



## **S.R. Ranganathan and His 5 Laws of Library Science: A Comprehensive Study**

**Dr. Meesala Nageswara Rao**

Librarian, Department of Library and Information Science,  
Srinivasa Institute of Engineering and Technology,  
Cheyyeru (vi), Amalapuram, East Godavari (District), Andhra Pradesh, India.

### **Abstract**

Dr. Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan (1892–1972) is known as the “**Father of Library Science in India.**” He was a visionary who transformed librarianship from a custodial profession into a dynamic, user-centered field. Ranganathan began his career as a mathematician before transitioning into librarianship. He developed the **Five Laws of Library Science** in 1928 and published them in his influential book in 1931 (Ranganathan, 1931). These laws provided libraries with both a philosophical and practical foundation for their functioning. They continue to influence libraries around the world, including in the digital era (Ramesh Babu, 2011). This study examines Ranganathan’s life, the historical background and meaning of the Five Laws, and their evolution and continued relevance in modern Library and Information Science (LIS). It explores how these laws remain important guiding principles despite rapid technological advancements and changing information environments. The **5 Laws of Library Science** is a theory proposed by **S.R. Ranganathan** in 1931, detailing the principles of operating a library system. Five laws of library science are called the set of norms, percepts, and guides to good practice in librarianship. Many librarians worldwide accept them as the foundations of their philosophy. Dr. S.R. Ranganathan conceived the Five Laws of Library Science in 1924. The statements embodying these laws were formulated in 1928. These laws were first published in Ranganathan's classic book entitled Five Laws of Library Science in 1931.

These laws are:

- 1. Books Are For Use**
- 2. Every Reader His/Her Book**
- 3. Every Book Its Reader**
- 4. Save The Time Of The Reader**
- 5. The Library Is A Growing Organism**

These laws of Library Science are the "fundamental laws" of Library Science. These are applicable to any problem in the areas of library science, library service, and library practice.

These laws are like pot containing oceans. Prior to their enunciation, the subject of Library Science had no philosophy. These laws gave a philosophical base, guaranteeing an everlasting future to the subject of library science, the profession of librarianship, and the use of libraries. These laws have provided a scientific approach to the subject of library science. Even though S.R. Ranganathan proposed the Five Laws of Library Science before the advent of the digital age, they are still valid and equally relevant today.

**Key Words:** books, collection, digital, information, principles, resources, services

## The Five Laws of Library Science

BY

**S. R. RANGANATHAN, M.A., L.T., F.L.A.**  
LIBRARIAN, MADRAS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY  
SECRETARY, MADRAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
MEMBER, INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY COMMITTEE  
OF THE WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR ADULT EDUCATION

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

**SIR P. S. SIVASWAMI AIYER, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.**

AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

**W. C. BERWICK SAYERS, F.L.A.**  
CHIEF LIBRARIAN, CROYDON PUBLIC LIBRARIES  
LECTURER IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP



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1931

## **Introduction**

### **S.R. Ranganathan: The Man and His Legacy**

#### **Early Life and Career**

Ranganathan was born on August 9, 1892, in Shiyali, Tamil Nadu. He first studied mathematics and earned his master's degree from Madras Christian College (Dhiman, 2023). In 1924, he became the first librarian at Madras University, marking a major turning point in his career. Although he had no formal training in librarianship, he later traveled to London to study modern library practices, which influenced his future innovations (Ramesh Babu, 2011).

#### **Contributions to Library Science**

Ranganathan's major contributions include:

- **Colon Classification (CC)** – A faceted classification system still used in digital libraries.
- **Classified Catalogue Code (CCC)** – A standardized cataloguing method.
- **Five Laws of Library Science** – The most enduring framework for library services (Librarianship Studies, 2025).

His work bridged traditional and modern librarianship, making him a global icon in the field (Bhattacharya, 1984).

#### **The Five Laws of Library Science**

The first presentation of Ranganathan's Five Laws took place at a teacher conference in 1928, followed by their publication in 1931 (Ranganathan, 1931). These laws appear simple but have had a profound impact on library policies worldwide.

