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# UNIT 4 LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

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## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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Ranganathan's five laws provide a paradigm of how libraries function, how they grow and serve, how they live, and so provide for us, a framework through which to examine our professional lives and our libraries. Hence the need for this Unit.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the characteristics of laws in general and identify them in Ranganathan's five laws;
- describe the Five Laws of Library Science;
- explain the nature of work in library, documentation, and information services in tune with the guiding principles governed by the Five Laws;
- make use of the Five Laws as a set of principles to initiate any new activity in library, documentation and information services;
- discuss the services of the library to a variety of information needs of users in different contexts, in an information society;
- examine relevance of Five Laws in the context of revolutionary changes taking place in library and information world; and
- discuss the appropriateness of revisions, and additions to the Five Laws attempted by different authors.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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One of the most significant contributions of Dr.S.R.Ranganathan to the field of library and information science has been the enunciation of his *Five Laws*. These laws were first stated and their formal exposition was provided by the author at

the Provisional Educational Conference held at Chidambaram (Tamil Nadu) in December 1928.

To have a proper understanding of the Five Laws, it is necessary to know the context in which these laws were formulated. It may be noted that Dr. Ranganathan had his education in librarianship in the University of London, School of Librarianship, in the year 1924. After formal training at the University, he had undertaken an extensive tour of England. This tour provided him an opportunity to observe the working of the libraries in England. Dr. Ranganathan took keen interest in understanding the principles and the practices followed in those libraries and the services rendered to their clientele. He was not convinced of the prevailing practices in libraries and the rules that were taught to be remembered in the organisation of library operations. He was not sure of the rationale behind them. They sounded to Ranganathan more like the rules of thumb (i.e. *take it as such* or *leave it*) type. His analytical mind could not submit itself to such mechanical practices. Therefore, he was engaged in efforts to discover some scientific basis using which the practices followed in libraries, that he observed, could be generalised and reduced to certain minimum number of *cardinal principles*. In other words, Dr. Ranganathan was in search of normative principles which could enable us to understand the measures to be devised in order to know what needs to be done in the library field to make library organisation, management and operation efficient and universalise its services. Also, it was his wish that these basic principles may contain *in a latent form*, many other practices not known at that time, but may surface later. The outcome of this line of thinking on the part of Dr. Ranganathan resulted in his enunciation of *Five Laws of Library Science*. Subsequently, these laws were fully developed and published in book form in 1931.

It must be noted that the Five Laws are a first step towards putting library work on a scientific basis, providing general principles from which all library practices could be deduced. Every activity relating to library services has a rationale in one or another of these laws or in all of them collectively. At this juncture, it is necessary to emphasise that merely stating the Five Laws – or even understanding the words – will not automatically lead to enlightenment about the functions of libraries. Although the laws are simple statements, they demand contemplation and experience before the richness and import of their meaning will be revealed. However, contemplating them as we go about our business in our libraries will provide us with basic tenets to guide us in performing work that fulfils our mission as librarians and information professionals.

In this Unit, we shall try to study the implication of the Five Laws in the context of conventional librarianship as well as their relevance in the context of revolutionary changes taking place in the library and information science (LIS) profession.

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## 4.2 THE FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

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Laws are scientific principles, rules of procedure or behaviour. Law is a generalisation based on a recurring fact or event. Achinstein, P [1971] considers the following lingual characteristics of a stated law:

- Laws are simple, precise, and few in number

- Laws are essentially general in nature
- Their subject is general
- Syntactically they are general and begin with *All*, *Every* or *No*
- A law expresses a generality which can be used to express regularities.

Keeping the above mentioned characteristics in his mind Dr. Ranganathan propounded his Five Laws as follows:

- Books are for use
- Every reader his/her book
- Every book its reader
- Save the time of the reader
- The library is a growing organism.

When Ranganathan used the expression *books* and *readers* he naturally meant that books stand for knowledge and information and readers stand for users of library and information services. In modern studies of knowledge and information and all related expressions, it must be noted that the carriers and channels of information and knowledge have changed from print to other forms, but all the services are revolving round *information* and *users*. Hence, the dimensions of services have expanded widely in scope, although the basic philosophy of the service remains unaltered. Therefore, these five laws might be restated to suit the changing context and modern developments taking place in the world of libraries and information science as such. For example, the five laws were restated even during the life time of Dr. Ranganathan as under:

- Documents / Information are for use
- Every user his/her document / information
- Every document / information its user
- Save the time of the user
- Document / Information system is a growing organism.

Let us now discuss each of the five laws and its interpretation and implications.

#### 4.2.1 First Law: Books are for Use

By using first law *Books are for use* you are prone to think that it is a self-evident truth or simple statement which does not merit serious consideration and contemplation. But, on deep pondering you change your opinion. This will become evident if we examine the history of books in libraries. In fact, the earlier accent is on the preservation of books rather than their use. Medieval libraries were an example of chained libraries. The books literally were attached to the shelves with brass chains and could only be used in a single location. Obviously, this was done for the preservation of books rather than facilitating their use. This was a natural inclination, at a time when it was very difficult to produce books. This habit some how continued even after the invention of printing, which facilitated the easy production of several copies of each book. Although, isolated examples of reluctance to permit the unrestricted use of books can be occasionally seen even today, the general position is that books are available for use without

any let or hindrance. In fact, policies relating to a library should be helpful in promoting the objective of books being put to maximum use. Let us now examine the implications of the first law in the functioning of a library.

