

Editorial

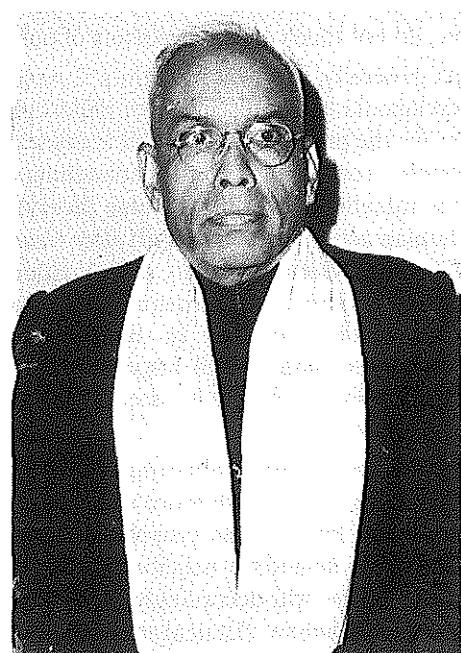
Ethics and Knowledge Organization

In Memory of Dr.S.R.Ranganathan in his Centenary Year

The year 1992, has been declared by our Indian colleagues a jubilee year in the honor of their great teacher S.R.Ranganathan. In order that due expression may be given, first to the gratitude we, too, owe him for his numerous and valuable contributions, in particular for his universal facet classification (Colon Classification) and his classification theory in "Prolegomena for Library Classification", and second, to our joy for having had him among us, this first issue of the 19th volume of IC is devoted to Dr.Ranganathan, as had already been announced - and pertinent contributions requested - in the Editorial of issue 91-1.

We are very happy to announce that such contributions have been spontaneously sent in from four countries, and we express our sincere thanks to the authors: (1) M.P.SATIJA, India, who compiled a chronology of Ranganathan's development and classification-related activities and who wrote an outstanding review of Ranganathan's "autobiography" so timely prepared in book-form by S.R.Kaula, (2) E.R.SUKIASYAN, Russia, who describes the influence of Ranganathan's works on classification theory and practice in Russia, particularly as applied to the revision of the Library Bibliographical Classification (LBC/BBK) along the lines of a facet classification, (3) Yan XIAO, China, who did this in a similar manner for her country and who recognized the urgent necessity of reorganizing the Chinese Library Classification and Chinese Documentation Classification into a facet classification, and finally (4) Hemalata IYER, USA, who presents us with an overview of empirical studies undertaken to test Ranganathan's postulates relating to subject structures.

From Ranganathan's Autobiography as published by ABC Publishing House in New Delhi and as supplemented by the personal impressions of his pupil P.N.Kaula from the years since 1945, we learn what manner of man Ranganathan really was and how it became possible for him to achieve so many good and constructive things in his life. His pupil M.A.Gopinath, who already at the age of 17 was picked up every morning at 6 a.m. by Ranganathan to accompany him on his morning walk, once confided to me that Ranganathan worked every day from early morning till 6 p.m., after which he turned to his religion, thus making his evenings belong to God alone.



When we learn from his biography that Ranganathan ate only one meal a day, that he slept on a mat on the naked floor, did not permit himself any luxuries, knew only hard work for the goals he had set himself, made the fullest and most fruitful use possible of his talents and loved everyone and everything more than himself, we really need not be surprised that his efforts were singularly blessed and that he was able to achieve much for his country as well as for the worldwide influence of his classification theories and works on knowledge organization. For, before turning to the problems of library science at the age of 32, he had studied mathematics and was teaching this subject with great pleasure at Madras University when he had to be literally persuaded to apply for the position of librarian at the Madras University Library. From among numerous applicants he was selected chiefly because he reproached the selecting official for belonging to those who lack common sense. This very audacity made him land this job - besides, probably, the realization on this official's part that such an independent spirit could not fail to be the right man for this difficult job.

Ranganathan lived according to the highest principles he had realized to be the proper ones for him. Who can claim as much for himself? It is not the knowledge of and speaking about what is good and correct which determines the value of a life, but the corresponding action; to this extent he is a real example to all of us! Therefore I wish to say of him: he was someone who lived and worked also for the ethics of knowledge organization.

The theme of this editorial was inspired by the recent Library Trends issue (91-2) on "Ethics and the Dissemination of Information" (Ed.Robert Hauptman). In this issue, 10 authors from the library field discuss relevant

subjects which also reflect the efforts of a committee of the American Library Association on Professional Ethics as expressed in its statement of 1981, which subject, however, do not touch on the problems of our field.

What, generally, is meant by "ethics"? According to my encyclopedia it is a discipline of philosophy which searches for the principles by which it becomes possible to determine reasonably whether something or some subject is valuable or worthless (value theory) or whether a human action is good or evil) (*Der Neue Herder*, Vol.2, Freiburg, Germany, 1970. p.397). Ethics whose values man can obtain only through divine revelation is called "authoritative ethics". In the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, which largely also govern the conduct of civilized nations, we are dealing with such God-given ethics.

So for this reason alone ethics has something to do with religion, but even much more so because of the 2 commandments given to the disciples of Jesus Christ: "love God above all and thy neighbor as thyself". Good and correct action will accordingly be determined by one's love of fellowman. "Ethical conduct" for the sake of ethics itself would remain on the formal plane and thus lack intrinsic value, and ethical conduct out of self-love, as is often also propagated ("The Way to Happiness") would be something like a contradiction in itself, for by it one would seek one's own advantage rather than one's fellow-man's, thus producing the exact opposite of the truly good.

What would an ethics of knowledge organization consist of? This question I would very much like to see treated in this journal in several articles. They would assuredly contain a great number of references to activities whose unworthiness many a one may not realize, although every human being should hear inside himself something like the voice of conscience. But in the course of wrong actions this voice may become inaudibly low,

often even silent. Who, after all, still cares today when laboriously compiled thesauri and classification systems are used by others - without asking the author's permission - as 'stone quarries' for building up a system of one's own? But isn't that plagiarism, theft of intellectual property and a sin against the commandment "Though shalt not steal"? Or, when out of negligence or lack of zeal items are incorrectly indexed or classified, can one then be said to live up to the truth postulate - which calls for correspondence between subject and statement - and to observe the commandment "Though shalt not bear false witness"? Or, when information systems are praised and sold for good money which do not live up to their promises, does not that constitute fraud (hence both lying and stealing) in the strongest sense?

In the purity of his intentions, in his punctuality and precision, modesty and zeal, in his perseverance in the search for correct, adequate and truthful representation, in his rigor and self-denial toward himself and in his paternal love and care toward his pupils, coupled with the wisdom which made him require from his pupils, too, more than the ordinary, Ranganathan has set us an example which, in this memorial year, should become for us a mirror, as it were, in which our own conduct becomes visible. We must confess that, confronted with this exemplary life, we find ourselves very imperfect. But we can at least try to conform our will more and more to the values which will be of greater help and service to others - not ourselves -, and thus to manifest more responsibility in our thinking, speaking and acting, and more responsiveness in our attitude toward others, granting them more assistance and help. In a word, if we all try to become more filled with love we will live up better to our task in life and can render a correspondingly more valuable and durable contribution toward solving the tasks to be accomplished in this world.

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