##### **First Law: "Books Are for Use"**

- **Meaning:** Libraries should prioritize accessibility over preservation.
- **Implications:**
  - Shift from closed stacks to open access.
  - Functional library design (lighting, seating, shelf height).
  - Extended operating hours.
- **Modern Adaptation:**
  - Digital libraries ensure 24/7 access (Noruzi, 2004).
  - Open Educational Resources (OERs) promote free use (Dhiman, 2023).

##### **Second Law: "Every Reader His/Her Book"**

- **Meaning:** Libraries must serve all users equitably.
- **Implications:**
  - Democratization of knowledge (public libraries, literacy programs).
  - User studies to understand diverse needs (Ramesh Babu, 2011).
- **Modern Adaptation:**
  - Personalized recommendations (AI-driven algorithms).
  - Accessibility tools for disabled users.

##### **Third Law: "Every Book Its Reader"**

- **Meaning:** Every resource should find its audience.
- **Implications:**
  - Effective cataloguing and metadata.
  - Marketing strategies (new arrivals displays, social media promotion).

- **Modern Adaptation:**
  - SEO optimization for digital libraries (Noruzi, 2004).
  - Data analytics to track user preferences.

**Fourth Law: “Save the Time of the Reader”**

- **Meaning:** Efficiency is key in library services.
- **Implications:**
  - Self-checkout systems.
  - Reference services (quick access to information).
- **Modern Adaptation:**
  - Chat bots and AI assistants.
  - One-click access in digital repositories (Gorman, 1995).

**Fifth Law: “The Library is a Growing Organism”**

- **Meaning:** Libraries must evolve with society.
- **Implications:**
  - Expanding collections (e-books, multimedia).
  - Flexible infrastructure (modular buildings).
- **Modern Adaptation:**
  - Cloud-based libraries.
  - Block chain for digital preservation (Sen, 2008).

**Impact on Modern Libraries**

**Table 1.1: Impact on Types of Libraries**

Academic Libraries	Public Libraries	Corporate Libraries
Institutional repositories follow the Fifth Law	Digital literacy programs align with the Second Law	Knowledge management systems embody the Fourth Law

A library is a living institution that stores information and gives people access to a wide range of resources to help with education, research, and lifelong learning. Libraries were once just organized collections of books and other study materials (Britannica, 2025). Now, they are complex centers that combine physical and digital resources to meet the needs of all users. In schools and universities, libraries are essential for helping people learn to read and write, do research, and grow intellectually. This essay discusses libraries’ types, functions, and importance in academia. It does its job by using scholarly sources to give a full picture.

In the past, libraries have been beneficial places in society. In fact, libraries have changed from places where people could check out physical books to places where they can get all kinds of information and services. Libraries are more than just places to locate books; they are complex systems that meet the informational, educational, and cultural needs of communities (Rubin, 2016). They are guided by values of access, stewardship of knowledge, and intellectual access and freedom.

Libraries have a long history of keeping records, from the first written records on clay tablets in Mesopotamia to the collections of handwritten texts in monasteries in the Middle Ages. Over the course of hundreds of years, libraries have helped to make knowledge more accessible to everyone, improve literacy in society, and support academic work. This history

shows that libraries have always tried to connect people who want to learn with recorded knowledge, even as society and technology have changed and presented new challenges (Shera, 1976).

A library is a well-organized collection of different types of materials, including both print and non-print formats. These materials are arranged in a way that makes it easy to read, consult, study, and do research. Traditionally, a library was thought of as a building that held physical resources like books. However, the modern definition goes far beyond this physical space. Libraries also work well in virtual settings, where they make their collections available online through databases and platforms.

The word *library* comes from the Latin word *liber*, which means “book.” Its Greek and Romance language equivalents, like *bibliotheca*, show this origin. These organizations are defined by their main goal, which is to meet the specific information needs of a certain group of users. Because of this, libraries usually have trained professionals on staff, such as librarians and support staff, who know how to organize collections and provide specialized services that meet the needs of users. Libraries play important roles in supporting both formal education and lifelong learning, as well as providing access to a wide range of information resources for recreational activities.

George Eberhart provides this definition in *The Librarian's Book of Lists* (Chicago: ALA, 2010): “A library is a collection of resources in a variety of formats that is (1) organized by information professionals or other experts who (2) provide convenient physical, digital, bibliographic, or intellectual access and (3) offer targeted services and programs (4) with the mission of educating, informing, or entertaining a variety of audiences (5) and the goal of stimulating individual learning and advancing society as a whole.”