I) ***Implications***

The first law of library science has some important messages for library work. Some of these relate to the location of library, its working hours, library building and furniture and the staff.

a) ***Library Location***

For example, it has a forward thinking message in terms of the emphasis on library location. The law advocates that library be located in a more accessible place in order to encourage more users to use the library. Obviously, it will be a discouragement for people to use books, if they have to walk long distance to reach them. At the same time, the location where the library is situated should be free from noise and other disturbances, so that serious study is possible. An ideal place for a public library should be a quiet central area, while a school library should be located in a prominent place in the school premises. The idea that a university library should constitute the heart of the university, then it should be reflected in its geographical location as well.

b) ***Working Hours***

Another important message inherent in the first law is that the working hours of a library should be convenient to most of the users. Many of the libraries in India need to pay special attention to this aspect and keep them open when their clientele are not engaged in other activities so that they are in a position to visit the library. This type of proactive approach in deciding the working hours of the library will certainly yield good results.

c) ***Library Building and Furniture***

The first law demands that proper attention be paid to the planning and designing of the library building and the different items of furniture equipped to the library. The library building should be functional and at the same time, aesthetic in appeal. The items of furniture should be functional, attractive to look at. The racks should be designed in such a way that books are placed at convenient heights facilitating their removal and use by the clientele. Particularly furniture in children's library should be specially designed to attract children. Comfortable furniture always tempts users to frequent the library. The law also implies the concept of an open-shelf library that is equipped with tools and furnishings which makes the books it contains useful. In other words, the first law alerts us to the requirements of properly designed functional building and comfortable furniture to invite and promote the use of its resources.

d) ***Staff***

Staff form an important component of any library. The first law of library science for its fulfilment calls for certain qualifications and qualities for library staff. Though Dr. Ranganathan has spent considerable space in discussing about library staff in his exposition of the first law, the essence boils down to these important attributes: The library staff should possess

qualifications that would enable them to organise library efficiently and provide satisfactory services. Obviously, this would ensure the proper use of books. But, much more important than formal qualifications are, perhaps, the personal qualities of the library staff. They should be courteous, cheerful and helpful. *Service with a smile* should be the *motto*. The staff should always remember that, everything that they do in the library is a means towards an end, and *the end is service to the readers*. If a potential library user encounters an unhelpful attitude on the part of the member of the staff, s/he is sure to turn away permanently from the library.. in such a contingency, the cause of the first law is *not served rather it is defeated*. The credibility of the staff, in respect of their knowledge, ability and personal attitude to readers, is a crucial factor in the promotion of the use of the books. The attributes discussed above deserve special consideration while library staff is recruited. This is necessary to satisfy the requirements of the first law.

### Self Check Exercise

**Note:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) State briefly the implications of the first law with references to library staff.

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### 4.2.2 Second Law: Every Reader His/Her Book

The second law “Every reader his/her book” (the variant form of which is “books for all”) is perhaps the most under stated; even Dr. Ranganathan acknowledged that with this one principle lies so much of what libraries mean for society. “The law relates to the fact that we all have diverse interests and that there is a book out there to satisfy that for all of us”. In other words, the law stands for the mandatory provision of library service to each person according to her/his need. Stated in a different manner, the law advocates the universalisation and democratisation of library service. However, in earlier days only a privileged few belonging to aristocracy and upper classes of society were given access to libraries and books. But, with the advent of democracy which ensured the participation of every citizen in governance, the position dramatically changed. Democracy, for its sustenance and survival, needs an educated knowledgeable citizenry. Hence, education and acquisition of knowledge through whatever institution possible became the basic right of all citizens without any discrimination. Hence, the law “Every Reader His/Her Book”.

#### I) *Implications*

This law has many important implications for the library. The fundamental issue it reveals, tension (conflict) between the cost of materials and the basic right of all persons to have access to materials they need. In providing a library for the

use of books, one must be mindful of the fact that since no one individual or library can acquire all the books, this responsibility needs to be accepted at the governmental level. Therefore, the second law imposes certain obligations on the state, library authority of the state, the library staff and the reader.

a) ***Obligation of the State***

It must be emphasised that it is obligatory on the part of the State to develop and organise a library system capable of providing adequate library service to all people. This has to be accomplished through suitable legislation, which should make provision for financial support of the library system and create suitable mechanism with authority for the coordination of all activities pertaining to its different units. A goal should be set for the library system and services best suited for the society must be initiated. The legislation must be so framed that it would serve as an effective instrument for achieving the goals and the stated objectives envisioned therein. Finances are always limiting factors for library development and the objective should be to derive maximum benefit in terms of library services, with the available limited funds. The library system envisaged through legislation is the public library system, which is available to the entire community. But, public library system, by itself will not be able to provide every reader the books he needs. In fact, public library system plays only a minimal role in fulfilling the book requirements of students, teachers and other researchers. Therefore, the government has an additional responsibility to establish school and college libraries as also, university and special libraries to cater for the demand of students, teachers and researchers. Only when the library system of a state is comprehensive providing library service to all categories of its people, it can be said that the demands of the second law are met.

