*. The exterior should be inviting and the interior should be attractive. The building should be functional and at the same time

aesthetic. It should be functional one providing enough space for various purposes to meet the requirements. The furniture should be so provided as to give comfort to the readers and to make use of the resources of the library as conveniently as possible. Racks in which books are kept should not be high and books on the top shelves should be easily reachable.

c) **Library Hours:** The opening hours of the library should be decided keeping in view the need of the user. The influence of the first law on library hours has resulted in opening for long hours and on all days of the year without any holidays. Library hours should also be convenient to the users. If possible, each user of the library should be provided with a key of the library so that the user can use the library at any hour, whenever he feels like using it.

d) **Library Staff:** In order to maximize the use of the library, it is essential that library staff should be qualified and efficient. Every member of the staff should perform the role of a *friend, philosopher* and *guide* to all those who come to the library to use it. The staff should believe in and follow the philosophy of service to the user. They should be *approachable, courteous, helpful* and *willing to appreciate* the point of views of others; a missionary zeal to serve the user; amiable manners and professional competence are the essential qualities of the library staff for carrying out the mandate of the first law.

e) **Book Selection:** The books should be selected and acquired keeping in view the *present and potential requirement* of the user. There should also be a periodical weeding out of books.

f) **Shelf Arrangement:** The books should be classified, catalogued and arranged according to a helpful sequence.

g) **Reference Service:** The personal service will lead to greater use of library document.

The forces of the first law can be looked at from the following-

In the ancient period books were rare i.e. multiple copies were not available due to the non availability of printing machines. The copying of the Mahabharata was a very tough requiring long hours to copy a

document. So, in the past, there was a great deals of negligence towards the first law. In modern times due to the availability of printing technology, photocopying, scanning etc it is possible to overcome all such barriers. But unfortunately due to the result of a rudimentary practice of preserving the documents, that tendency has remained as a regular habit in the successive generation of librarians. The modern librarian should overcome such a habit and there is an urgent need for the vigorous attempt to eliminate the negligence to the first law.

A modern librarian who has faith in the first law is happy only when his/her reader make his/her shelves constantly empty. Also in such cases he/she will go to them, not to snatch away the book they are using but to distribute the new arrival that needs to be introduced to them as quickly as possible.

The forces of the first law as a whole can be traced out as

- Make the library *open access* rather than *traditional closed access;*
- Make *free access* to the book world;
- Branch libraries should open in the larger cities in order to be *easily reachable* within a few minutes walk from each house;
- Books should be sent *free to the houses* of those that would offer to get them introduced in their neighborhood;
- Books should be carried in motor van from street to street for their distribution amongst the residents.

The above forces of the first law will be possible only if library has enough funds and the library itself obtains free copy of books from different sources. But in this industrialized world in which everybody pays according to his/her need or requirement, there is a doubt that an exception will happen for library and information science only. So the fulfillment of the first law is bleak in near future. If library legislation comes to help in this regard or the readers of a library are ready to pay according to their need, the law, *Books are for use*, can be satisfied in every aspect.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century books were actually kept in chains (chained library) to confine their movement to the sphere determined by their chain. Such chaining was more conducive to the preservation

than to the use of the books. This practice was in contrast to the first law of library and Information Science.

3.8 SECOND LAW: EVERY READER HIS / HER BOOK

The second law is, *every reader his / her book* (books are for all). According to the second law every reader of a library should have the books he / she wants. It advocates for a mandatory provision of library services to each reader according to his / her need. It advocates the universal and democratization of library services i.e. documents are not merely for scholars but for all, including the poor, sick, blind, prisoner, neo-literates and the old. The documents should be accessible irrespective of occupational and income lines, irrespective of the normal and the abnormal, or irrespective of an adult and a child.

Ranganathan examines the implication of the second law under the following four categories.

a) Obligation of the State

i) *Library Legislation*: In order to achieve the second law it is desirable that economy factor should not stand as a barrier. This will be possible through library legislation, which will provide for finance of public libraries at various levels to achieve free library services for all.

ii) *Maintenance of a Library System (Network):* As far as students, teachers and researchers are concerned the public library plays only a marginal role in fulfilling the second law. Therefore, the state also has the responsibility of establishing other types of libraries like school library, college library, university library and special library.

iii) *Co ordination and Resource Sharing:* A given library would not have the finance to purchase documents on occasional demand. Therefore the second law would suggest the formulation of a National library network to share the resources, especially for the purpose of inter-library loan.

b) Obligation of the Library Authority

i) Choice of Book (Book Selection): The second law implies that all the books that can be useful should be selected and all the useless books should be discarded. The selection should be based on individual needs. The library authority should ensure the proper selection and acquisition policy in order to build up a balanced collection in the library for each category of users i.e. the blind, neo-literates, scholars, children, young, adult, man, women, etc. Buying a document that has no potential demand is a violation of the second law.