### **Philosophical Foundations and Traditional Roles**

The philosophical roots of library science see libraries as “social tools” that help people learn and keep their culture alive. Jesse H. Shera (1976), a well-known library professional, saw libraries as social institutions that bring people together to share knowledge and work toward the betterment of all. Shera stated that libraries act as bridges between society’s “cumulative cultural heritage” and individuals who seek knowledge, allowing ideas to cross boundaries of both time and space.

This idea of libraries aligns with Dr. S.R. Ranganathan’s Five Laws of Library Science, which include principles such as “**Books are for Use**,” “**Every Reader His/Her Book**,” and “**The Library is a Growing Organism**” (Gaur, 2013). These five laws emphasize both practicality and adaptability, ensuring that libraries continuously evolve to meet the changing needs of users. Traditionally, libraries focused on acquiring collections, organizing information, preserving materials, and creating spaces for individual study and intellectual development while keeping users’ needs at the center of their services.

People traditionally viewed librarians as caretakers responsible for collecting, preserving, organizing, and providing access to information resources. Public libraries became community centers by offering literacy programs, storytelling sessions for children, and access to newspapers and magazines (Roberts, 2001). Academic libraries, on the other hand, develop and provide collections of printed and digital resources that support teaching, learning, and research activities. Special libraries, whether operating in the public or private

sector, provide specialized services and resources tailored to specific professional or institutional needs.

In other words, some libraries possess the expertise and resources to focus on particular subject areas and provide users with access to specialized and synthesized information materials (Rubin, 2016). Although libraries operate in different environments and serve different audiences, they all share a common purpose: to organize knowledge and make it accessible for the benefit of individuals and communities.

### **User-Centered Services**

In the digital age, libraries are no longer just places where people can acquire print and other materials. They are actively working to attract people to use their services and resources. Libraries now encourage and support users to become actively involved in learning and information access.

As part of this shift toward user-centeredness, embedded librarianship has become an important practice. Embedded librarianship refers to librarians working directly within academic, professional, or community settings to provide specialized support. In academic environments, embedded librarians may collaborate with faculty members or professional groups to design research assignments, conduct information literacy workshops, or prepare customized resource lists for courses (Carlson & Kneale, 2011).

Public librarians also extend their services into communities by working with local groups to organize events such as coding boot camps, job fairs, and health literacy programs for patrons (American Library Association [ALA], 2012). These initiatives reflect educational approaches that emphasize practical experiences and collaborative learning.

Embedded librarianship has also expanded into digital environments. Librarians use social media, wikis, cloud-based tools, and virtual learning platforms to engage users and encourage participation in creating and sharing knowledge (Carlson & Kneale, 2011). Through these technologies, users become active contributors rather than passive consumers of information.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries worldwide adapted their services by providing online tutoring, virtual book clubs, and opportunities for digital storytelling. These efforts demonstrated libraries' ability to respond flexibly to crises while continuing to support users and maintain access to educational and cultural resources (ALA, 2012).

This approach reflects Jenkins' (2006) concept of "**participatory culture**," which emphasizes active user involvement in collaborative knowledge-building through interactive formats. As a result, libraries have evolved from traditional public spaces into a "**third space**" where knowledge is recognized, welcomed, and transformed through conversation, creativity, and lifelong learning.

### **Core Services: Meeting Diverse Information Needs**

Libraries offer both basic and advanced services to meet the needs of different users. Users are usually familiar with the library's basic services, such as lending items from the collection, interlibrary loans, and reference services. These services are designed to provide convenient access to information and support users in locating appropriate resources.

The reference librarian responds directly to users' information requests and assists them in identifying relevant sources. Reference librarians help users understand how to use library

catalogues, locate factual information, and conduct effective literature reviews (Library and Information Science, n.d.). For example, a student researching climate change may receive guidance on searching academic journal databases, while a small business owner may learn how to access market reports available through public library subscriptions.

Advanced library services are developed to address users' specialized information needs. Current Awareness Services (CAS), including Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and new publication alerts, keep users informed about recent developments and publications in their areas of interest. Document delivery services allow users to obtain copies of articles or book chapters from other libraries. Libraries also provide reprographic services, enabling users to photocopy or scan materials on demand. In addition, translation services may be offered to assist individuals in accessing materials written in different languages.