b) ***Obligations of the Library Authority***

The second law emphasises the fact that it is obligatory on the part of the library authority to accept responsibility in respect of book selection and provision of suitable staff. No library will have enough funds to purchase all the books that it may require. This is the reason why libraries have to take recourse to book selection process. In other words, the available finances have to be judiciously used to purchase most relevant and wanted books. This necessitates the libraries to ascertain the requirements of their clientele and formulate proper book acquisition policy. Systematic user surveys help in identifying the user requirements. It may be emphasised that acquiring a book which has no suitable or potential demand is a negation of the spirit of the second law.

The second law implies that an adequate and competent team of staff is essential to provide every reader her/his book. In other words, a reader should be able to exploit the resources which are relevant to her/his needs available in the library. The staff has to play a proactive role in this exercise. In the absence of competent staff willing to help the reader, s/he may not be in a position to locate a good number of books useful to her/him. More often than not, a library finds itself in such a predicament, where users are not served properly for want of adequate qualified staff. Such a situation should be avoided.

Reference service gains its legitimacy and its purpose from the second law. In his description of the second law, Ranganathan explains that reference function is critical. He observes that it is the business of library staff “to know the reader, to know the books, and to actively help in the finding by every person his or her book”. Reference librarians are trained to bring readers to their books, either through formal research instruction, informally in one to one *reference interview* or by the compilation of bibliographies, research guides, exhibits, etc. In a sense, patrons *use* the skill of reference librarian to find the library materials they need.

The reader also has certain responsibilities cast on her/him by the second law. It particularly wants the reader adhere to the rules of the library in respect of loan and use of books. If the reader retains the book beyond the period of loan, s/he is depriving other readers, who may want to use the book. There are some readers who misplace books with a view to monopolise, or tear off pages from books or even steal them. This undoubtedly leads to the gross violation of the *second law*. The readers should be made conscious of such violations and their consequences by the library staff through short programmes of user education.

With best efforts, it will not be possible for any library to be self-sufficient. There would be hardly any library which is capable of ensuring all the demands of its clientele depending on its own resources. In other words, this points to the need for resource sharing among libraries. The second law envisions emergence of resource sharing library networks, both at national and international levels, to satisfy its expectations fully.

### Self Check Exercise

**Note:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of the Unit.

2) How does the second law provide guidelines for book selection in a library?

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### 4.2.3 Third Law: Every Book its Reader

The third law of library science is “Every Book its Reader”. The approach of this law is oriented towards the book. As per the law, every book in a library should have a chance of finding its appropriate reader and be useful to her/him. In other words, investment in unused books amounts to wastage of funds and must be avoided under all circumstances. The mission of any librarian is to build a well-organised collection of resources in order to maximise the chance that users will find what they need. The third law *implicitly means that “resources look for users”* in fact, the duty of the librarian is to help the library resources find the people who want and need them most. Dr. Ranganathan points out, that library

users often, do not know enough about available resources to identify what to ask for. According to him “the majority of readers do not know their requirements, and their interests take definite shape only after seeing and handling a well-organised collection of books”. This principle naturally addresses the fundamental issue of open access. In the open access system, books are arranged in the shelves in classified order and readers have freedom of access to them. In the course of readers browsing through shelves; they may come across books of interest to them, the existence of which they may not be aware of. The chances of readers noticing the books and reading them are enhanced by the open access system. The third law, therefore, definitely advocates open access.

Adopting an open access system for a library imposes certain responsibilities and obligations on the part of the staff as well as the readers. For example, the classified arrangement of books i.e. the arrangement of books in the order of their relationship with particular subject should be constantly maintained. This means that the shelf-rectification, i.e. restoring the misplaced books to their correct place on the shelf should be done by the library staff on a regular basis. They should also provide shelf guides, bay guides, etc, which guide the readers to their appropriate regions and shelves in the stack room.

Readers, on their part, should conduct themselves with a sense of responsibility. They should not try to replace the books they have taken out because in that process they are likely to misplace books. They are also advised to resist the temptation to misplace books deliberately, mutilate or steal books or indulge in other unsocial activities. Readers should note that *a book misplaced is a book lost for ever*. There are both advantages and disadvantages in practicing open access system. In case, the open access system is practiced, it must be done in a balanced and orderly manner, so that its advantages outweigh the disadvantages, the system definitely contributes to the satisfactory fulfilment of the third law of library science. In addition to have open access system; the library should adopt aggressive promotional activities and innovative services in order to bring the library resources closer to their users. There are many ways to do this. One of the ways is distribution of monthly list of books added to the library to the readers on a regular basis. This will be helpful in bringing such books to the notice of their potential users. The newly added books should be displayed prominently in the library for some time before sending them to the stacks, so that they may catch the attention of the readers and are read by those who are interested in them.

