EDITORIAL

Homage to Melvil Dewey 1876–1976

One hundred years of use of Dewey's classification in libraries, documentation centers, and information systems! The world's most widely spread and used classification system reaches the century mark – a remarkable point in the history of classification, well worth of reflection, astonishment, and admiration.

This issue of *International Classification* is dedicated to the honour of Melvil Dewey, the author of the Decimal Classification. We therefore included firstly articles directly considering his ideas and the history of his classification (see those by F. s. Chiapetti et al and J. P. Comaromi). Secondly there are articles pointing to further research into the theoretical bases and practical development of classification, as e. g. the ones that provide insights into structures of classification systems (see those by S. Körner, K. Subramanyam and J. M. Perreault) and the one that is concerned with the structure of classificatory statements (S. Reball). A third urgent problem of today is tackled in the article on a commodity thesaurus (J. Hölzl). Here the questions of terminology for the ordering of concepts of objects become again apparent and with them the awareness of the significance of language for classification. The excellent book reviews by E. Svenonius and G. Vleduts could be considered as extensions of the ideas of these articles.

The following contemplation on Dewey and Ranganathan was written and compiled by M. A. Gopinath, a close cooperator of the late Dr. Ranganathan and his very young assistant in the revision of the Prolegomena of 1967. He may thus duely speak for the great classificationist Ranganathan providing – by citations from the correspondence of these two "fathers of library science" – some idea of the ingenious mind and practical thinking of Dewey, who had given mankind such a helpful tool for the ordering of knowledge – a classification with a mnemonic notation through which conceptual relations may be expressed and easily comprehended by everybody.

I. Dahlberg

Dewey and Ranganathan

Dewey and Ranganathan were pioneers in the field of library science and librarianship. There is a striking similarity in the events which both of them experienced, although these events happened at a hemispherical distance and a time-distance of half-a-century. The similarity is so striking that Ranganathan may be called the Melvil Dewey of India. Like Dewey, Ranganathan founded and promoted library associations, library schools, library periodicals, chaired commissions and committees on library matters, designed classification schemes, piloted public library acts, encouraged young men and women to take library profession, built the image of the profession on par with other established professions of lawyers, doctors and teachers. Like Dewey, Ranganathan was a trained teacher. He faced many odds with administrators for his unconventional approach to administrative matters and for his strict disciplinarianism when be was bent on finishing a job or a work.

Dewey and Ranganathan were in regular correspondence. Once Dewey wrote to Ranganathan warning him about the problem one would face in designing a new scheme for classification. In his peculier orthography, meant to simplify, he wrote: "It is much wors to giv the tym and muni which everi librari so urjentli needs to devys still another skeme. None will ever be made that is not justli subject to mani criticisms. The librari that adopts sum 1 skeme in print can blame all its shortcomings on the author. But if it makes a skeme of its own it is almost sure to spend a larj part of the time needed for the presing work of the librari in devizing, revyzing and constantli arguing, and trying to defend the inevitable mistakes." Here was a sound and wise advice borne out of experience. Dewey had gone through the turmoil of bringing out a scheme and keeping it uptodate at the changing face of knowledge. He was at once sympathetic to the designer of a new scheme for universal classification. But Ranganathan had already gone deep into his scheme when he received this advice. He resolved the dilemma arising by saying to himself, "Either success or ruin. No halfway hereafter" (3, p. 194)

On 18th November 1930, Dewey sought the cooperation of Ranganathan in improving Decimal Classification to meet the needs of Asia: He wrote, "Naturali the sistem 1st published in 1876 was from the standpoint of our American libraries. Thru the 12 editions it has constantli broadened. But we need speciali to cover Asia mor adequateli and hope we shal hav yur aktiv cooperation in making the decimal sistem mor wydli useful." (3, p. 153). Ranganathan points to the attempt made in India to make DC to accomodate ideas of Indology. But alas! Dewey's death prevented incorporation of these into DC.

Referring to the "Five Laws of Library Science" (in 3, p. 192), Dewey wrote on 5 Sept. 1931, "The most praktikal advys I fynd in the book is paje 401" 'don't mutilate the skeme' and ending with "wyzest thing is to adopt a tryd skeme *as it is* without modifying it here and there!' As the author of the Decimal Classification now mor wydli used than all others combynd, I have naturali given special attention to this, and I am firmli convinst that 1 of the most serious mistakes is to waste tym & muni in "improving" a classification skeme". (3, p. 192)

Dewey's delight and optimism on activities towards the library development in Asia can be inferred from his message of December 1930 to Ranganathan on the occasion of the First All Asia Educational Conference, beginning with the characteristic words "In a life full of inspirations, I still found a new thrill in reading your notice of the . . . Library Service Section. All nations are coming to understand rapidly that we shall never attain a better world merely by Law, Police and Soldiers. Somehow we must make people prefer the better things and that is education. I have for over fifty years been preaching the gospel that the schools are only half of education and that the corner-stone of the second part

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is the Public Library. Give the message of warm congratulations to your All-Asia Educational Conference. It is the beginning of a movement certain to grow steadily in usefulness to the great people who live in the countries which were the cradle of the human race." (2, p. 129).

Speaking on Dewey in general, Ranganathan said "his main passion was for organisation and efficiency. He was always vigorous, affectionate, and susceptible to new ideas, with width of view, but unswerving loyalty to his own ideals." (2, p. 129).

Ranganathan's admiration of Dewey's contribution to classification can be inferred from his words:
"Before Dewey's invention and popularisation of a hospitable notation, systematic arrangement usually worked itself like a rudderless vessel." (4, p. 375).

"Indeed the genius of Dewey consisted in harnessing the decimal place values of numbers to the service of classification." (4, p. 361).

"Progress in profitably applying classification to books was made possible only after Dewey had introduced the use of ordinal numbers". (4, p. 361).

"The achievement of Dewey is a marvellous step towards the ideal of co-extensiveness between a specific subject and its class number so that the books on no two specific subjects may get mixed up promiscuously, irritatingly, and deceptively. The urge towards this ideal had been working in him all along though he does not appear to have explicitly stated it anywhere" (1, p. 328).

"Dewey has achieved enough to be immortalised and be provided with a special niche of fame, even by his one bold attack on the notational barrier. To exploit the territory so conquered to the maximum possible extent and to consolidate the position – to that alone – was the task of a life-time. It is easy for us who stand on his shoulders, as it were, to say "He was so near it and yet he did not reach it", but it would be irresponsible, ungrateful, irreverent to say so" (1, p. 332).

"The bright new trail blazed by the genius of Dewey has been thinned and finally lost in the waste. The sincerest tribute the library profession can offer to its doyen is to re-direct into more fruitful lands." (1, p. 70)

In his *In memoriam* to Dewey, Ranganathan wrote, "The burning passion which he entertained for his Decimal classification can be inferred from the buoyant – alas! it has now turned to be a tragic one also – words with which he recently converted the authorities of Library of Congress to the plan of printing the Dewey numbers on the Congress catalogue cards. His closing words were, "When I see the Decimal Classification Numbers appearing on the Library of Congress cards, I shall be ready for the *Nunc Dimittis*". The Dewey Number has appeared on the Congress cards, and Dewey has departed true to his words." (2, p. 129)

The two great designers of classification did not stop with designing the schemes, but proceded to establish library movement, library science and library profession in their respective countries. How apt it is to call each of them "Father of library science" each in his own right and in his own country. Both of them lived an active life of eighty years.

M. A. Gopinath

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