39 Months with Dr. S. R. Ranganathan

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I started hearing about Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, from the very the first day of my B Lib Sc class in the Kerala University. That was in 1965. From then on, teacher after teacher, no matter what they taught, referred to Ranganathan at least a few times in each class. Almost all the books, they referred to us to read were also by Ranganathan. By the time I completed my B Lib Sc course, I had a picture of Ranganathan in front of me. I was a good student, and scored good marks in all my class examinations. In fact, I missed the first rank in the final examination by a few marks only.

Just about a week before the start of my final examination, Prof Isaac, the then Head of Library Science Department , called me to his room and enquired about my plans after I completed my examination. I mentioned to him that I don't have any plans but would look for a job. He then told me that there was a job in Bangalore to work as the Research Assistant of Ranganathan, who then was the National Research Professor in Library Science. I could not believe, having heard about Ranganathan numerous times in the class room and having understood that he was a great librarian, there comes an opportunity, rather an invitation, to meet and work with him. Prof Isaac gave me a good briefing about Rangqanthan and he repeatedly said that it was a unique and rare opportunity.

He also said that “Rao Saheb” , that was how he and many others addressed Ranganathan, was a task master and I should be prepared to work for long hours without even having any holidays or weekly off days. Seeing my predicament, Professor asked me to consider it and to meet him the next day with a firm answer. He once again reiterated that it was a unique opportunity, and also said that the previous Research Assistant was M A Gopinath, again a familiar name because of his association with Ranganathan's writings,

and that he had moved to DRTC as a lecturer. By the time I left Prof Isaac's room, I had more or less made up my mind to go to Bangalore and take up the job.My classmates too encouraged me. So, I confirmed my decision next day to Prof Isaac.

On My Way to Meet the Great

On completing my examinations I went to my hometown in Kerala, to convince my parents and brothers that it was a rare opportunity and I should take it up. With their consent I took a train journey to Bangalore, travelling on an unreserved third class ticket. That was my first travel outside Kerala. I was tense and anxious for a variety of reasons, most important being that I was going to meet that great DrS R Ranganathan and work with him. On reaching the railway station, an autorikshaw took me to a nearby lodge where I took a room. After freshening up and having a quick breakfast in a nearby hotel, I again took a auto and went to DRTC in Malleswaram. There the office staff immediately sent me to Ranganathan's residence, which only a few minutes away, escorted by MrRajappa, one of the support staff there. On the way, Rajappagave me the first briefing about Ranganathan, which was not a very encouraging one!! It confirmed many things that Prof Isaac had told me, such as his work culture, his expectations and so on.

My First Meeting

Rajappa opened the small gate of “Sarada”, 100 Main Road 4, Malleswaram, the one hundred rupee a month rented house where Ranganathan lived, and escorted me inside. I was greeted by “Maami,” that washow Mrs Ranganathan was called by all, including Ranganathan himself(!) , with a warm *Namaste* and directed me into a side room, which was Ranganathan's bedroom. There was Ranganathan modestly dressed and lying in his bed and a young gentleman sitting by his side on a cane chair and taking dictations: that was M. A Gopinath, fondly called“Gopi“ by all. He brought in another cane chair for me. Ranganathan enquired about my travel and introduced me to Maami and two of his secretarial staff. Then he asked if the hostel room was comfortable, the room in DRTC hostel which was kept ready for me. I had to tell him that I was not aware that a room was kept ready and so I had taken a room in a lodge near the railway station. He had written so to Prof Isaac, and also that I should bring a mosquito net, among other things.

I had not seen that letter , because I had left Thiruvananthapuram before that letter reached Prof Issac. Ranganathan was very unhappy that I had spent money in hiring a room. He asked Gopi to accompany me in the evening to the lodge and vacate the room and take me to DRTC hostel. He also asked Gopi to speak to the lodge manager to refund the rent I had paid, at least part of it! If he refuses, Ranganathan offered to speak the manager himself. In the evening I went to the lodge and returned to DRTC with my luggage: Neither Gopi joined me, nor I asked for a refund. But we reported in the morning that part of the room rent was refunded!!

My Work Schedule

I stayed in the DRTC hostel and had my food at the hostel mess itself. DRTC was only about five minutes walkfrom Ranganathan'sresidence *cum* office. I was expected to reach there every morning by 8.30, after having my breakfast. By the time I reached there, Ranganathan would be waiting for me in the sitting room fully ready for the day's work. The session continues till about 1 pm, when I went to DRTC for lunch. In between, at around 11, Ranganathan used have his simple small liquid lunch. He also used to read all letters that had arrived the day, read out to him by me or his Secretary. He used to dictate replies then and there, thus mostly replies going the same day! I returned at 2 pm, with a brief nap after lunch. The day's work come to an end in the late evening by around 7, sometimes it goes upto 8 or even 9. There were days I did not go to the hostel for dinner. Those days, I used to have my dinner at “Sarada” itself,the simple vegetarian dinner provided my Maami.

On an average Ranganathan used to work for about 10 hours every day, every day meant every day! I had no choice I too had to work like that. **Work, Work and More Work!** It was work, work and work. No Sunday, no national holidays! Even on Ranganathan's birthdays, when the whole country would be celebrating , he and I, and indeed his staff, would be working. Few local librarians come with flowers to greet him, otherwise there were no signs of any celebrations at “Sarada”.