Another innovative technique to draw the attention of the potential users to library resources is organisation of book exhibitions, which have a bearing on topical themes to enhance the chances of the books finding their appropriate users.

The third law also advocates maintenance of a well designed library catalogue with effective cross references, and added entries meeting the different approaches of readers. Of course, the importance of reference service cannot be over emphasised in this connection. Ultimately, as Ranganathan asserted “it should be the business of ... the librarian ... to adopt all the recognised methods of attracting the public to the library so that every potential reader may be converted into an actual one, thereby increasing the chances for the fulfilment of the *third law*.”

Note: i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of the Unit.

3) Explain briefly how open access facilitates better use of the library.

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4.2.4 Fourth Law: Save the Time of the Reader

The fourth law presents the biggest challenge to the library administrator. Policies must always be formulated keeping in view the needs of the readers (users) in mind. For example, aspects like hours of operation must be set in such a way to ensure the most appropriate and convenient access to patrons who rely on the library for their study and research needs. The collection must be arranged in an inviting clear and obvious way so as not to waste the time of the user in searching for the books they need. Library users may be busy people, and they should not be made to wait longer than necessary to get their needs met. They should get exact and fast service from the library. It must also be noted that in many individuals, intellectual interest may exist only momentarily and unless it is satisfied at the moment of its existence, it may vanish. Hence, the importance of the law "Save the Time of the Reader". It means satisfied library users. In other words, the prime measure of library's success, it is important to note that frustrated or disappointed users means that the library has failed in its responsibility and has grossly violated the dictates of the fourth law and failed in its fulfilment. Let us now try to analyse the full implications of this law and the various operational methods employed by libraries to save the time of readers.

I) Implications

Just as the third law the fourth law also pleads for open access system in libraries. The justification is that in closed access libraries, the readers are not allowed to the stacks where books are shelved and have to requisition for books they need. The procedure is that they prepare a list of books they want after consulting the catalogue, and hand over the list to a library staff member. S/he may locate some of the books asked for and report the non-availability of others. On seeing the books, the reader may discover that none of these books is relevant to her/his need. S/he has to prepare another list and repeat the operation and wait again for the result. This trial and error method may consume lot of her/his time before her/his needs are met. A lot of time is spent counter productively in these processes. Obviously, this frustrates the library user. A lot of user's time is saved, if the library follows open access system and maintains a well organised collection of books.

There are other ways to satisfy the law. One of them is following proper classification system which would bring together books on specific subject and

also related subjects. Another way is to construct a well designed catalogue which meets the different approaches of readers. It is important to note that while catalogues are tools for retrieving items accurately, they become items that waste the time of the reader, if items are haphazardly catalogued or if the cataloguing is excessively focussed on the intricacies of the technique.

Another important aspect which has a great relevance to the Fourth law is the charging system (i.e. loan of books) followed in the library. Earlier systems were time consuming and some what cumbersome. Hence, efforts have been made to simplify the process with a view to reduce the time involved in the operation. As a result, modern systems like photo-charging system, ticket system, computerised charging system, barcode system and radio frequency identification (RFID) system have been evolved. Adopting any one of these systems will lead to substantial reduction of time in the issue and return process which the fourth law strongly advocates.

### Self Check Exercise

**Note:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of the Unit

4) Discuss the operational methods employed by libraries to save the time of readers.

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### 4.2.5 Fifth Law: Library is a Growing Organism

The fifth law is *Library is a growing organism*. Dr. Ranganathan compares library to a growing organism. In a living organism the growth is of two kinds: the child growth and the adult growth. We can notice that child growth is characterised by increase in physical dimensions and it is fast and visible. On the other hand, the growth in adults is mainly in the nature of replacement of cells. It is a kind of internal qualitative change, which may not be perceived, and as such, not visible. When we say library is a growing organism, we mean that library is not a static entity, but a dynamic growing entity. In other words, the dynamic nature of the library be properly grasped and provided for right from the time of starting of a library so that its growth is not inhibited due to lack of far-sight and planning. On further analysis, we know that the basic components of a library comprise: i) the book stock (or resources), ii) the staff, iii) the readers, iv) the physical infrastructure such as the building, furniture and equipment. When we say that a library grows, we envisage growth in all these components. Naturally, the fifth law has implications for each one of these components.