Referral services connect library users with external experts, institutions, or organizations when information needs extend beyond library resources. Academic libraries further support research activities by maintaining institutional repositories, promoting open-access publishing, and assisting with research data management (Rubin, 2016).

### **Technological Transformations and Digital Libraries**

Library services have changed significantly from the last quarter of the 20th century into the 21st century because of advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). These technological developments have transformed the way libraries collect, organize, preserve, and provide access to information resources.

Digital libraries emerged as major innovations in traditional library services by offering access to digital and digitized content through online environments that enable users to search and retrieve information efficiently (Chowdhury & Chowdhury, 2003). Digital libraries rely on metadata standards, search algorithms, and digital preservation technologies to manage large collections of electronic books, journals, and multimedia resources.

Examples of large-scale public digital libraries include the **Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)** and **Europeana**, which provide access to millions of digitized objects representing global culture, heritage, and information resources. These initiatives demonstrate how digital technologies have expanded access to knowledge beyond physical library spaces. The use of ICT has fundamentally transformed library operations. The **Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)** has replaced traditional card catalogues, making information retrieval faster and more accessible. OPAC systems allow users to search library collections remotely and support services such as interlibrary loans and document delivery. Librarians can also provide virtual reference services and respond to user inquiries regardless of geographic location (Booth, 2011).

Modern academic libraries provide access to subscription-based databases such as **JSTOR** and **ProQuest**, enabling users to access scholarly materials online. Public libraries have also adopted digital lending services by offering e-books through platforms such as **OverDrive**. According to Rubin (2016), libraries function as part of a broader knowledge infrastructure supported by digital tools, partnerships, and collaborative information networks.

Despite these advances, the digital transformation of libraries presents several challenges. One major issue is the **digital divide**, where unequal access to technology due to socioeconomic conditions limits users' ability to benefit from digital library services (Rubin, 2016).

Copyright restrictions and licensing agreements may also limit libraries' ability to share e-books and archival materials effectively (Chowdhury & Chowdhury, 2003).

Additionally, maintaining updated technological infrastructure requires significant financial investment, which may be difficult for institutions operating with limited budgets. Therefore, while digital libraries have increased access to information, sustainable technological development remains essential to ensuring equitable and effective library services for all users.

### **Challenges in the Digital Age**

Although libraries can evolve, they still face challenges. Funding constraints make it harder for libraries to acquire new technologies and licensed content. Copyright laws also create difficulties for libraries in sharing resources and, in the case of e-books, preserving digital content. Using data analytics to better tailor services raises privacy concerns. However, libraries can protect user data by adopting ethical practices and policies that safeguard privacy (Rubin, 2016).

The digital divide continues to remain a significant issue. Many urban libraries have advantages because they offer high-speed internet access and makerspaces. On the other hand, rural or low-income libraries must manage outdated infrastructure and limited technological resources (ALA, 2012). Since 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States has attempted to address this issue through the E-Rate program, which supports libraries in obtaining broadband access. However, the digital divide continues to persist globally.

### **Libraries as Cultural and Educational Pillars**

Libraries are an important part of preserving the culture and heritage of a country. Archives and special collections protect rare manuscripts, oral histories, and Indigenous knowledge for future generations. The National Digital Newspaper Program at the Library of Congress, for example, digitizes newspapers, while the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme preserves cultural materials that are at risk of being lost.

Libraries in schools support both formal and informal learning. School libraries help children develop reading and literacy skills by providing access to books and reading programs. Academic libraries, on the other hand, provide essential resources for research and higher education. Public libraries support marginalized communities by offering adult education classes, online language programs, and digital literacy initiatives (Roberts, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

Ranganathan's Five Laws are still the most important part of library science, and they have stood the test of time. These ideas continue to guide user-centered services, technological integration, and fair access in both physical libraries and digital ecosystems. The Five Laws will keep shaping the future of how knowledge is shared as libraries continue to evolve (Ramesh Babu, 2011). Libraries are service organizations. They serve the user community. The idea of providing information resources or the desired information with each access by users suggests the adoption of quality principles. The landmark statement, "**Right user, right information at the right time,**" is one of the strongest symbols of quality delivery in libraries.

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