I worked for almost three and half years with Ranganathan. I was not cut to be a researcher, nor did I enjoy such a work schedule. When I joined Ranganathan I was only 24 and he 79. Even at that age, he used work about 12 hours on an

average, that too every day of every week. I had no choice but to work along with him. Honestly, I did not enjoy that type of work schedule, rather disliked it. I wanted to go out, I wanted to see movies and roam around Bangalore. The work schedule did not allow me time for any of these. In spite of all these, I decided to stick to the job because I knew very well that it would help me in future. So I continued . As per records, I was his Research Assistant till he died on 19 September 1972. But actually, I had a job in my hand and I had decided to take it up by 1 October. My greatest regret is that I was not in Bangalore on the day Ranganathan died, I had gone to Kerala to prepare myself to travel to Jamshedpur to take up a job in the prestigious XLRI, as Documentation Officer of its Food Marketing Centre. .

Introduction to the World of Writing

It was in late 1969 or early 1970, the then Director of DESIDOC ,Mr P N Rao, visited Ranganathan, to discuss about a proposed National Conference DESIDOC was planning to hold in Delhi. Ranganathan agreed to write a paper for it, and also committed papers from everyone in DRTC. I too was asked to write a paper, and he suggested that I should write on “Patent Information service”.When he discovered that I did not know what a patent was, he asked Gopi to take me to Indian Institute of Science to see a few patents and note down the structure of patents, and what type information these contained. That was my first visit to IISc library, where I met the then Librarian Dr T K S Iyengar, before seeing patents. I did write the paper, of course with substantial inputs from Gopi and indeed Ranganathan.

That was the first paper I wrote.My second paper was on “ the Changes in 16th edition of Decimal Classification” , which was published in Library Resources and Technical Services of the American Library Association, in 1971. This topic too was suggested by Ranganathan and he had provided a lot of help in writing that paper. He had a vested interest! He wanted to prove that the new edition of DC had made substantial changes from its previous edition, much more than what CC was contemplating. I was overjoyed to see my name in a reputed foreign journal, that too published by the American Library Association.

My name also appeared in many books published by the SaradaRanganathan Endowment for Library Science: “ Index prepared by P. Jayarajan, Research

Assistant to Dr S R Ranganathan, National Research Professor in Library Science" . My name was also on the title page along with Ranganathan's in his book " New Educationa and School Libraries" published in 1971, which was the new title of his earlier book, "School and College Libraries" . I was overwhelmed to see my name on the title page of the book along with Ranganathan's.

Colon Classification Ed 7

When I started with Ranganathan, he had almost completed writing the Preview to the 7th edition.. In fact he was writing the " Concluding paragraph". This substantial preview was published in *Library Science with a Slant to Documentation*. Several copies of this preview were taken out as reprints and circulated widely.

Immediately after that, Ranganathan started work on Edition 7 of Colon Classification. I was involved with the CC Ed 7 project from the very beginning. It was a unique experience and this work introduced me to several new subjects, all the classification schemes, eg DC, UDC, Bliss Classication, LC Classification, Riders International Classification,and Thesauri. I used to often go the Indian Institute of Science library, to check actual books on some of the emerging subjects to see where exactly to position these subjects in Ed 7, and what were the main components (isolates) of those subjects.

Ranganathan was always busy those days talking and thinking about Ed 7. He did not even sparevisitors : if it was Prof T R Sheshadri, he would discuss with him about Chemistry schedule, if AlladiRamajkrikshnan, who used to call on Ranganathan whenever he visited India, the discussion would centre around "operations research, Systems analysis" and so on! Often he sent word for me early in the mornings.

he would have got some new idea in the night to talk about that and incorporate those ideas in the draft schedule. He was so much engrossed in CC Ed 7 in the early 70s, so was I. How many times we have gone back and forth to different schedules and had made sweeping changes. Any change in the schedule meant corresponding changes in the index, examples , rules and on. The entire typescript, containing the shedules, index and examples were once even handed over to the printer, but to be taken back the next week. Finally, CC Edition 7 never got published.

Relatives Were Kept at Arms Distance

Ranganathan did not encourage relatives to visit him, he thought that would be a distraction and cut into his professional work. I had met only handful of his relatives visiting during the three and half years I was with him. There were also no much contact with most of them. Even if they came, he would not spend much time with them.

Sir C V Raman and Ranganathan were more or less contemporaries, and both lived in Malleswaram in Bangalore. Ranganathan visited Raman twice when I was in Bangalore. The first time when Raman was sick, and the second when Raman had died. On both occasions, I had accompanied Ranganathan.

I was like a member of the family. When Ranganathan was admitted to hospital, I stayed with him in the hospital, when Maami was in hospital one of the Secretaries stayed with her in the hospital and I used to stay at home, looking after Ranganathan. I used to go to with a blank cheque to buy monthly medicines and even for occasional other shoppings by Maami.

Man Full of Idiosyncracies

Ranganathan had his own whims and fancies. His liking or disliking librarians were based on subjective assessment of the persons and what others said about a person. I thought he was often wrong! Also many people used this weakness in him to their advantage. Writing something good about him / his works would please him. On the other hand if they wrote something good about a person who is not in Ranganathan's good book, that would annoy him, and that person became his enemy forever.

Because of his idiosyncracies, he made many foes. His work culture was not liked by many. After all, forall who had worked with him, the oft-discussed work/life balance was totally missing. The saying goes that on his wedding day Ranganathan returned to work in the afternoon after attending to the ceremony in the morning.

I moved out of Bangalore in 1972, immediately after Ranganathan's demise and joinedXLRI. In 1979, I joined the British Council Library in Hyderabad as its first librarian, and moved to Delhi in 1982. I made my first visit to the United Kingdom in 1983, and during that visit I visited many libraries and a few

departments of library science. One such visit was to the School of Librarianship, University College London, where Ranganathan went for his study. When I entered the main lecture hall of the Department, I could see a photograph of Ranganathan prominently displayed there.

The faculty there were thrilled to know that I had worked with Ranganathan closely Not only that, the Head of the Department told me that every year, they start the programme of the academic year after playing an audio of Ranganathan's speech. Such was Ranganathan's reputataion outside India.