#### D) *Implications*

Let us try to analyse these implications and try to understand the guidance we can derive from the fifth law in solving the problems presented by the dynamic growth associated with the library.

a) ***Book Stock***

In the initial stages of development, the growth of books including the periodicals will be rather fast. This naturally impacts the size of the stack rooms, size of card cabinets, size of the catalogue room, number of periodical display cabinets and the number of book racks for accommodating the books. Also, as the book collection grows, and the newly added books are interpolated in the classification arrangement, there will be constant movement of books on shelves. This would necessitate re-labelling of shelves periodically. This is essential to reflect the correct position of arrangement of books for easy retrieval.

b) ***Readers***

When the library functions properly in keeping with the spirit of the first law of library science, the readers of the library are bound to grow. That means the readers need proper facilities by way of reading space etc. and new types of services need to be organised.

c) ***Staff***

It must be mentioned that mere quantitative growth does not mean anything. There must be qualitative growth also. This requires the number of staff must be increased commensurate with the increase in readers and books to initiate new services to suit the needs of the new readers and to improve the existing services to meet the changed demands of the readers and personalise them with reference to service. The qualifications and skills of the staff need to be updated to meet the changing circumstances. The staff should be provided with opportunities to receive training in new areas of professional development. The motto of the staff should be to render efficient service and save the time of the readers. For this purpose, constant updating of skills and growth in professionalism by learning innovative techniques and new areas of professional development is necessary.

d) ***Classification and the Catalogue***

One of the implications of increasing intake of books on a variety of new subjects is that the classification scheme adopted should be hospitable to new subjects. It must enable the classifier to allocate a unique class number to each subject and must facilitate easy retrieval. The growth factor also calls for a card catalogue built on sound principles to help the readers to know the contents of library without difficulty and the catalogue should facilitate easy interpolation of entries. It should be a easy locating tool.

Libraries which grow fast, especially, the larger ones, need to modernise their services by taking recourse to computerisation of all the house keeping operations. This results in the efficiency of service.

The fifth law also advocates that care be taken while planning and designing a library building by making provision for the expansion of the building both horizontally and vertically. The need for more space often arises *sooner than anticipated* and *lack of provision for expansion* would block the development of library.

e) **Weeding of Books**

The development plans for a library should also include provision for weeding out obsolete books and adding new ones which are relevant and useful. Weeding need not necessarily mean the discarding of books. It only means removal of books from a library where their relevance has ceased in order to make room for current and relevant books. Such books may be stored where they are available for occasional use. Different libraries in a region may cooperate in planning a storage facility for locating the weeded out books in a central place so that readers in need of such books may go there and consult them.

In the foregoing pages, we have discussed the implications and interpretations of the five laws of library science in a traditional manner. Their adequacy and relevance in meeting the demands of changing information environment is discussed in the next section.

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### 4.3 NEW INSIGHTS AND WIDER INTERPRETATION OF FIVE LAWS

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A sea changing is taking place in all facets of human society. While knowledge and information have always been instrumental in promoting the material progress at every stage of societal development, the last 50 years have witnessed spectacular developments in the growth, access and availability of information and knowledge. This change is generally attributed to the advancements that have taken place in information communication technologies (ICTs). As a result, knowledge and information can be accessed today instantaneously, irrespective of its location and made available on a computer screen, downloaded and stored for future use. Though, the bulk volume and variety in which knowledge and information is disseminated do not pose any problem of access and availability, the fundamental problem of *use* and *service* to the user remains still somewhat unsolved even today. Ranganathan's laws, though formulated in the context of traditional libraries and their use, and services rendered by them to the user community, it is the opinion of many professional experts that these laws have not lost their relevance even in the context of new developments such as the Internet System, World Wide Web, Digital and Virtual Libraries.

These laws "continue to give us a blue print for our professional values that is as relevant now, as it was in 1931. The language may be seen as restrictive, but the underlying values inherent in them means they can be continuously interpreted for the future". As a matter of fact, many of the scholars have attempted to do so. For example: Rettison [1992], Chappell [1976], Naun [1994], Gorman [1998], Kuronen and Pekkarinen [1999], Croft [2001], Leiter [2003], Satija [2003], Noruzi [2004] and Choudhury et al. [2006] have provided new insights relating the adequacy and relevance of Ranganathan's *five laws* in the present context and their future value.

Let us try to understand the significant aspects discussed in their writings.

- James A Retting [1992] while paying his tributes to Dr. Ranganathan on the occasion of his birth centenary discussed the *five laws* and opined that these laws needed to be extrapolated. He conceived a sixth law "Every reader his

freedom” as applicable only to the type of service such as instruction or provision of information.

- Michael Gorman has reinterpreted Ranganathan’s laws in the context of today’s library and its likely future, and reformulated them calling them as [Gorman’s] “Five New Laws of Librarianship”.

They are:

- 1) Libraries serve humanity;
- 2) Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated;
- 3) Use technology intelligently to enhance service;
- 4) Protect free access to knowledge; and
- 5) Honour the past and create the future.

Gorman’s laws are not a revision of Dr. Ranganathan’s laws. They are another completely separate set, from the point of view of a librarian practicing in a technological society [Middleton 1999].

- Kuromen and Pekkarinen Paivi in their work entitled Ranganathan revised: a review article, made a critical study and analysis of the *five laws* and concluded that the underlying philosophy of the Five Laws is fundamental and works well in the context of traditional library environment. But, in the context of modern technological developments and the changes that have taken place in the very concept of a library resulting in a paradigm shift in the information world, giving rise to a situation in which the information – which is instant power – flows globally and is delivered or accessed at the speed of light, Ranganathan’s laws, though valid, may be inadequate. With convincing reasons and rationale, they established the need for additional laws to cope with the situation. They proposed two new laws in their writings. These are: 6<sup>th</sup> Law: “Every reader his library”.