ii) Choice of the Staff: The library authority should select an adequate and competent team of library staff and it should take utmost care in the recruitment of the library personnel, their subsequent promotion, recognition and status.

c) Obligation of the Library Staff

i) Open Access: The library staff should also feel the obligation to introduce open access to help the readers in gaining access to all the books of possible interest to them. The open access makes it possible for a reader to approach books directly and handle them personally without any barrier. A user can, thus browse amongst the world of books and thus they will have better chances of choosing the right book.

ii) Cataloguing: Some times the information contained in a chapter or a few pages of a book may be of interest to a reader but the users often tend to miss such content. To avoid such oversight the library should introduce *subject analytical* or *cross reference entries*.

iii) Shelf Arrangement: The shelf should be arranged according to the subject of the document and not based on the size and other aspects.

iv) Maintenance: In case of *open access libraries* there is every possibility of some document being misplaced intentionally or unintentionally by the patron of the library. To fulfil the second law misplaced books must be restored to their proper places. Books in

need of binding or repair should be taken out from the shelves from time to time.

v) *Reference Service:* Reference service is an effective means of ensuring that the reader gain access to all the documents of potential interest to him that are held by the library. So the library staff should have proper training in reference work and be able to provide an effective reference service to the user in getting the right book.

d) Obligation of the Reader

i) *Library Rules Should be Followed:* A user must realize that library rules are framed to get the maximum out of the library resources and to prevent the misuse of library resources. The rules are aimed at increasing the use of the library rather than curbing its use. Thus, the user should regard the rigid enforcement of the rules as an aid rather than a hindrance in the use of the library.

ii) *Maintenance of the System:* A user should not misplace the books within the library or damage it. This will deprive the other users; similarly a user should not mutilate or take out cards from the library catalogue, tear pages or steal etc.

iii) *Should not Ask for Any Undue Special Privileges:* The Library is meant for every body's use and no one should have undue privileges at the expense of others. The current issues, the reference books etc which are in much demand should not go through the process of any special privileges.

iv) *Returns of Books in Time:* The books that are borrowed must be returned on or before due date so that other users do not have to suffer. If a document is lying unused at home, it is the obligation of the user to return it as soon as possible.

3.9 THIRD LAW: EVERY BOOK ITS READER

Every book in a library must find its reader. This law emphasizes the approach to the document. According to this law, every book in a library must find its reader, not a single item should be lost in the darkness of the stack.

The following measures should be adopted for giving effect to this law.

a) Introducing Open Access: In the *open access system* books are arranged in shelves in the classified order and the readers have freedom to access them. In the course of readers' browsing through the shelves they may come across books of interest to them the existence of which they may not be aware of; so the chances of readers noticing the books and reading them are enhanced by the open access system only.

b) Provision of Popular Department: The provision of popular department like newspaper reading room, periodical section etc offer baits to the reader and such provision increases the chances for every book to get its reader. Recent additions, rare books, specific collection, festival collection etc displayed at prominent places attracts the reader's attention.

c) Book Selection: Best attention should be paid to book selection so that the chances of books remaining unused are reduced.

d) Cataloguing: Subject cataloguing, series entries, cross reference entries etc. may often reveal to the reader the books which might not have otherwise been noticed.

e) Shelf Arrangement: If the shelf arrangement is made by the *subject approach* then there are better chances of books finding their reader. Again, the subsequent attention should be given by the library staff to maintain the arrangement by way of restoring the misplaced books to their correct place and so on.

f) Reference Service: There must be the provision for personal assistance to each reader when they feel they need it. The reference staff should act as a canvassing agent for book.

g) Publicity and Library Extension Service: Internally, within the premises of the library, the staff should provide shelf guide, bay guides etc. which will guide the reader to appropriate places in the library. Externally, the reference staff should go to make the use of mass media like press, radio, television, public lecturer, demonstration, tours,

exhibitions, library weeks, brochure and leaflets etc for publicizing the library.

3.10 FOURTH LAW: SAVE THE TIME OF THE READER

A user is supposed to be a busy person; so his / her time must be saved. Corollary of this law is “save the time of the staff”. A reader coming to the library should get an exact and fast service; they should not be made to wait longer than necessary. Unnecessary delay may cause vexation and readers may be dissatisfied. Dissatisfied readers may cease to come to the library.