7<sup>th</sup> Law: “Every writer his contribution to the library”.

In the opinion of these authors, reader means a *searcher* and library perhaps *connotes the virtual type*? These two new laws dwell on the new cooperative and interactive relations between the users and the documents of the virtual library. However, their interpretation in consonance with the five laws of Ranganathan needs to be further studied before their validity is established. Even Francis Miksa ... opines that “it is appropriate to paraphrase S. R. Ranganathan’s second and third laws of library science. Instead of, *Every reader his book* and *Every book its reader*, new technology appears to be making possible, *Every reader his library* and *Every library its reader*”.

- Recognising Ranganathan’s five laws of library science and their underlying concepts as powerful inspirations for social change, Mentor Cana [2003], analysed the “Open Source Software”, as defined by Open Source Initiative (OSI) and its congruency with the five laws. He felt that since the underlying concepts upon which the five laws are built had profound impact on our society, then the proponents of open source movement can learn a lesson or two from that example in achieving their objective. Cana explains that a *book* is a basic element of Ranganathan’s laws: it contains objective knowledge. This calls for defining the comparative basic elements of software

development. Hence, he takes the term *Software* to be the basic element: it contains objective knowledge. He uses the term *Software* to connote a software product or software modules that can be used to build software products and believes that the five laws of the “Software Library” could be:

- 1) Software is for use
- 2) Every user his / her software (or software for all)
- 3) Every software its user
- 4) Save the time of the user
- 5) A Software Library is a growing organism.

It must be mentioned here the OSI definition is congruent with the first law: Software is for use. The very reason open source software is developed is that, it can be used. The second, third and fourth laws are dependent on the existence of the software library. Though, there are repositories of various open sources online, the collections are not as organised as the library system. Open source movement can attempt to apply some lessons from the evolution of libraries in establishing and streamlining the software library concept bearing in mind here that the producers and users of software are different than producers and users of books. In this connection we can just imagine the importance and power of bibliography control over software in information society, being that software has the potential to be more pervasive when compared to pervasiveness of books in our society.

- One of the most useful papers which provides significant insights and wider interpretation of Ranganathan’s five laws and establishes their relevance in 21<sup>st</sup> century is the paper authored by Alireza Noruzi A[2004] entitled “Application of Ranganathan’s Five Laws to the Web”. The paper poses the question; “does the web save the time of users?” and attempts to answer the question by analysing the application of *five laws* of Ranganathan to the Web and reinterpreting them in the context of the Web. “The Five Laws of the Web” formulated by him are:

- 1) Web resources are for use.
- 2) Every user his / her Web resource.
- 3) Every Web resource its user.
- 4) Save the time of the user.
- 5) The Web is a growing organism.

Before we actually discuss the impact on the Web, we need to know briefly what the Web is and what it actually contains? The World Wide Web (WWW) is an Internet system that distributes graphical, hyperlinked information, based on the hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). The Web is the global hypertext system providing access to documents written in a script called Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) that allows its contents to be interlinked, locally and remotely. The Web was designed in 1989 by *Tim* Berners-Lee at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva [Nouzi, 2004]. It provides materials and makes them online accessible, so that they may be used. The Web consists of contributions from any one who wishes to contribute, and the quality of information or the value of knowledge is rather

opaque, due to the lack of any kind of peer reviewing. It may also be mentioned that the Web is an unstructured and highly complex mix of all types of information carriers produced by different kinds of people and searched by a variety of users. It was designed to meet the human need to share information resources, knowledge and experience. The Web masters want people to interact with their websites and pages, click on them, read them, and print them if they need. In other words, websites are meant for use and *not for admiration*. The main objective of the Web is to help users all over the world, by catering for their information requirements. It is in this context, *The five laws* of the Web came into existence. In fact, they are really the foundations for any Web user-friendly system. What they advocate is universal access right of cyber citizenship in the information age.

- *The first law*: “Web resources are for use” is very important because information serves no purpose, if it is not utilised and at least available for people to attempt to learn. The role of the Web is to serve the individual, community and service, and to maximise social utility in the communication process. To satisfy the first law, the web must acquire materials and make them accessible so that they can be used. Some webmasters are currently closing their files by password protective systems, and others are charging fees – the first law admonishes such people. Another point that the first law emphasises is about service. In order to deliver and reap the rewards of services, the Web must identify the benefits that society can reasonably expect and then devise means of delivering those benefits. In other words, the law dictates the development of systems that accommodate the use of Web resources. For example, updating and regular indexing of Website resources facilitates the use of site resources and the Web in general.
- *The second law*: “Every user his / her Web resource” has many implications. It reveals the fundamental need anywhere in the world. This makes diffusion and dissemination very important. In other words, each web resource should think of potential user before Website is created. This means webmasters must know their users well, if they are to provide them the materials they need for their study and research. The second law also dictates that Web serves all users, regardless of social class, sex, age, ethnic group, religion or any other consideration. The law emphasises that every cybercitizen has a right to information. Webmaster and search engine designers should do their best to meet cybercitizens’ needs.
- *The third law*: “Every Web resource its user”. How can a webmaster find a user for every web resource? There are many ways in which a web can actively work to connect its users. But the most important aspect which should be kept in mind, in this context, is that webmaster should add content with specific user needs in mind and they should make sure that the users can find the content they need easily. Webmasters should make certain that the content they add is something their users have identified as a need and avoid cluttering up their Website *with content no one seems to care about*.
- *The fourth law*: “Save the time of the user”. This law has been responsible for many reforms in Website administration. A Website must examine every aspect of its policies, rules, and systems with the one simple criterion that *saving the time of the user is vital to achieve the Website’s mission*. In order

to save the time of the user, Websites need effectively and efficiently design systems that will enable user to find what they are looking for *quickly* and *accurately*. At the same time, the Websites they are searching should make them available most of the information that could be *potentially useful*. In other words, the fourth law emphasises efficient service to the users. This implies that a well designed and easy to understand guide map or index to the Website.

- *The fifth law*: “The Web is a growing organism”. The web reflects and represents the changes taking place in the World as the society moves forward. In the process, a large quantity of information is added to it. Hence, a Web is a growing organism. We need to plan and build with the expectation that the Web and its users *will grow and change over time*. To cope with the dynamic situation, it is necessary to keep our own skill levels moving forward. The fifth law alerts us by emphasising the vital point that *change and growth go together*, and require flexibility in the management of Web collection, in the use of cyberspace, in the retention and deployment of users, and in the nature of Web programs. The law advocates proper and systematic planning to meet the requirements of change and growth.

In conclusion, these laws are not only applicable to the Web in general, but characterise the establishment, enhancement, and evaluation of online databases and digital library services, as well. These five laws concisely represent the ideal and the organisational philosophy of the Web. No doubt the five laws of the Web prove useful in the evaluation of Websites.

### Self Check Exercise

- Note:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Check your answer with the answers given at the end of the Unit
- 6) Explain briefly the implications of five laws in the wider context of changes taking place in the library and information world.

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## 4.4 SUMMARY

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This Unit discusses the five laws of library science propounded by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan. While these laws seem simple on first reading, on second thoughts and deep contemplation, the richness and import of their meaning will be revealed. The *five laws* provide a *paradigm* of how libraries function, how they grow and serve, how they live, and so provide for us a *framework* through which to examine our professional lives and our libraries. These laws are the lens through which practitioners can inform their decision making and set their business priorities, while staying focussed on the user. It may be emphasised that the five laws of

Ranganathan continue to give us a blue print for our professional values that is as relevant today as it was in 1931. The language may be seen as restrictive, but the underlying values inherent in them mean they can be continuously reinterpreted for the future. New information and communication technologists suggest that the scope of Ranganathan's laws may appropriately be extended to the Web. In Noruzi's opinion "these laws are as applicable to the current practice of the Web as of tomorrow. These laws are not only applicable to the Web in general but characterise the establishment, enhancement, and evaluation of online databases and digital library services as well. These five laws concisely represent the ideal service and organisational philosophy of the Web. ... we can evaluate web site by applying the Five Laws of the Web". Since 1992, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ranganathan's birth, several modern scholars of library science have attempted to update his five laws, or they reworded them for other purposes. Some of these are referred to in this Unit.

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## 4.5 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

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- 1) The first law is a statement that emphasises the use of materials available in library. Evidently the staff that serve the readers of library must have the abilities to organise their collection efficiently. The law dictates the development of systems that accommodate the use of library material. For this purpose, they should have the knowledge about the collection available in the library. The staff should know how to use the various tools in the library to provide access to the documents stocked in the library. The more the knowledge about the staff about subjects, the better would be the service to users. For instance, proper and regular shelving of library materials by the staff and logical and topical arrangement of materials facilitate their use by readers. Besides knowledge and skills, the library staff should be courteous and should be cheerful to help the readers. In other words, the first law advocates that the library staff must take care to provide a facility and an organised collection that invite and promote the use of library resources. Users rate the library on the basis of the way the library staff shows keenness to assist them. In fact, the credibility of the staff, both in respect of their knowledge and their personal attitude to readers, is a general factor in the promotion of the use of books.
  
- 2) The second law has many important implications for the library. '*Books for all*' irrespective of the type of readers is the *main message* of the second law of library science. It may reveal the conflict between the cost of materials and the *basic right* of all persons to have access to the materials they need. In providing a library for the use of books, one must always be mindful of the fact that since no one individual can own all the available books, one of the primary obligations of the library is to acquire body of literature or research materials that will benefit each of the readers and researchers. The freedom to access writings of all kinds and inform their own minds on topics that others may wish to suppress. The second law reminds us to be impartial in our dealings with our users. We may not like what they request from us, we may think a book or other resource is low-brow, but we should never place our own prejudices in the way of access. Users' information requirements are the prime consideration for building a collection in a library. In other words, the collection the library is building and maintaining must be

representative and adequate to fulfil the expectations of the majority of its community of users. The book selection policy should therefore be determined on the basis of the findings of the users' survey. Library should not be stocked with material that is not wanted by its clientele.