The implications of the fourth law are as follows.

a) **Location of the library:** The library must be centrally located so that it is conveniently accessible to the community being served.

b) **Open Access:** There are many advantages of introducing the open access. One of the major advantages of *open access system* is the subjective time decline which gives satisfaction to the readers.

c) **Classification and Cataloguing:** Proper Classification system which would bring together documents on a specific subject and also the related subject should be adopted.

d) **Shelf Arrangement:** The arrangement of documents according to the degree of mutual relationship of subjects would lead to saving the time of the readers.

e) **Signage System:** Stack room guide, bay guides, tier guides, gangway guides should be provided to save the time of the reader.

f) **Reference Service:** The fourth law advocates the need of reference service.

g) **Charging System:** The issue method, charging and discharging should be done as quickly as possible.

h) **Centralized Cataloguing:** Cataloguing in press, cataloguing in publication, cataloguing with the aid of OCLC database greatly reduce the time factor.

i) **Information Technology:** The use of IT in libraries invariably speed up many activities. So to fulfill the fourth law the IT should be introduced.

3.11 FIFTH LAW: LIBRARY IS A GROWING ORGANISM

The main components of the library are documents, the user and the staff. A library always grows in terms of documents, the reader or the user and the staff. The growth of a new library can be compared to the growth of a child as it grows in every aspect. In case of a service library that has attained certain degree of stability its growth can be compared with the growth of the adult i.e. it grows in terms of replacing old document by new one and new user will continuously replace the old one.

The implication of the fifth law of library and information science are:

a) Library Building: The library building should be modular and should have the provision of future growth.

b) Choice of Classification and Cataloguing Code: The classification and cataloguing scheme chosen should have the provision to keep apace with the development in the universe of subject.

c) Physical Forms of Catalogue: The physical forms of catalogue chosen should have the provision of updating, sorting in different order, editing and so on.

d) Weeding out of Document: To make the space for new addition the documents that are obsolete and unused should be weeded out. The weeded out document should be stored, where they are available for occasional use or at a central place (a central library) with cooperation among libraries.

e) Modernization, Computerization: Library that grows fast both in terms of *size* and *services* may have to go for the computerization of various *house-keeping operations* (i.e. acquisition, circulation, cataloguing etc). In order to take care of the growing collection the documents should be digitized or microfilmed; the new procurement should be made in the form of electronic journals, E-book etc. To cope with the increased readership the library should go for the video terminal and ultimately to the digital or virtual library.

Previously the libraries grew with the collection, but nowadays the digital library, or virtual library or e-library does not show the characteristics of the growing of a library by volume. The growth is in the use of sophisticated technologies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A) Fill in the Blanks

a) The implication of the five laws was published in the form of a book in .....

b) The ..... law of LIS emerged last from the casual hint provided by Prof. E. B. Ross.

c) Melville Dewey Passed away in the year.....

d) Full name of Dr. S. R. Ranganathan is ..... Ranganathan.

B) Match the Following

a) Father of Library science in India.	a) Alireza Noruzi
b) Our Singular Strengths	b) Michael Gorman
c) Application of Ranganathan's Laws to the Web	c) Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan.



3.12 LET US SUM UP

Ranganathan's five laws of library science consist of five short statements but they provide guidance and rationale for practice and teaching of library and information science. With the help of these laws, we can derive postulates, cannons and principles applicable in different fields of library and information science. The first three laws emphasize the exploitation of the documents of the library fully by the maximum number of users. The fourth law gives emphasis on the role of reference librarian and has a great potentiality to bring reforms in the running of libraries. All laws as a whole will serve as source of inspiration and guidance in the years to come.



3.13 FURTHER READING

1) Chakrabarti, Bhubaneswar (1993). *Library and information society*. Calcutta: World press.
2) Krishan Kumar (1987). *Library organization*, New Delhi: Madhuban.
3) P. S. G. Kumar (2004). *A students manual of library and information science*, 2nd ed.. Delhi: B.R. publishing corporation.
4) Tripathi, S. M., Lal, C and K Kumar (2002). *Descriptive questions in Library and Information Science.* New Delhi: Ess Ess.



3.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A) Fill in the Blanks

a) 1931 b) First c) 1931. d) Shiyali Ramamrita

B) Match the Following

a) Father of Library science in India.	a) Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan.
b) Our Singular Strengths	b) Michael Gorman
c) Application of Ranganathan's Laws to the Web	c) Alireza Noruzi



3.15 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

A) Short Answers Type Questions

a) What are the need of the laws of Library and Information Science?

b) What are the five laws of LIS?

c) What is the usefulness of the five laws of LIS?

d) What are the variants of the five laws of LIS?

B) Essay Type Questions

a) Write down the implications of the five laws of LIS.

b) Discuss in detail the first law of LIS.

c) Comment on “Every Book its Reader”.

d) Discuss the sentence “Library is a growing organism”.

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