- 3) The third law of the library science addresses the fundamental issue of access. The need to provide easy access to materials is one way of putting people together with what they require. Equally putting, books into the hands of the people who do not necessarily know which book they actually need is at the heart of the third law. We could interpret reader development as being part of the third law, since within its remit we promote books to the users that may not be known to them and that we feel may offer them opportunities for enrichment those other titles. Allowing readers to browse a collection through open access is one of the inherent messages provided by third law. The open access system facilitates better use of books because it gives freedom to readers to choose what they want. The browsing facility provided by the open access system ensures the readers chances of getting at their particular item. It certainly saves the time of the reader to get the appropriate documents. The advantages of the open access system outweigh the disadvantages associated with its implementation.
- 4) Time is a precious commodity. Saving the time of the reader has always been a concern of the librarian. In fact, the fourth law presents the biggest challenge to the library administrator. This is the reason why libraries create catalogues, bibliographies, indexes and abstracts. Saving the time of the reader also relates to how we actually organise the library. The most important aspect which the staff of the library should remember in this connection is that catalogues and other devices are tools for retrieving items accurately; they become items that waste the time of readers, if items are haphazardly catalogued or if the cataloguing is excessively focussed on the intricacies of the art. However, when considering the time of the user as the vital notion, a *simple and effective system* is what is called for. Adequate staffing of reference, information, and circulation desks, as well as telephone reference, also helps patrons find needed materials quickly. Saving the time of the reader means providing efficient, thorough access to materials. It means satisfied library users. This is the prime measure of success of any library; frustrated or disappointed users mean that the library has failed in its duty and its responsibility. Hence, the library staff must make every effort to make its service more efficient.
- 5) The five laws of library science of Ranganathan were a first step towards putting library work on a scientific basis, providing general principles from which all library practices could be deduced. During his life time Ranganathan himself revised and reworded them to suit the work of documentation centres and documentation service. During the period when Information Science was developing Ranganathan's five laws were interpreted to suit the information work (service) and the functions related to information institutions. However, since 1992, the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr. Ranganathan, a number of modern scholars of Library and Information Science have attempted to update, reword, or reinterpret the five laws of Ranganathan. Some of the major efforts in this direction are briefly considered in the following paragraphs.

In 1992, James R. Retting enunciated a sixth law, as an extension of Ranganathan's five laws. It read as "Every reader his freedom". It was supposed to be applicable only to the type of service (i.e. instruction or provision of information).

It may be noted that *book, readers, and library* are the basic elements of Ranganathan's laws. Even if we replace these key words with other elements, Ranganathan's laws still work very well. Based on five laws (of Ranganathan), many researchers have presented different principles. For example, "Five new laws of librarianship" by Michael Gorman became famous. Gorman, it appears, reinterpreted Ranganathan's Laws in the context of today's library and its likely future, and reformulated them calling them as [Gorman's] "Five New Laws of Librarianship".

They are:

- 1) Libraries serve humanity.
- 2) Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated.
- 3) Use technology intelligently to enhance service.
- 4) Protect free access to knowledge; and
- 5) Honour the past and create the future.

Obviously, Gorman's laws are not a revision of Dr. Ranganathan's Laws, but another completely separate set, from the point of view of a librarian practicing in a technological society. It may be mentioned that new information and communication technologists suggest that the scope of Ranganathan's five laws may be appropriately be extended to the Web. In fact, Noruzi has analysed Ranganathan's five laws in the context of the Web and provided the rationale as to how they are applicable in the case of Web design and Web sites evaluation. The five laws in their interpreted version help to identify the Web a powerful inspiration for technological, educational and social change.

Cana (2003) established the fact that Ranganathan's five laws could be used as normative principles in the case of *open source* software, and advocated that they be used as guiding principles. Similarly David Mc Menemy observed that Ranganathan's laws remain relevant in numerous areas of modern library and information practice, and will continue to be reinterpreted by the profession for a long time to come.

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## 4.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Book</b>	: A packaged carrier of information and knowledge.
<b>Growing Organism</b>	: A biological phenomenon indicating growth, not necessarily indicated externally.
<b>Information</b>	: A recorded message, irrespective of physical form or content.
<b>Information Society</b>	: A new form of social existence in which the storage, production, flow, etc. of networked information plays the central role.

- Knowledge** : Organised information irrespective of the physical form.
- Reader / User** : A person using the resources of library; a customer of information institutions.
- World Wide Web (WWW)** : An Internet System that distributes graphical hyperlinked information, based on the hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) the Web is the global hypertext system providing access to documents written in a script called Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). It was designed in 1989 by Tim Berners - Lee at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN).

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